



## Warrnambool's Finest - *Marc Leishman*

*It's one of the enduring images from Adam Scott's break through win at The Masters in 2013.*

**A**s Scott was going ballistic after sinking what he thought was the winning putt on the 72nd hole, in the background his Aussie playing partner Marc Leishman was quietly fist pumping in delight for his colleague, Presidents Cup teammate and compatriot – knowing full well the significance of the moment for Scott and Australia.

Angel Cabrera almost crashed the party with his own birdie on the last to set up a playoff which Scott would go on to prevail in but for all intents and purposes for both Scott and Leishman, that putt was the historic moment

all Australian players have dreamt of.

An hour earlier, Leishman's chances of pulling on Australia's first Green Jacket were literally sunk when his approach to the 15th found the greenside pond. But there he was, as deflated and disappointed as he must have been, pumped for his mate.

The gesture alone says a lot about the character of Marc Leishman, as Scott would affirm much later when he became aware of the image.

"We were two Australians trying to win the Masters." Scott said, "One of us did it and my favourite

image of all is the one where I'm celebrating the putt on the 72nd hole and in the background, there's Marc pumping his fist."

"That is just incredible to me. That's the best photograph of the whole week because it showed what kind of a bloke Marc is."

This past Australian summer, Leishman was notable for his absence from all but one of the four big events but for all the right reasons – remaining in the U.S. to attend the wedding of caddie and long-time Warrnambool mate Matt Kelly.

In the wake of Scott's win at Augusta, a record six

Australians won on the PGA TOUR in 2014 and although Leishman was not one of them, the mateship shines through.

"It was awesome to see. We all feed off each other when guys are doing well." Leishman said.

"A lot of us Australian boys play practice rounds together. It's great to see your friends winning and it gives you motivation to want to win as well."

It's a point easily overlooked by most golf fans that Leishman, despite not adding to his sole win in America at the 2012 Travelers Championship in Hartford and playing second fiddle to his mates

in that regard, enjoyed his most consistent of six full years on the PGA TOUR last year.

Leishman's haul: in excess of US\$2.5 million in earnings, a career-high six top-tens, a tie for 5th at The Open Championship at Hoylake after shooting 65 on the final day and more recently, back-to-back top-tens at consecutive World Golf Championship (WGC) events.

"I was really happy with my year although a little disappointing that I didn't get that win, but it's hard to win when you're playing against the best players in the world every week."

Leishman finished the calendar year the No. 46 player in the world, guaranteeing exemptions into almost all the majors and WGC events in 2015. Before he pondered his schedule and any preparation for it, Leishman was enjoying time in his hometown of Warrnambool in Victoria to recharge the batteries.

"I've just been taking it easy pretty much. We've been taking the kids (young sons Harvey and Oliver) down the playground and to the beach so it's been a good break so far."

Leishman recently turned 31 and is entering a stage that traditionally has been regarded as the 'prime' of a player's career. As hard a worker as anyone, Leishman has also learned how best to maximise his time and opportunities when he shows up for an event.

While many players like to play and practice regularly when they're away from the Tour, Leishman's time off is just that: 'off'.

Nor does he live in

one of the stereotypical PGA Tour 'enclaves' like a Scottsdale, Orlando or Palm Beach, where he might be tempted to play and practice alongside dozens of other professionals.

Leishman met wife Audrey in her home state of Virginia during a Nationwide (now Web.Com) Tour event and the couple settled in Virginia Beach, close to Audrey's family and network of friends.

"Everything we want is there and it's pretty easy to travel in and out of so it's a good spot." he said. "There aren't a lot of golfers there which isn't a bad thing for me either, because I generally don't play a lot of golf on my weeks off."

"I think I'm better off playing fresh than burned out and over golfed."

Leishman will also look to advance his career without taking any inspiration from many of the current crop of players who could easily be confused as being athletes in other sports as they are golfers.

For example, the top three players in the game at the moment: Rory McIlroy, Henrik Stenson and Adam Scott, are physically speaking, people you wouldn't fancy running into in a dark alley at any time. All three are chiselled from some serious work in the gym but following their regimen is not something Leishman sees as absolutely necessary, or overly enjoyable for that matter.

"I'm not a gym junky by any means...at all. I don't spend anywhere near enough time in the gym as I should but I do quite a bit of stretching and try to stay somewhat in shape."

"There's more than one way to skin a cat, that's for sure. I might tinker a little bit here and there but I'll never look like Rory McIlroy or Jason Day. I enjoy my food and my beer a bit too much to do that!"

What Leishman is conscious of in his work with long-time coach Melbourne-based Denis McDade is eradicating the 'big misses', which might not show up so readily in the sea of statistical information the PGA TOUR collect, and to be more consistent with his putting.

"I'm not a big stats man but I'll look at them. I think a lot of it is more where your misses are and how bad they are. If you're hitting two balls in the water every round and hitting everything else good, you're not going to do so well."

"That's what we're working on: making my misses better, not disastrous".

"(However) the big key to winning tournaments is holing putts so hopefully I can have a good year with the putter next year and give myself a few chances to win."

Courtesy of his top-50 world ranking at year's end, Leishman was relishing the opportunity to set up his schedule around the majors and WGC events where he is guaranteed a start. Maintaining his place in the top-50 over the early months of the year will also lock down a spot in the U.S. Open, but Leishman is already looking forward with some excitement to the courses where this year's majors will be staged.

On paper, most would appear to suit the big

Australian's game to a tee.

"Augusta sets up pretty well for me. I played the British Open the last time it was at St Andrews and played OK. Whistling Straits, I played well when the PGA was there last and then Chambers Bay looks 'linky' and should be a pretty fun course."

"It's not just one type of course I like playing on. Generally the tough courses I like but having said that, I won at Hartford which has one of the lowest winning scores on Tour every year. I feel like I can adapt reasonably well to different courses"

The experience gained playing with Scott on that fateful Sunday at Augusta back in 2013 was one Leishman filed into the memory bank and he said he was able to draw on throughout the final round at Hoylake. Leishman carved out an eight birdie, one bogey 65 which incidentally, jumped him into a tie for 5th place with Scott.

"The more experience you can have, the better it is. I don't think you can have 'a' bad experience, they're the times that you learn from the most."

Scott will continue on his own quest to fulfil his own personal career goals and the expectations of many, but you can bet your bottom dollar he will be fist pumping in delight if his mate Marc Leishman can turn his recent momentum into victories and particularly, major championship success in the year or years to come.



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