

Wilson's approach no joke

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By MATT JAMES

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MADERA – A man and his wife are playing golf ...

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I realize that sounds sexist. Why couldn't it be a woman and her husband playing golf?

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I don't know. It's a golf joke, meant to be told on a golf course, where things are inherently sexist. If you started, "A woman and her husband were playing golf," it would be too distracting and no one would get it. Besides, the man is the main character. That's how we'll justify it.

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So a man and his wife are playing golf and the man is playing the round of his life. He's never broken par before, but this day, he's hitting every fairway. Every bounce is toward the green. Every putt is the perfect speed. He's 1 under, standing on the 18th tee box, and starting to get nervous.

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When Dean Wilson tells a joke, you get details. Wilson is a professional golfer, No. 19 on this year's money list, hotter than August asphalt.

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He's made \$2.37 million in 2006, though he didn't take any shortcuts to get there. He spent years on the Japan Tour. He went back to PGA qualifying school again and again. His biggest note of 2005 was shooting a 63 at the Buick Invitational, then forgetting to sign his card and getting disqualified.

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But he won his first PGA Tour event, the International, this year. He's played in 32 events. The only player in the top 200 who played more than Wilson was Mark Brooks (No. 190 on the money list). Tiger Woods, for comparison, has played 15 events in 2006.

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Yet Wilson, who grew up in Hawaii, is still best known for the two rounds he played at the 2003 Bank of America Colonial with Annika Sorenstam. When so many on the PGA Tour were doing their best Vijay Singh impression at the thought of a woman playing a PGA event, Wilson wore a "Go Annika" button to a news conference, then treated her with class on the course.

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They have been friends since, though not to the extent the feel-good story is sometimes told. Their families don't barbecue together, or anything like that. They've spoken a few times since the Colonial.

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How no one has gotten them together for a pro-am event before Monday at the Save Mart Shootout, though, is astounding.

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Peter Jacobsen, the Shootout organizer, did just that, and so they were playing together for the first time since those historic rounds, walking up the 13th fairway at Riverbend

Golf Club, Wilson telling Annika a joke about a penguin who made a trip to Arizona and then had car trouble.

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Many people tell a version of the penguin joke in 20 seconds. Wilson can stretch his for an entire par 5, which he did Monday afternoon. ("You sit in a hotel room for 30 weeks a year," he says. "You'll start making stuff up, too.") Around the joke, he bombed a drive down the right side, smashed a rescue club from 218 yards to within 4 inches, then tapped in for eagle. Did I mention the 218 was over water?

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The punchline was somewhat PG-13 and Annika either wasn't ready for it – it's tough to imagine her telling a dirty joke – or she didn't get it.

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"Did you see her face?" Wilson said as he walked to the No. 14 tee box.

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Not deterred, he walked next to Annika down the next fairway and started the "man and his wife" joke.

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The man is 1 under, nervous, gripping his driver a little tight and shoves one out to the right behind a big oak tree. He examines the options from both sides of the tree, backs away, still pondering.

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"What's a matter?" his wife says. "Just take a 2-iron, choke down, put it in the back of your stance, run a low cut under the branches, up to the green, two-putt and make your par."

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But the ball comes up too fast, hits the tree, bounces back, hits his wife in the head and she dies instantly.

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"You played with her at the Colonial didn't you?" a man yelled to Wilson. He's gotten used to it by now. "She played with me," he said with a smile.

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The Colonial wasn't an act. The man has insides of gold. Wilson gave his seat in a cart to Shari Crawford, a volunteer carrying a sign with the team score, who looked tired. When he found out a 110-pound woman named Mary Oliver was his caddie on Monday, he made sure she got a pull-cart.

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"The thing weighs half as much as me," she said. "I think he's got a plasma TV and a chest of drawers in there."

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(She paid him back with shot advice. Their exact conversation on No. 6 ... Wilson: "How far is it?" Oliver: "From here to there." He nodded and hit a 3-wood.)

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The next year, the man is playing golf with a friend, and again, playing better than ever. He ends up in the same spot on 18, 1 under. The man tells him to hit a low cut under the tree, run it up and two-putt for par. "Forget it," he says. "The last time I tried that I made double."

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Annika laughed at that one. Wilson will always be special to her for those two rounds of golf. "I think we were both just overwhelmed," she said.

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And if his career is remembered for treating another player well, he's OK with that.

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On No. 9, Wilson and Annika were side-by-side in the fairway.

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"What are you hitting?" she said.

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"Seven," he said.

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"I'm between six and seven," she said.

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Wilson didn't hesitate: "I'm hitting eight then."

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