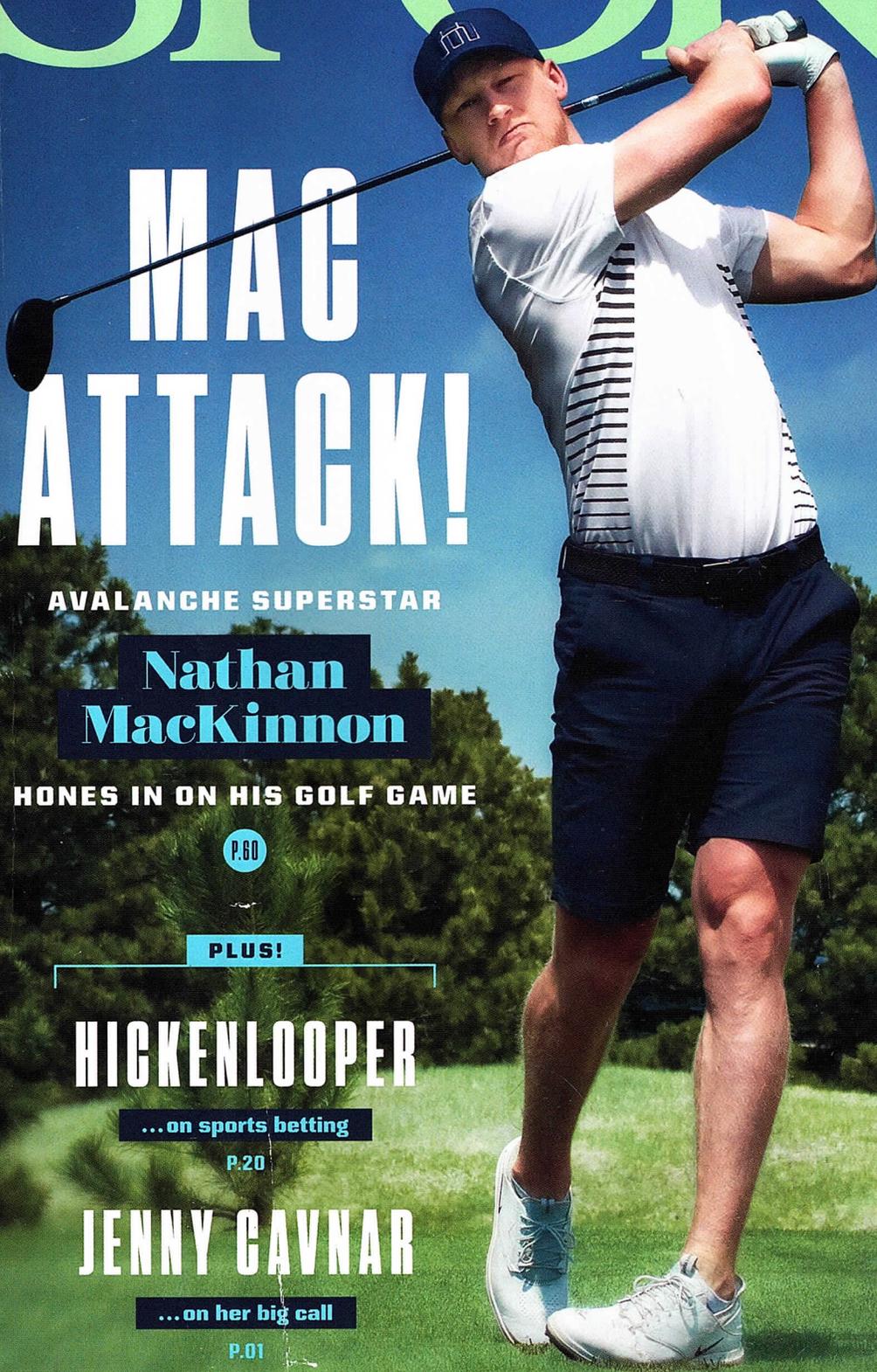


THE 2018

Golf Issue!

MILE HIGH

# SPORTS



## MAG ATTACK!

AVALANCHE SUPERSTAR

**Nathan MacKinnon**

HONES IN ON HIS GOLF GAME

P.60

PLUS!

**HICKENLOOPER**

...on sports betting

P.20

**JENNY CAVNAR**

...on her big call

P.01

## The 39th Annual U.S. Senior Open

The complete guide to the legends swinging it at the Broadmoor

TOUR THE FAMED EAST COURSE

MEET THE FIELD

DUST OFF THE HISTORY BOOKS

CHAT WITH FINSTERWOLD

P.32

## SO LONG, OLD FRIEND

...saying goodbye

to Fitzsimons

P.72

...AND MUCH MORE INSIDE!



# Tale of Two Seasons

AVALANCHE SUPERSTAR NATHAN

MACKINNON MASTERS ANOTHER GAME

► BY TRENT WEARNER

MacKinnon, it's safe to say, is *hooked*.

While many young athletes sit around playing video games, the 22-year-old MacKinnon prefers golf as a release from the mentally and physically demanding sport that is hockey.

# T

he Colorado Avalanche had an amazing turnaround season, and after an inspirational, down-to-the-wire campaign that saw them back in the Stanley Cup playoffs, the Avs will now enjoy a well-deserved summer break.

Watching the ice melt is a sign that the grass is turning green. For Avalanche star Nathan MacKinnon, it also means that he'll soon be hitting a small white ball around the golf courses of Colorado and Nova Scotia.





When I got a call from Mile High Sports about writing an article for the magazine's annual golf issue, I originally had a few ideas – tips and tricks, equipment reviews, and all the usual stuff that sports magazines are usually after. But after spending two years with "Mac" as his golf instructor, I thought I'd ask him to share his experiences trying to improve his game. Golf can be a maddening sport, and even the greatest athletes on the planet have their fair share of tales from the rough.

From cracking the face of his driver to regularly playing with a Canadian PGA Tour player, it's been fun to watch MacKinnon's growth as a golfer. While he's almost superhuman on the ice, the game of golf and all its complexity can bring upon many challenges. "Mac" now hits a ton of great shots, but early on, he was very inconsistent. His work ethic on the ice, however, carries over to golf; MacKinnon is intent on becoming the best golfer he can be.

After having the pleasure of helping No. 29 with his golf game, we've learned there's an interesting parallel between hockey and golf – at least for him. As even he'll admit, his past two seasons on the ice and the links have been eerily similar. Last season left a lot of room for improvement, but in this season, his improvement is evident.

You already know the story of how much better the Avalanche were on the ice this season, but here's my tale of two (golf) seasons with Nathan MacKinnon.

I'll start with some follow-up about that cracked driver face. No, it wasn't from cross-checking or a response to a bad golf shot. When you play 82-plus ▶



## MACKINNON'S SWING PATH

Most golfers who come to us arrive with a laundry list of swing items ("corrections") from their previous teacher or swing evaluation. While it's possible the golfer may have a few setup issues, their swing corrections can be reduced to one to two adjustments that can make a massive dent in their improvement. In Nathan's case, there were two primary areas on which to focus: Minimizing the steep angle of approach, and improving his swing path.

### MACKINNON'S ANGLE OF APPROACH



#### DAY 1

Driver approaching ball very steeply.



#### TODAY

With hands in the same location as the previous photo, the club is much lower to the ground – which means the club is coming into the ball more level or shallow.

▶ games a season in the NHL with guys trying to take your head off, a bad golf shot doesn't bother you. The cracked face of a driver only happens with power and clubhead speed — and MacKinnon has both. The same strong hands and wrists that allow MacKinnon to deftly handle a hockey puck create a lot of clubhead speed in golf. Believe it or not, MacKinnon's "normal" clubhead speed is well above the PGA Tour average, but in an effort to have more directional control, he's actually toned it down. You'll be surprised to learn, however, that he hasn't lost any distance. How he's managed to do this is quite unique.

#### THE SECRET TO NATHAN'S POWER!

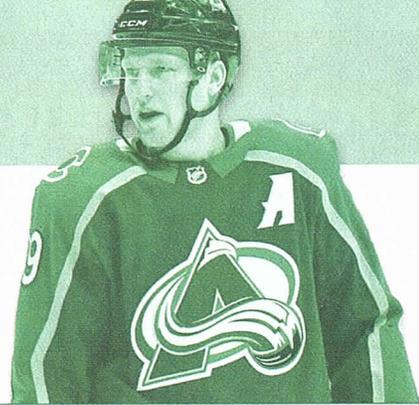
We are fortunate at our academy to have a lot of great technology, including Trackman and FlightScope launch monitors. What they reveal about Nathan's golf swing is that while he can swing as fast as the fastest players on the PGA Tour, he has slowed it down and can still manage to outdrive the PGA Tour

average distance. Seems weird, right? How can a person swing slower and hit it farther than a PGA Tour player?

The secret is in his shallow angle of attack (the club doesn't hit down on the ball so much and create large divots), mixed with low dynamic loft (the loft of the club at impact). This creates a shot that is crushed!

Think of the clubhead coming into the ball much like how an airplane lands — smooth and slightly descending. Pair this with a "de-lofted" clubface, and you get a ball that doesn't slide up the clubface, but instead darts off of it — with a *lot* of energy. For the technical golf guru, MacKinnon gets a "Smash factor" on a 7-iron at or above 1.48 — which is what PGA Tour players get on their driver. [NOTE: *Smash factor is a mathematical number found when dividing the speed in which the ball travels immediately after leaving the clubface (say, 135 mph) by the speed of the clubhead at contact (say, 90 mph).*]

As you might guess, there is a ton of natural talent to work with



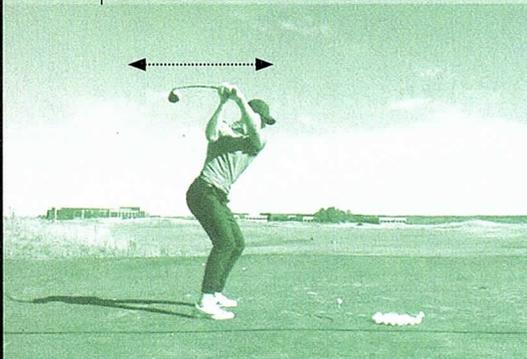
A Hart Trophy finalist this past season, MacKinnon helped guide the Avalanche to the postseason for the first time since 2014.

when it comes to MacKinnon's golf game. My job is to take that world-class athletic ability and help No. 29 channel it into a world-class golf swing.

#### DAY 1 WITH 29

A few weeks prior to our first session, I got a call from a fellow PGA professional. This colleague knew a member of the Avalanche who wanted to better his game — and he wanted to send that player to me. That player was Nathan MacKinnon; we spoke on the phone, talked about his game, he completed every question of our comprehensive questionnaire — which is always a sign of a new student's commitment — and set up a time to meet. Our first session together lasted over two hours, and I remember him checking his phone at one point, astonished that we'd already been at it that long. It was evident during our first session that he wanted to get better, that he was competitive and that ▶

## MACKINNON'S BACKSWING



#### DAY 1

At the top of the backswing, Nathan's arms are much too vertical.

#### TODAY

Nathan's body has turned well, and the arms and shaft are in a great place to start the downswing.



he was dedicated to improving. He dressed like a golfer, had some solid equipment and was ready to dive in. What was also clear from the beginning was how he takes care of himself physically and nutritionally. He's always drinking water and I've never seen him put a bad thing in his body. He's truly dedicated to all that embodies being an elite athlete.

When No. 29 gets the puck, and starts racing down the ice, the decibels rise. Everyone gets off their seat in anticipation of what's happening next. But what about his golf game? How far does he hit the ball? What was his swing like at our first session, and where is it now?

### SWING EVOLUTION

Not surprisingly, our first session revealed lots of clubhead speed, but also some things that weren't allowing the ball to travel effectively and consistently. The bottom line was that the club, especially the driver, was moving very steeply and in an "outside-in" motion through the impact area. While having one

of those issues isn't good, having both leaves any golfer with a plethora of troublesome results.

Every golfer typically has one or two elements in their swing which cause the majority of their inconsistency; improve those couple of things and the game becomes really fun.

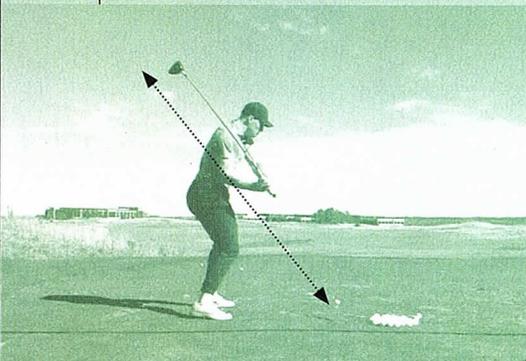
For instance, with Nathan's steep angle of approach and outside-in swing path, he could hit the ball with a very low to a very high trajectory — think "pop-up."

When a person swings the club outside-in, the ball can contact the clubface on the heel, on the center and on the toe, all of which make the ball fly differently. And that same outside-in path makes the ball — depending on the degree of outside-in path compared to the degree of club face angle — typically travel straight left to a big curve right and everywhere in between. Nathan might see the ball go (1) low, (2) extremely high, (3) straight left, (4) straight-ish toward the target (though this would come from a toe hit), (5) some amount of curve to the right. His contact could be (6) on the toe, (7) on the center, or (8) on the heel. That's *eight* possible outcomes! But if you understand this, and have a coach who can help explain how and why this takes place, then you'll be well on your way to better golf shots — just like the ones that Nathan MacKinnon was about to hit.

Like the Zamboni smoothing the ice, we set out to improve and smooth out his golf swing. With some obvious "intermissions" due to his schedule, I've ►



## MACKINNON'S SWING PLANE



### DAY 1

Mainly due to a poor backswing, in his downswing, Nathan's hands and arms are too far away from the body, and the shaft is up near his neck.

### TODAY

Now we're talking! Nathan's hands, arms and club have now come down in a place where he can turn his body open and let the club take a rip at the ball.





witnessed some impressive qualities over the past 18 months. First, if Nathan is “off” in any way, he is able to get back on track now, and usually on his own. Initially, when he first began taking lessons, we’d work on something and it would take him a while to get it; that can be frustrating for anyone, let alone a high-level athlete. Recently, however, Nathan has developed the ability to get himself back on track or allow himself to be guided back on track quite easily.

Secondly, hitting bad shots early on used to frustrate Nathan. I could see in him the same situation that most golfers find themselves in once they get frustrated or mad — the downward spiral happens. We had a conversation about learning to let go of the outcome, and he shared how working on that in hockey truly helped his play in the 2017-18 season. For golf or hockey, it’s the same outlook on the process. It’s consistency in preparation that matters most — in golf, we call this the “pre-shot routine.” Doing things the right way, and

the same way, before every shot, allows him to accept whatever the outcome is; however the golf ball flies, good or bad, lucky or unlucky. You don’t have to like it when the ball flies off-line, but you do have to deal with it and move on mentally and emotionally.

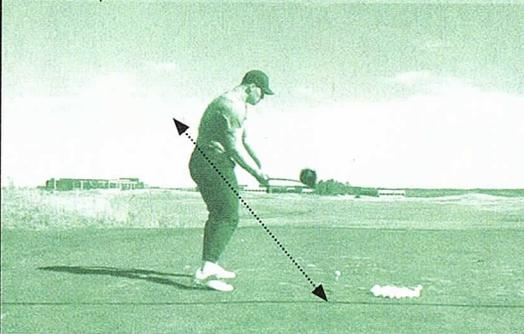
Our discussions on not over-thinking things on the golf course have also proved to be crucial to Nathan’s success in improving. This is a hard thing for most golfers to do, but we have some keys that he sticks with. By simply imagining a solid strike and saying internally, “*Pure it,*” he does so — and his natural talent and improved technique shine. Whether you’re an elite athlete or just a weekend warrior, it’s absolutely amazing how good we humans can be when our “third eye” stays engaged with striking the ball solidly and at our target. Conversely, it’s also amazing to see how the best golfers and the most elite athletes can be destroyed by becoming overly mechanical.

When time allows, Nathan works extremely hard on his golf game; ►



Three-time Colorado PGA Teacher of the Year Trent Wearner enters his third season of working with the talented MacKinnon.

## MACKINNON'S SWING PLANE



### DAY 1

From here, the club is much too far away from that line — a sure sign of inconsistent shots.

### TODAY

One more frame into the downswing, and you can see the great approach from which Nathan’s clubhead is moving into the ball. It’s no longer outside his hands like in the photo above.



we get on the course together as often as possible to learn in the real environment. It's invaluable to get on the course with students — if you take lessons, get your coach to take you out on the course. Get off the range — and especially away from hitting balls into a net.

When “Mac” goes home to Nova Scotia in the summer, we’ll stay in touch via swing videos and text. He loves watching golf and is learning so much about it, so quickly. He’s a true student of the game, and it’s fun to have students like him who work smart, work hard and who love the process of improving. He is hoping to get to play in the Celebrity Classic that takes place in Lake Tahoe in July, but for now, we are focusing on improving in other areas — things like chipping, pitching and putting is where we will spend most of our time now.

But shooting in the 70s — after just *two years* of playing - is as solid as the ice at The Can.

As we anticipate another exciting season for MacKinnon and the Avalanche next year, we wish the same for your golf game this summer. Get yourself out to the course this weekend, and who knows? You might see No. 29 out there, too.

*Trent Wearer is a three-time Colorado PGA Teacher of the Year and often rated the No. 1 golf teacher in Colorado by his peers. His academy, Trent Wearer Golf, has been located at Meridian Golf Club for 19 years. 303.645.8000 TrentWearerGolf.com*

MHS

## SLICING & HOOKING

**N**athan prefers to hit the ball with a little fade. As strong as he is, and as far as he can hit the golf ball, a fade is a great way for him to play. We work to have an on-plane swing and then control the clubface through impact by turning his chest. That opening of the chest keeps the clubface slightly open to his swing path for a gentle fade. If you suffer from a hook, you can copy this motion — it’s the drill Nathan does time and time again. If you slice the ball, you’ll need more of what you see in the second photo.



◀ Nathan takes a lot of half-swings where he feels his chest, core and hips turning open through impact with a right arm that stays bent a moment longer through impact. This seemingly continual turning of the body keeps the clubface from turning. It keeps the clubface quieter from a rotational standpoint, and that helps him hit a gentle fade. Note how the club’s leading edge is close to parallel to the spine at this point. This is a good drill for any golfer who tends to over-draw the ball.

▶ If you slice the ball, you need to emulate this motion, where the trunk isn’t nearly as open as it is in the photo above — that helps the forearms and clubface rotate much sooner into the follow-through. Note how the leading edge of the clubface is angled to make an “*Λ*” with the spine. Copy that clubface position to rid yourself of a slice. If this is challenging for you to do, then it’s highly likely that your wrists are in the wrong position throughout the downswing. In that case, go spend some time with an expert coach who can help speed up your learning curve.



In coaching players of all abilities, I’ve learned that nothing is more important than helping a person understand how what they’re doing will improve their contact and/or direction. The golfer needs to understand what the club is doing the two feet before and after impact and how that affects the ball. For instance, we might change something in their grip or their backswing, but they need to understand how that affects the club and ball at contact. If you’re told to do something and don’t understand how it will help the club-ball interaction and the flight of the golf ball, then make sure you ask your coach to explain it. You need to understand the why or how it will help your contact or direction. That said, using what we now know about slicing and hooking, take a look at how that will affect the spin of the golf ball, or in this case, a hockey puck.