



One Last Shot

A Sacramento golfer contemplates his future on the PGA

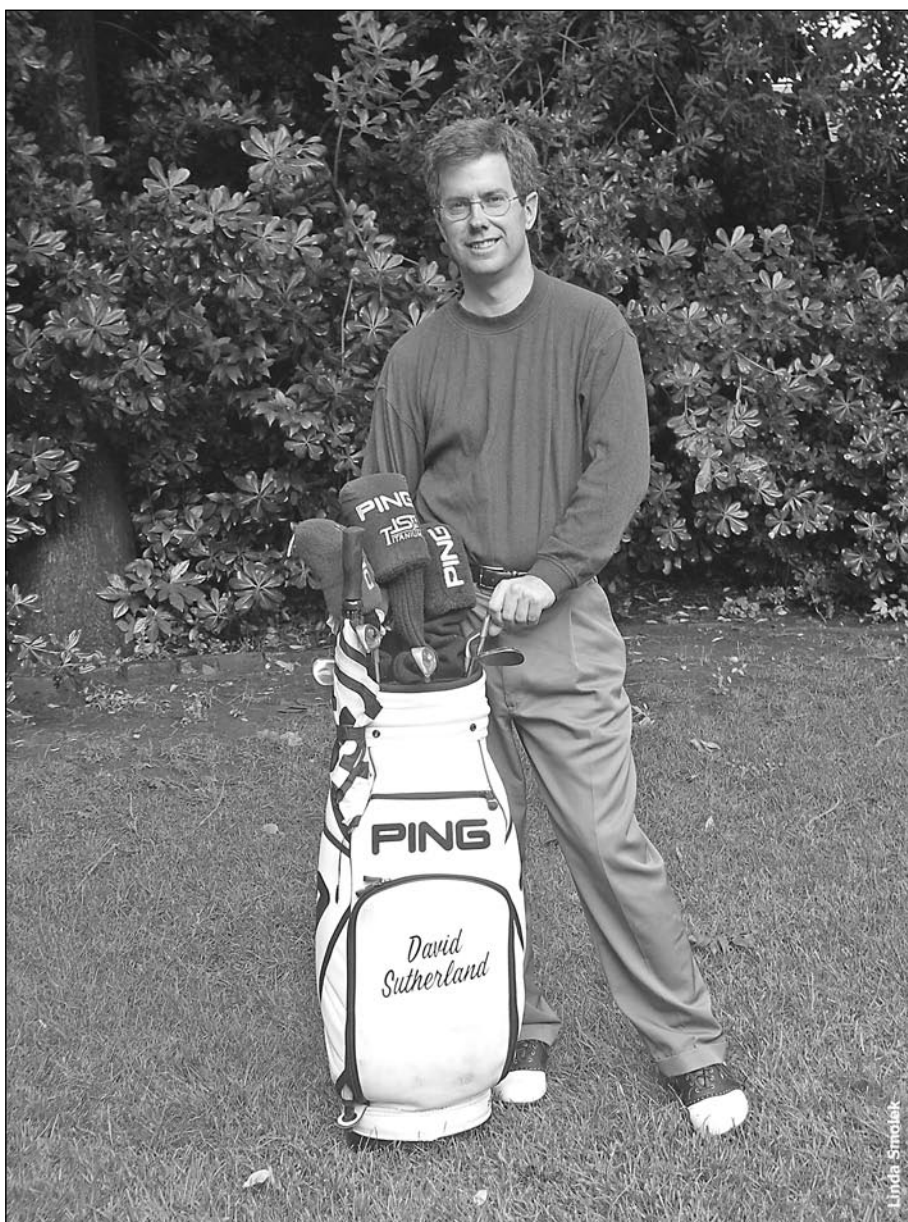
By Angela K. Nickerson

“**I**n 2002, I was playing basketball with some friends . . . oh, you don’t even want to know how clumsy I was. It was awful,” says David Sutherland. The East Sacramento resident, a professional golfer, admits his clumsiness that day may have cost him his ultimate goal: winning a PGA tournament.

Sutherland was not groomed for the PGA. He and his brother, Kevin, also a professional golfer, learned to play golf as a cheap diversion. Their father would drop the two boys off at Foothills Golf Course, where for \$3 each they could play all day long. Typically, the two would play the nine-hole course eight or nine times a day. “We didn’t take formal lessons,” says Sutherland, “until we were in our late teens.”

Though he admits they were both “very mediocre,” both brothers acquired a passion for the sport. They loved to play, both at community courses and at Christian Brothers High School. In college, Sutherland walked onto the golf team at Fresno State and quickly proved his worth. “We were not recruited by any colleges out of high school,” he says. As he had in Sacramento, Sutherland worked diligently. “There was nothing privileged about it,” he says. Keeping a balance between sport and academia, Sutherland graduated with a degree in history—a personal passion nearly equal to golf.

Just a year out of college, Sutherland earned a spot on the PGA tour. It took him several years



David Sutherland

of playing on and off the tour to hit his stride, but in his late 20s “it finally all came together.” He has played consistently since. Playing golf professionally, however, is not glamorous. With a schedule requiring him to be away from home for 25 to 30 weeks each year, Sutherland says he “found it difficult to establish a sense of home and family.” He admits, “There was a real price.” With his

wife and two young sons at home while he traveled, Sutherland knew he was missing out.

Sutherland says his 2002 fall on the basketball court may have been “a blessing.” He had broken the same wrist in 1989, and while the two injuries cannot be conclusively tied to his chronic pain, the coincidence seems too great to be ignored.

Last year while playing in the Canadian Open, Sutherland knew the pain was too great. “You start sensing that something is really wrong,” he says. There on the links, surrounded by 90,000 fans, Sutherland paused. “I took the time to soak it all in,” he recalls. “I sensed at the time that I might never experience this again because my wrist was so bad.”

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Surgery in June may have bought Sutherland some time—the months ahead will tell. But he acknowledges that his wrist will never be the same. “It’s like retreading an old tire,” he says. “You can take a bald tire and retread it and make it better, but it will never be a new tire.”

Though Sutherland is listed as “injured” on the PGA roster, his future on the tour is uncertain. He must weigh a complicated question: “How much long-term pain am I willing to go through to have short-term fun?”

Certainly, Sutherland still has goals to achieve. “It would be nice,” he says, “to play for another year or two without having to deal with the pain.” And at 39 he has not yet won a PGA tournament—a fact he refers to as “the hole in my resume.”

But his injury has also given Sutherland a window into the life he

misses while on tour. “It’s kind of nice to take a deep breath and relax and be normal and wake up in the same bed every day,” he says. His sons, 4-year-old Matthew and 2-year-old Andrew, are old enough now to tell him, “I want you to stay home”—words to warm any father’s heart.

So what if he can never return to golf? Right now, Sutherland teaches golf lessons at Antelope Greens, something he says he thoroughly enjoys. “I don’t know what I’ll be doing three years from now,” he says, “but I think I’ll find something I like very much.” His options range from coaching and teaching lessons to pursuing his academic interests: history and writing. “I think I’m OK if I’m removed from golf. It gives me a chance to explore my other areas of interest.”

Maybe his recent surgery will give him a chance to chase that elusive PGA win. Maybe not. The months of therapy ahead will inform that choice. Either way, though, Sutherland says he has “had a great run.” He says, “I have no regrets at all.” ●