

Shrink of the links



Mike Hlas
The Gazette

Dr. Mo takes Zach, Cink to higher level

For years now, Zach Johnson has mentioned "Team Johnson."

That's his wife, his caddie, his swing coach, his putting coach, and a sports psychologist who is on a major roll. Or rather, a majors roll.

Johnson has employed Dr. Morris Pickens since midseason 2006. Since then, Pickens has mentored



Morris Pickens
Part of Team Johnson

the 2007 Masters champion (Johnson), the 2009 U.S. Open winner (Lucas Glover) and the 2009 British Open titlist

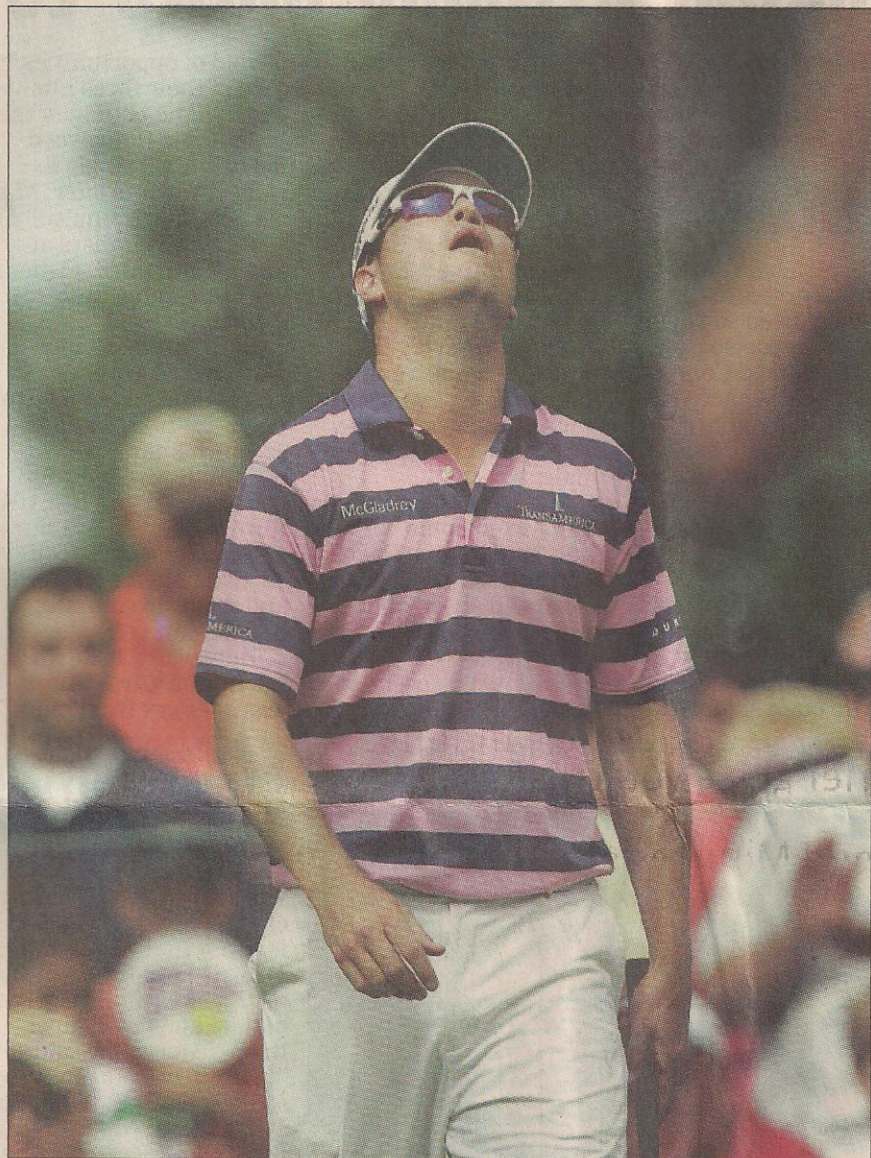
(Stewart Cink).

Where do I sign up, the dozens of pros gathered at Hunters Ridge this weekend for the Greater Cedar Rapids Open may wonder. Many on the PGA Tour probably are asking the same thing.

Cink began working with Pickens May 19, two months before he won the British. Cink broke through a wall or two on his way to totting the Claret Jug from Turnberry.

"He didn't miss a blink in his routine on his last six holes — 17 and 18 and then the four-hole playoff — that I could see," Pickens said by phone. "His pace, his movements, how long he focused on a target — everything was clicking."

Cink's biggest shortcoming when he started



Brian Ray/The Gazette

Cedar Rapids native Zach Johnson reacts after missing his birdie putt on the ninth hole July 12 in the final round of the John Deere Classic. Johnson works with a sports psychologist to "understand the process of winning."

"I won before I met Dr. Mo, but he helped me understand the process of winning."

Zach Johnson, 2007 Masters champion

working with Pickens was putting. Cink's stellar putting separated him from the others late in the final round of the British.

"We all like to do what we're good at," Pickens said. "He's good at hitting balls, so that's what he did. He didn't practice putting. I told him Zach and

Jonathan Byrd (another client) practice putting a lot more than what you're doing, and he knew that."

A mental tweak here and there is often all that separates majors winners from non-contenders.

"I say there are three parts," Pickens said. "One is what

you're doing on the golf course, your routines, how you interact with your caddie, how you control your emotion, course management.

"Two is what your practice and preparation is like, what you're accomplishing in your practice, how do you work in the off-season.

"Three is what's going on off the golf course that might be impacting you on it."

For instance, he said, he thought Johnson broke out of a slump last fall once he decided

► DR. MO, PAGE 4B

Dr. Mo/‘It paid off’

► FROM PAGE 1B

he was going to move from the Orlando, Fla., area to Sea Island, Ga. The deciding itself had weighed on him.

“Any of those three areas can get you messed up,” Pickens said. “You can’t do all perfectly, but I try to make sure you’re addressing all three and help with what you need to address them.”

Johnson didn’t originally go to Pickens with any specific problem areas.

“He was playing well in 2006,” Pickens said. “I didn’t help him make the Ryder Cup team at all. He was really just kind of curious. He wanted to turn over every stone in being the best player he could be.

“After the 2006 season, we got together with (cad-die) Damon Green and (swing coach) Mike Bender and came up with a plan for the off-season. He wasn’t going to get much longer, so what needed addressing was wedges. If he wanted to compete with the best in the world, he had to get better with his wedges.

“He would hit wedges six hours a day, five days a week. That sounds like a lot to most people, but if you want to be one of the

best players in the world, that’s what it takes.

“It paid off in 2007, most glaringly at Augusta.”

Said Johnson, “I won before I met Dr. Mo, but he helped me understand the process of winning.”

Johnson broke through within a year of working with Pickens. Glover broke through last month. Cink broke through Sunday.

“The players at the highest level are trying to find the one, two percent they might be off,” Pickens said. “They don’t mess up the big things. It’s subtle details, not technical errors.”

If you go to the GCRO this weekend, you’ll quickly realize the players are terrific. But watch the guy in contention as opposed to the guy who is struggling to make the cut. It probably won’t be the same.

“Walk dictates a lot,” Pickens said. “Walking smoothly down a fairway gives you a better chance to walk smoothly to the ball, then have a smoother transition.”

After Johnson won the Masters, Green said this: “He walked slow.”

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