

Orlando

A real Mickey Mouse tournament

Donald and Goofy and Stewart and Crenshaw—DAVID OWEN
golfs among the greats

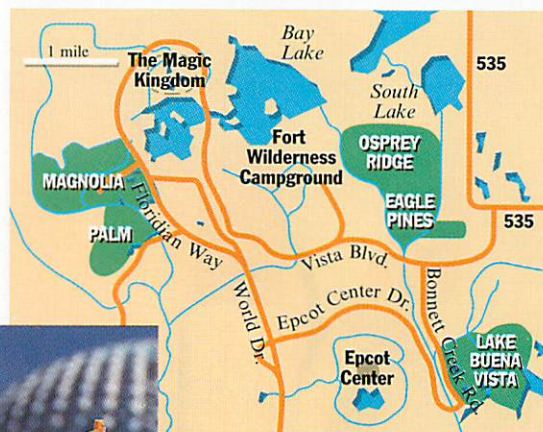
JOHN DALY WAS THE FIRST to go. The men who picked him were so excited that one of them ran to the lobby to call a friend. I looked over the crowd. Roughly 400 men were hunched intently over the small, numbered tables that filled the ballroom, and roughly 400 women—their wives—were yawning and looking around. During the next few minutes, Paul Azinger, Ben Crenshaw, Hale Irwin, Phil Mickelson, Mark O'Meara, and Payne Stewart were snatched up. All had been on my list of possibilities. Then, suddenly, my table's number was called, and my two teammates and I had 20 seconds in which to decide. In a final frenzy of deliberation, we settled

on Lance Ten Broeck. Choosing him would give us Corey Pavin on the second day and Bobby Clampett on the third. As our captain hurried to the microphone to announce our selection, I leaned back in my seat and waited for our names to go up on the big board.

It was Tuesday night at Walt Disney World, and I was sitting in the ballroom of the Grand Floridian Beach Resort with the other amateur participants in the Walt Disney World/Oldsmobile Golf Classic, a regular event on the PGA Tour. We were picking our professional partners for the tournament's pro-am competition, which would begin

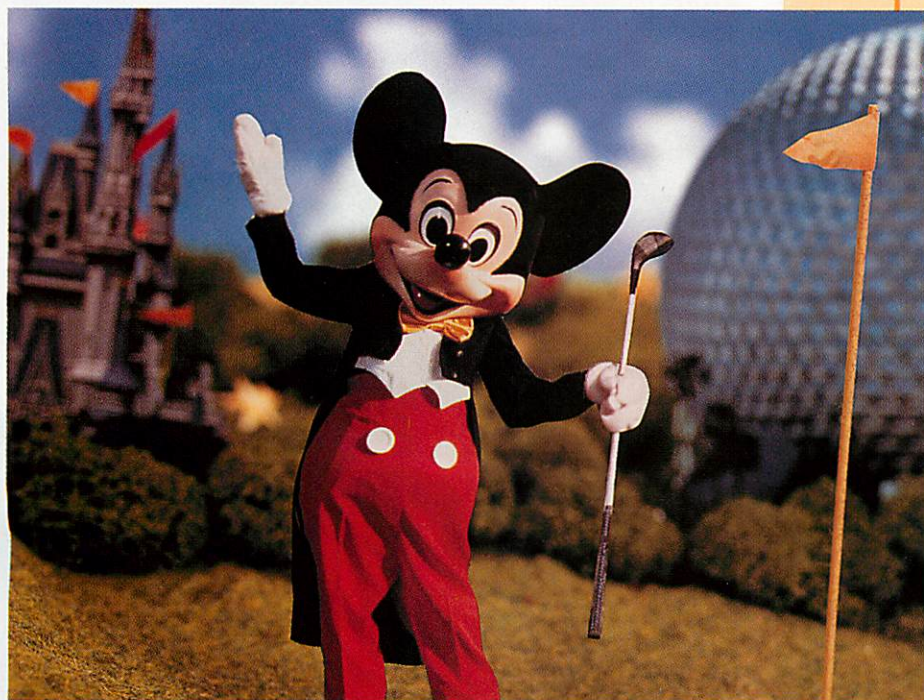
on Thursday. Virtually all professional tournaments include pro-ams, in which ordinary hackers like you and me pay a great deal of money for the privilege of slicing drives out-of-bounds and missing short putts under the bored gaze of touring professionals. The Disney program is different from most in that it lasts three days and takes place during the real tournament. (Most pro-ams are held during a single practice round on the day before the pro competition begins.) Another difference is that the Disney tournament is held at Walt Disney World, a fact that makes it somewhat easier for would-be participants to persuade their wives that paying the \$5,000 entry fee would be a smart move for the entire family.

The amateur field at the Disney Classic consisted of 132 three-man teams, which had been put together in a blind draw based on handicaps. Each team would be joined by a different pro during each of the first three days of the tourna-



Disney World's

43 square miles include five excellent 18-hole courses, two of which opened just last year. One of the new courses, Osprey Ridge, was designed by Tom Fazio. The Disney Classic is played each fall on the three older courses—the Palm, the Magnolia, and Lake Buena Vista—which were designed by Joe Lee and have been around since the early seventies.



ment. (On Sunday, the top pros would play on alone for the \$180,000 first prize.) The other amateurs on my team were Phil Lengyel, who is a Disney executive, and Randy Hundley, who played catcher for the Chicago Cubs back in the seventies. Randy now owns a baseball fantasy camp in Palatine, Illinois. He has reddish hair and a tree-trunk-like neck that turns only if his head and shoulders turn with it. Randy's handicap, 10, was the lowest on our team, and that meant that he was our captain, a position to which he was ideally suited, since he had spent a couple of years managing one of the Cubs' farm teams and Phil and I were minor league all the way. My handicap was a fragile 14. Phil's was 18. Phil, who is in his mid forties, was a last-minute replacement for a local businessman. "I hope you're a player," he had said to me jovially earlier in the evening, "because I'm just along for the ride." I was just along for the ride, too, I figured. My goal for the week was to rub shoulders with a few of my golf idols, and to try not to make too many embarrassing mistakes.

When many people think of Disney World, they think mainly of overweight

tourists wearing funny clothes and taking pictures of other overweight tourists taking pictures of the Pirates of the Caribbean. But the world's most surreal amusement park is not just an amusement park. In recent years, for example, it has reportedly become North America's most popular honeymoon destination. It has also become a popular place to get married in the first place, and Pluto, Donald, Goofy, and various other Disney characters can be hired to mingle with wedding guests. Most surprising of all, Disney World has quietly become one of the country's best golf resorts. The complex's 43 square miles include five excellent 18-hole courses, two of which opened just last year. (One of the new courses, Osprey Ridge, which was designed by Tom Fazio, is the best of the five, in my opinion.) The Disney Classic is played each fall on the three older courses—the Palm, the Magnolia, and Lake Buena Vista—which were designed by Joe Lee and have been around since the early seventies.

I was nervous for about a week before the Classic began. Mainly, I was brooding about my shot off the first tee. The first shot is the only shot in a round of golf that

really counts, psychologically. If the first shot is good, every succeeding catastrophe can be viewed as an aberration. Conversely, if the first shot is lousy, every good shot seems like a fluke. My moment of truth came at noon on Thursday, when the announcer called our group to the tee. Our first hole was a nice wide par five that played about 520 yards long for the pros and about 30 yards shorter for the amateurs. Lance, our pro for the day, hit first. Comfortingly, he hooked his ball into serious trouble on the far left. If I screw up, I thought to myself, at least I'll be in good company. Then Randy, using the biggest golf club I have ever seen, took a home-run swing and launched his ball very nearly out of sight, right down the middle of the fairway. An excited murmur raced through our gallery, which consisted of Randy's wife and a couple of friends of Phil's. My name was announced next. I have no memory of swinging my club, but my ball somehow ended up in decent shape on the left side of the fairway. I felt an enormous weight lift off my shoulders. Then Phil sliced into trouble on the right, and we were off.

MANY TOURING PROFESSIONALS hate pro-ams. They don't like being distracted from the nearly impossible task of earning a decent living on tour, and they don't like exposing themselves to the contagious and potentially terminal swing flaws of their amateur partners. The pro-am is such an integral part of the Disney Classic, though, that pros who don't like amateurs usually stay away. Lance was more than friendly as we headed up the fairway, actually making conversation as we walked along. Then he turned off into the weeds to look for his ball.

Like all the pros in the Disney Classic, Lance was competing for a share of the tournament's million-dollar pro purse, but for today he was also a member of our pro-am team. The team's score on every hole would be the best score (including handicaps, for the amateurs) made by any of the four team members. Our first hole was one of Lake Buena Vista's hardest. That meant that Randy, Phil, and I would each get to subtract one stroke from whatever score we actually shot. Lance wouldn't get to subtract anything from his score, of course. But pros don't usually need handicap strokes. That's why they're pros. In a pro-am, the pro's main function is to provide a scoring floor for the team by steadily shooting par after par, leaving the amateurs to try to capitalize on their

CARIBBEAN ISLAND DISCOVERED OFF THE WEST COAST OF FLORIDA.



Located on Captiva Island, South Seas Plantation is so lush and secluded it's hard to believe you're only minutes from the mainland. Here, on 330 private acres, you can enjoy golf by the sea, tennis, swimming, boating and fishing – all just footsteps from your lavishly appointed beach house or villa.

To find out more about South Seas Plantation, call your travel agent or 1-800-237-3102. In Florida, call 1-800-282-3402. And discover an island that offers everything you'd expect from a luxurious Caribbean resort. Except the time it would take you to travel there.



South Seas Plantation
Captiva Island, Florida

handicaps. My goal on that first hole was to make a nice, undramatic par, which would count as a birdie.

Well, I made it to the front of the green in regulation, as planned, but then I nervously pushed my first putt wildly to the right. I could still get my par, but I would need a great putt to do it. I realized that I had let down my team, and I felt terrible about it—unnecessarily, as it turned out. While I had been wallowing in my own problems, Randy had followed his gargantuan drive with a beautifully whacked fairway wood to the left side of the green, and he now had a 20-foot putt for a three, which, minus his handicap stroke, would count as a two. Miraculously, he stroked his ball into the heart of the cup, and suddenly, after just one hole, we were three under par. While Randy, Phil, and I exchanged high fives, Lance tottered to a bogey six. The tournament volunteer carrying our team's miniature scoreboard put a gloomy black 1 after Lance's name, and a fiery red 3 after ours.

From that moment forward, the round is a blur in my mind. Randy was hot for a few holes, then I was hot for a few, then Phil was hot for a few. Like all successful

pro-am teams, we somehow managed never to be all good or all bad at the same time, and when we came to the electronic scoreboard behind the sixth green, I was astonished to see that our names were near the top of the pro-am leaderboard. "Don't you think about that leaderboard," Randy said sternly when he saw me staring. We maintained most of our momentum, finishing the day at 19 under par. On my way back to my room that evening, despite Randy's warning, I stole a peek at the big scoreboard across from the clubhouse. Out of 132 teams, we were tied for second place. We were one stroke off the lead.

LIKE MANY OF THE OTHER PARTICIPANTS, both amateur and professional, I was staying at the Disney Inn. It is hardly the most luxurious of Disney's numerous hotels, but it is plenty nice enough, and it is ideally situated for golf. My room was roughly equidistant between the first tee of the Palm and the first tee of the Magnolia, and there was a practice green just 100 yards outside my door. When I needed to travel anywhere that a golf cart wouldn't take me—such as the

Lake Buena Vista course, several miles away—all I had to do was go to the inn's main entrance and hop into one of the 200 courtesy cars that local Oldsmobile dealers had provided for the tournament. The courtesy cars made it easy for me to take full advantage of Disney World's numerous spooky efficiencies, such as the fact that you can wander into virtually any facility on the vast property and charge things to your room.

Our pro on the second day was Corey Pavin, who was the tour's leading money winner in 1991. He set the tone for his round with us by missing an 18-inch putt for par on the very first hole. Actually, I got a small thrill when his ball didn't go in. One of the most inebriating experiences in golf is watching a terrific pro make a terrible shot. Even better, while Corey was clawing his way to bogey, Randy, Phil, and I were adding another red number to our pile. By that point, my attitude toward our professional partners was pretty much the same as the attitude of most pros toward their amateur partners: Just stay out of our way. Despite Corey's difficulties, we shot 17 under par for the day, leaving us 36 under after 36 holes. For the time being—there were still quite a few groups out on the courses—we were leading the tournament. In fact, we were ahead by eight strokes.

WE WENT TO THE DRIVING range together again that afternoon. After our practice session, I mentioned to Randy that I was going to take a quick look at the scoreboard on my way to dinner. "You stay away from there," he said. "That scoreboard doesn't concern us." Good manager that he was, he didn't want one of his impressionable rookies to become mesmerized by statistics. But when Randy went off to talk to someone else, I snuck through the pro shop and around the caddy area and took a look anyway. Our lead had been whittled from eight strokes to two, but all the groups were finished now, and we were still on top. As I stood gaping at my electronically illuminated name, I happened to notice someone sitting in a cart ahead of me, also gaping at the board. It was Randy.

I spent the evening putting on the carpet in my room, chipping balls onto my bed, and looking at all my free stuff. Free stuff is one of the best things about playing in a good pro-am. Every participant in the Disney Classic received a pile of loot that included two expensive Gore-Tex rain suits (one for the player and one for his wife), a

INTIMATE, EXQUISITE, GRACIOUS, EUROPEAN
AND RIGHT SMACK DAB IN THE MIDDLE
OF EVERYTHING.



CAMPTON PLACE HOTEL
Kempinski San Francisco
On Union Square

For reservations see your travel agent or call 1-800-426-3135.
(When in Los Angeles stay at Checkers Hotel Kempinski.)

couple of hats, a dozen personalized golf balls, a sort of blanket with a big Goofy on it, various accessories emblazoned with the tournament's logo, a basket of fruit and cookies, some one-year passes to the Disney golf courses and the Magic Kingdom, several other things I can't think of at the moment, and a very nice leather bag for carrying everything home in. Of course, all this stuff was free only in the sense that you didn't pay for it at the exact moment it was handed to you. Still, it seemed free, and seeing it strewn around your room made you feel kind of rich.

We had an afternoon tee time for the final day of the tournament. That meant that I had a long, nervous morning to kill. I spent it putting on the practice green, hitting balls at the driving range, napping, taking two showers, and gazing lovingly at my name in the sports section of the *Orlando Sentinel*. A guy in the pro shop and a guy in the bag-storage room both recognized me and spoke to me in a way that seemed somehow more animated and more respectful than the way in which they spoke to people who were not on top of the leaderboard. For a brief moment I had a teeny inkling of what it must

be like to be John Daly.

Unfortunately, that mood didn't last very long. As we finally made our way to our first tee, we couldn't help noticing that the group that had trailed us by two strokes the day before had already gone out and shot 22 under. They were leading the tournament by a mile, at 56 under par, and we would have to shoot 20 under just to tie them. That was a very intimidating number. Still, we were the only group left that had a chance.

Our pro for the day was Bobby Clampett. Bobby was viewed as a potential superstar back in the early eighties, when he started out on tour, but he won only a single tournament, in 1982, and then sort of drifted away. Nowadays he is best known as a television commentator, for CBS, although he still manages to put together a good tournament every once in a while. He was having a good tournament at Disney. He didn't have a realistic shot at winning, but he was well on his way to earning a decent paycheck for the week. And, like Lance and Corey, he couldn't have been nicer to us.

Randy, Phil, and I started off well, birdieing the first three holes, but then we

had to settle for par on the next two. Then Bobby got us a birdie, and then we scraped up a couple more, and then I played the best four or five holes I have ever played in a row, and then Randy was hot for a while, and so on. Still, we didn't bring the course to its knees the way we needed to. By the middle of our back nine we realized that, barring a miracle, we were playing for second place. Bobby said, "Let's go out and get you some eagles," but when we came to the final tee, we were six strokes off the lead, and we needed a net par just to stay in second all by ourselves. We got it, barely. It was a little disappointing not to win, but missing by six strokes was probably easier to take than missing by one, and playing in the Disney Classic was still the most fun I have ever had. At the awards dinner that night, we trooped up onto the stage with the other top 19 teams to receive enormous trophies with little statuettes of Mickey Mouse on top. The applause was muted, and the dinner conversation consisted primarily of grumbling by nonwinners, who assumed that anyone receiving a trophy had played with an inflated handicap. Most of the grumbling was directed at the first-place team, a fact that made me not entirely sorry to have come in second.

Experience the simple life of the Irish.



In Ireland, our appreciation of fine accommodations goes back at least 800 years. Aer Lingus vacations start at \$45 to \$67 per day and include charming B&B's or first-class hotels, a hearty Irish breakfast and an Avis rental car—so you can pursue the simple life at your own pace. For a free Ireland vacation kit, please call 1-800-SHAMROCK, extension 59.

IRELAND

The ANCIENT BIRTHPLACE of GOOD TIMES.



Irish Tourist Board

Aer Lingus

Price per person based on double occupancy. Price effective April 1, 1993. Subject to change. Airfare not included.

AT A COCKTAIL PARTY ON Sunday, I ran into Randy and his son, Todd, who is a catcher for the Mets. We chatted for a while. Then Randy brought up the possibility of playing a little more golf. I looked at my watch. At most, there was an hour of daylight left. Suddenly, though, the three of us were running to put on our shoes and find golf carts and scrounge up some clubs for Todd, who is left-handed. We met again on the tenth tee of the Palm just as the sun was scraping the tops of the trees. Each of us had a golf cart. I teed off first, and raced after my ball as Randy was teeing up his. On one hole, as I was about to hit my ball out of a fairway bunker, I heard Todd yell from the tee. I ducked, and his ball bulletted into the sand just past my head. I dusted myself off, made my shot, and hurried on. We made it through 18 holes in a little less than an hour and a half, and there was still some light left when we finished: I could just make out the vague shapes of trees along the fairways. Quitting was hard, even in darkness, so Todd and I went over to the practice green and chipped for a little while. Then we shook hands and said good night, and I went back to my room to begin the long wait until next year. □