

Golf

# Baltusrol is last chance for 2016 major for young guns

By **DOUG FERGUSON**  
Associated Press

SPRINGFIELD, N.J. — Rory McIlroy took stock of his game and the shots required at Baltusrol and reached a most logical conclusion Tuesday. He believes the PGA Championship will be his best chance this year to win a major.

He overlooked the obvious. It now is his only chance this year to win a major.

McIlroy is not alone. Except for the three players who have achieved the ultimate in golf this year by winning majors — Danny Willett at the Masters, Dustin Johnson at the U.S. Open and Henrik Stenson at the British Open — the PGA Championship is all they have left.

The focus starts with McIlroy, Jordan Spieth and Jason Day. They began the

year as the modern version of the “Big Three” because they had captured five of the previous six majors and took turns at No. 1 in the world ranking.

But they have come up empty in the majors — so far.

Spieth is feeling it as much as anyone, mainly because he nearly won them all a year ago with a major performance that ranked among the best ever. So when a question was posed to him Tuesday that expecting 20 more years like that would probably be a tough benchmark, Spieth leaned toward the microphone and interrupted.

“Probably?” he said.

Even with two victories and a chance at the Masters that he threw away with one bad swing at the wrong time, he has been noticeable in the last two majors by his absence from the leaderboard. Spieth, who turns 23 on Wednesday,



AP Photo/Mike Groll

**Fans shoot photos as Rory McIlroy walks between the fifth and sixth holes during a practice round for the PGA Championship golf tournament at Baltusrol Golf Club in Springfield, N.J., Tuesday, July 26, 2016.**

had contended in five straight majors. He finished 13 shots behind in the U.S. Open and 22 shots behind at the British Open.

“I set my own expectations so high,” Spieth said.

“So have I met them this year? Not yet.”

He still can.

So can Day, a three-time winner on the PGA Tour this year. Stenson’s victory at Royal Troon surely gave

hope to players who have yet to win a major, from Sergio Garcia to Lee Westwood, from Rickie Fowler to Matt Kuchar.

Baltusrol was soaked with nearly 2 inches of rain overnight, though the Lower Course was in remarkably good shape for a full day of practice on Tuesday in sweltering conditions that only add to the pressure of players trying to break through.

McIlroy was especially optimistic given the length of Baltusrol, exceptionally long (7,462 yards) for a par 70 that doesn’t have a par 5 until the final two holes. He is among the top power players in the game, and his driving is aesthetically beautiful because of his balance.

McIlroy was asked to describe his season in one word, and after some thought, settled on “neutral.”

That’s another way of

saying he has been spinning his wheels.

“I feel there’s been times where I got a little bit of momentum, and then sort of got set back a little bit,” he said. “It’s been a little stop-start in a way. But it’s hard. I’m trying to stay as positive as I can. I feel like I am positive because my game is in good shape. But I guess just maybe running out of patience a little bit and trying to make it happen.”

His record in the PGA Championship is in his favor. McIlroy has won the Wanamaker Trophy twice in the last four years, and he has three other finishes in the top 10. Even though he grew up in Northern Ireland, the American brand of golf suits him best. Baltusrol is big, and likely will be soft with the overnight rain, the steamy heat and the threat of thunderstorms.

Soccer

# Seattle Sounders part ways with coach Sigi Schmid after nine years

By **MARK MOSCHETTI**  
Associated Press

TUKWILA, Wash. — Sigi Schmid won an MLS Supporters Shield, four U.S. Open Cups, and never missed the playoffs as head coach of the Seattle Sounders. But the team and Schmid are parting ways.

The Sounders announced Tuesday that Schmid’s run as the only coach in the franchise’s MLS era has come to an end. Longtime Seattle assistant Brian Schmetzer is taking over immediately as interim head coach.

“We agreed it was a reasonable time to part ways,” Sounders majority owner Adrian Hanauer said during a news conference.

“That takes absolutely nothing away from what he has done for this club. He won a bunch of trophies for us, he won a lot of games, he had a lot of success. But the results just weren’t there this year.”

Schmid joined the Sounders in 2008 after winning an MLS Cup title with the Columbus Crew. He also won an MLS title with the LA Galaxy in 2002.

“I want to thank Seattle Sounders FC for the opportunity to lead this club over the past eight years, with particular gratitude to Adrian Hanauer, Joe Roth, and the



Schmid

rest of the club’s ownership group,” Schmid said in a statement released by the team. “My only disappointment is that we were unable to bring home an MLS Cup to our tremendous fans, who have always been supportive through good times and bad.”

Schmid was 115-79-56 with the Sounders and led them to seven consecutive MLS Cup playoff appearances, and his 228 regular-season wins rank first in league history. But Seattle has struggled this season, currently sitting in ninth place in the Western Confer-

ence with a 6-12-2 record. On Sunday, the Sounders lost 3-0 at Sporting Kansas City, and managed just one shot in the game.

“The results obviously have not been great, and the performance in Kansas City was maybe a low point,” Hanauer said. “There’s no magic stopwatch on this that tells us when the right time is.”

Schmetzer has been affiliated with the Sounders at various times as either a player or a coach since signing out of high school with the then-North American Soccer League franchise in 1980. Prior to their joining MLS in 2009, he was head coach of the USL Sounders from 2002-08, winning

league championships in 2005 and 2007.

“It’s kind of bittersweet,” said Schmetzer, who was named Schmid’s top assistant in December 2008, just six days after Schmid was hired. “You lose a guy you have a lot of respect for. But at the end of the day, it’s an opportunity to try to impart some pride back in the club and try to make sure we win games.”

Schmetzer’s first game in charge will be on Sunday when Seattle hosts the Galaxy. The Sounders will start that game 10 points out of the last Western Conference playoff spot.

“We’ve not given up on making the playoffs, and help is on the way,” general

manager and president of soccer Garth Lagerway said.

“We’re optimistic that we can change this thing positively and move forward this year.”

The help that Lagerway, Hanauer, and Schmetzer all mentioned was Nicolas Lodeiro. The native of Uruguay, an attacking midfielder, played most recently for Argentina’s Boca Juniors club, and has 42 caps for the Uruguay national team.

“It’s no secret, though it’s not necessarily the worst-kept secret we’ve had, but Nicolas landed at the airport today,” Hanauer said. “We have some i’s to dot and some t’s to cross, but we fully anticipate him joining our squad.”

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