

The image of golf is being refreshed by the astonishing ability of a more youthful group of top players who are capturing the world headlines. However, no matter at what age you take to the greens, keeping dry, warm and comfortable remains key to enjoying the sport.

Swinging in the rain

July was a busy month for the organisers of the Opens – that is, The Open, played this year at St. Andrews, the home of golf, and The Senior Open Championship, the British major four-round stroke play tournament for golfers who have hit the venerable age of 50 and above. This year the seniors' championship was played at an almost equally famous course, Sunningdale, some 25 miles to the southwest of London.

Looking at the list of entries for each of the tournaments, there were quite a number of names in common. Besides players such as Bernhard Langer, Nick Faldo and Colin Montgomerie, the two Opens had something else in common: foul weather. Because of the weather, The Open suffered serious delays and was completed on a Monday for only the second time in its 155-year history. When women golfers played in the Women's British Open, held at Turnberry at the end of July, the weather continued to be unkind.

With driving rain, flooded fairways and buffeting winds that moved golf balls without being struck by a player, keeping dry and warm was the order of the day for much of the play. The fact that some caddies walked around in short trousers should not have fooled anybody.

The tens of thousands of spectators at the three venues had the option of curtailing their viewing and making for the beverage and food tents – the players had to stick it out.

Grey, grey and more grey

The men's fashion colour at St. Andrews seemed to be unrelieved grey, clearly in harmony with the rain clouds. The major brands had all focused on the monotone, including Nike, adidas and Under Armour. Over the years spectators have become familiar with most of the logos splashed on clothing, shoes, gloves, bags and other items. One, however, could be considered as somewhat unfamiliar to many golf viewers in Europe: Under Armour. It is a fair bet that the Under Armour logo has now made an indelible impression.

It could be a matter of serendipity, luck or careful analysis on the part of the company's marketing department but Under Armour has



Bad weather golf: Galvin Green's totally waterproof, full zip jacket is ultra lightweight with maximum breathability, and designed for maximum freedom of movement.

 Galvin Green

selected players that warrant sponsorship; in golf they signed up Jordan Spieth, seen by many as the next Tiger Woods and a serious challenger to Rory McIlroy. McIlroy, then still world number one, was injured (playing football!) and did not compete. Tiger Woods did not make the cut. This meant that Nike's two main logo-men didn't get the TV exposure normally expected by the giant brand.

It was interesting to note, too, that in the important British summer of sporting events, Under Armour was also very much in evidence away from the golf course and included an important Davis Cup tennis tie when Andy Murray and his brother, Jamie, were sporting the Under Armour mirror-image U symbol, forming the letters UA. For a multi-billion dollar company that only started in 1996 in order to produce a better T-shirt, it has come a long way. Nike has been building its business since early 1964, while adidas had its origins 40 years earlier in 1924.

There is a commonality between the three – all were the brainchildren of athletes who felt they could do a better job of developing performance footwear or clothing for their specific sporting interests. Building on initial success, all have expanded into areas far beyond their individual sport.

Cool, dry and comfortable

Under Armour sees itself as the originator of performance apparel, "engineered to keep athletes cool, dry and light throughout the course of a game, practice or workout", claim others in the sports sector possibly could and would no doubt dispute. Cool, dry, light are all key to comfort and the sports textile industry is awash – to coin a phrase – with technologies to provide those features. Under Armour bases its programme on wearing its HeatGear when it's hot, ColdGear when it's cold and AllSeasonGear for days between the extremes.

Notwithstanding these comments, the company appears to have been extraordinarily successful in promoting itself and its products. In barely 20 years, it has grown its revenues to \$3.08 billion (end 2014) and is predicting 2015 to generate net revenues of approximately \$3.84 billion. For comparison, Nike's 2014 fiscal year revenue figure was \$27.8 billion, while adidas garnered €14.5 billion (\$16 billion) in 2014. In the US market, however, Under Armour has now pushed adidas into third place.

Under Armour's CEO and founder Kevin Plank has stated that the company has unlimited potential and is driving its Connected Fitness community which he sees as one of the key foundations for future growth: "With our Connected Fitness community now totalling more than 140 million unique registered users and adding on average more than 100,000 new



athletes each day, we are pleased with our progress and believe we are still in the early stages of uncovering the potential of what the world's largest digital health and fitness community can do to build consumer engagement and drive healthier lifestyles."

Back to golf. UA's ColdGear is based on a technology that it states is built right into the dye, reflecting IR rays and delivering a UPF 30+ to keep players cooler and better protected from the sun – not that there was much sunshine at The Open and players were often seen wearing adaptations of neck wear and scarves. Many were trudging around with their hands in their pockets, including Jordan Spieth, who just missed out on a play-off for the championship, which was eventually won by Zach Johnson (who, like the other two contenders in the play-off, Marc Leishman and Louis Oosthuizen, wears FootJoy golf shoes). For those looking to stay dry, there is its Storm collection, which it claims is practically weightless, as well as breathable.

UA's HeatGear relies on its ArmourVent mesh technology that is said to deliver true breathability in a light, stretchy, durable, fast-drying fabric. The waistband of its golf trousers incorporates stretch, allowing the garments to move with the body.

Going for traction

Under Armour is now seeing growth in footwear sales, too: its 2015 second quarter footwear sales rose 40% to reach \$154 million. And, as a result of Spieth's rocketing fame, it appears that its Drive One golf shoes quickly sold out.

Jordan Spieth's phenomenal year in major championships has provided Under Armour with the perfect flag-bearer for the brand on both sides of the Atlantic.

 Under Armour

Features of the Drive One launched earlier this year include its ArmourVent mesh technology and OutDry technologies, a system developed in Italy and now part of Columbia, the sports- and leisure-wear company based in Portland, OR, to maintain a cool, waterproof environment. It has a cleat-like carbon heel counter for better stability, special cushioning foam for comfort, and Champ Zarma Tour spikes with a new Slim-Lok system for maximum grip. These spikes have flexible anti-clogging comfort 'legs' with superior traction and durability. They also include a visible wear indicator that turns solid when the spikes need to be replaced. The green-friendly design of the spikes may minimise marks on the green but they certainly haven't minimised the impact of young Mr Spieth on world golf.

It is noticeable among the big brands that they have all broadened their offer into just about every area of sport activity. There remain, however, many companies that have maintained their focus on golf and have not tried to adapt specific technologies to other sports, which might allow for a dilution of focus.

Keeping dry on the greens

One such company is Galvin Green, a pure golf brand specialising in the design and supply of high-performance clothing to golfers in more than 20 countries worldwide. Based in Växjö, central Sweden, the company was established in 1990. It also lays claim to having introduced some firsts into golf apparel: half-zip rain jackets, zip fly trousers, jackets without front pockets, adjustable chest tabs, cuffs with rain channels, and the use of stretch fabric in golf wear designs.

Even though the largest golf market lies in the US, it only entered that market as recently as 2013; three of the 11 European golfers who struggled with the heavily criticised US Open venue of Chambers Bay, University Place, WA, wore its garments, so its layered concept has still some way to go in making inroads across the pond. US golfers may have much to look forward to.

Since 2007, the company has won some 26 top awards for its clothing, especially its



waterproofs, and it also appears to have made its mark to the north of the US – in 2013 it signed a multi-year agreement to become the official clothing supplier to the PGA of Canada and provide PGA of Canada branded shirts, sweaters and outerwear. It was already the official clothing outfitter for the German and Danish PGAs.

The Galvin Green collection is said to be designed by golfers for golfers, and that every garment and layer has been developed to be compatible – providing exceptional comfort, freedom of movement and protection from the elements. As the company states, "each detail exists because the game demands it and there is never any compromise on the quality of materials or the functional design of golf wear styled for all climatic conditions".

Multi-layering is the name of the game and, with the development of waterproof zip technology, it all makes sense. It does, however, suggest that the golfer needs to keep an eye on

Ladies golf has become increasingly important for companies targeting the sport and its spectators.

Manufacturers such as Galvin Green provide strong colour themes, combining function with fashion.

 Galvin Green

Jordan Spieth has made the Drive One shoe a 'must-have' for ordinary golfers – Under Armour couldn't have asked for a better wearer-trial demonstration of its fairway footwear.

 Under Armour



2016 Ryder Cup

Up to three different fabrics are currently being tested for the 2016 Ryder Cup rain suits, including one that offers the benefits of a brand new technology. To meet the required standards of protection and durability, the samples are being tested by Gore-Tex in Scotland. Each garment is subjected to at least 50-hours of testing in different playing conditions, including simulated heavy downpours in a rain chamber. Official team supplier of outerwear, Galvin Green's European team's garments will also be made available to the wider golfing public after the 41st contest ends in October next year. 



the weather forecast (with a Galvin Green app) so that he or she makes the right selection of the baselayer. There are three Skintight variations: fresh, thermal and compression. All the base layer garments are designed to convey moisture away from the skin and incorporate permanent anti-bacterial properties. The polyester/elastane compression technology also enhances blood circulation and oxygen levels in the muscles, providing greater stamina.

The company relies heavily on various forms of Gore-Tex for its waterproof outer layers but has developed some novel concepts for insulation as well as for golf-specific shirts. Its Insula fabric helps the body to regulate its own temperature; the soft, pliable fabric made mainly from polyester with a touch of elastane has a special structure creating air chambers, is lightweight and can be worn underneath a waterproof jacket if an extra bit of warmth is needed, or it can be worn with a polo shirt.

The brand is also sure to get a major boost across the world of golf, especially in the US, as the company's product will be on active display at the next Ryder Cup, when the European team will hope to continue its winning streak at Hazeltine National in Minnesota next year (27 Sept- 2 Oct), having won the last three contests. It has also been confirmed as the official supplier for the 2018 Ryder Cup that will be held in France.

Unlike the colour scene at The Open this year, however, Galvin Green has a strong colour palette. Its women's collection, especially, has some striking colour combinations that, if being worn while playing in a mixed fourball, might just distract Jordan Spieth from holing yet another putt. 

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