

Kendall

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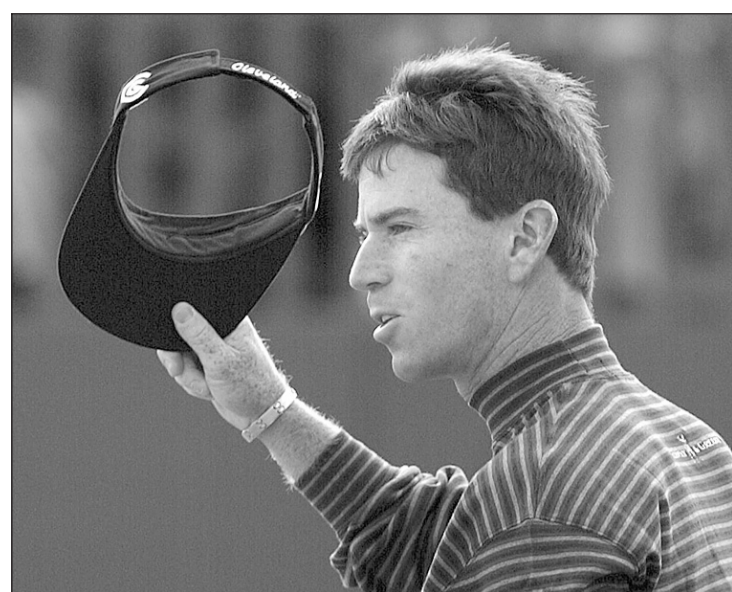
his next victory will be his first. "I really feel like I've been very close," he said. "I've lost in a bunch of playoffs. I really feel like I can win out on the PGA Tour as well as anyplace else. I think it's just a matter of time.

"Hopefully, this is mine." Whether it turns out that way, Friday was definitely Kendall's day. He holed out from a bunker at No. 3 to kick-start his round, then offset his lone bogey at the 11th with three more birdies and an eagle at the 16th by rolling in a 50-foot putt from just off the green.

Moments after signing his scorecard for a 66 that left him at 135 — one shot ahead of Frenchman Thomas Levet — Kendall took his seat behind a table on a stage in the interview room. According to one of the more informal traditions that have sprung up at the Open over the years, the winner autographs that same table at the end of his session Sunday.

"I know that there's a long way to go and that this is only halfway done. But hopefully," Kendall said, exercising caution once more, "I'll be signing my name right here in a couple of days."

A pen might be as sharp an



Alastair Grant — Associated Press

"I know that there's a long way to go and that this is only halfway done. But hopefully I'll be signing my name (on the winner's table) right here in a couple of days."

Skip Kendall

object as he should be entrusted with at the moment. At the Memorial tournament last year, Kendall tried to cut a frozen bagel before dropping it into a toaster and nearly sliced off his left forefinger.

"I didn't cut it completely off, but I cut a big piece of it off," he chuckled. "They had to sew it back on and I didn't play for, I guess, about four weeks."

Because Kendall is one of those guys who has to play every chance he gets to hold onto his tour card, he devised a new grip in time to play last year's Open. To get into this year's tournament, Kendall played in one of four special 36-hole tournaments staged by the Royal & Ancient Golf Club around the world to give tour players a chance to qualify

without having to travel to Britain.

"It was a no-brainer for me. Anytime I can try to get into a major championship, I'm going to be there," he said. "These are important to me — not only to test yourself, but to try and win one. And the only way you can do that is to try to get in."

Never mind that 52 of his fellow PGA Tour players didn't even bother to show up for the qualifier. This is only Kendall's third appearance at the Open, and chances are he would have come over in a row boat if that's what it took. Because this is a guy who just seven years ago glimpsed the end of his professional life.

It was summer 1997, and Kendall came to the Buick Classic having just missed the cut in four consecutive tournaments. His best finish in 12 previous starts was a tie for 49th. He'd already lost his exempt status on the PGA Tour twice and was in danger of missing yet another cut.

Then Kendall hit his drive on the second fairway at Westchester Country Club, walked to where he thought it landed, and hit his approach to within an inch of the hole. The only problem was that he hit the wrong ball, turning a certain birdie into a double-bogey.

Instead of losing it, Kendall turned all that anger inward. He birdied the final four holes.

"It completely turned my career around," Kendall mused a while ago.

He hasn't come close to losing his tour card since. That, combined with the memory of pounding balls between shifts waiting on tables, is why big-timing anyone is hardly Kendall's style.

En route to an opening-round 69 a day earlier, he spotted Prince Andrew chatting behind the 11th green and asked an official walking with his group for some tips on protocol before daring to introduce himself.

"I went over and shook his hand and talked to him briefly, and that was pretty exciting to me. Seemed like a great guy," Kendall said. "I don't know. Is he? You guys tell me."

Assured by the assembled grins that the prince was a regular fellow, Kendall sat back in his chair, and an embarrassed grin creased his lips. He didn't say why, but the expression seemed to speak for itself.

Is this a great game, or what?



Play kickball

Summer kickball leagues in Madison are already under way, but fall leagues will start in a few months.

For more information:

◆ [Midwestern Unconventional Sports Association](http://www.midwesternunconventionalsports.com/index.htm) is on the Internet at www.musakickball.com/index.htm.

◆ [Legends Sports](http://www.eteamz.com/legendsports/) is on the Internet at www.eteamz.com/legendsports/.

Knees bloodied after a tough play, Paul Willemssen pitches during a kickball game at Demetral Field.

Kickball

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Middleton-based Legends Sports first started adult kickball leagues in 1999 in Madison, and now there are more than 16 teams playing at Wingra Park on the near West Side.

The Midwestern Unconventional Sports Association has from 15 to 30 teams playing each season at Demetral Field on Madison's East Side. The association runs kickball and other retro-playground leagues in the Twin Cities, the Fox Valley and Milwaukee.

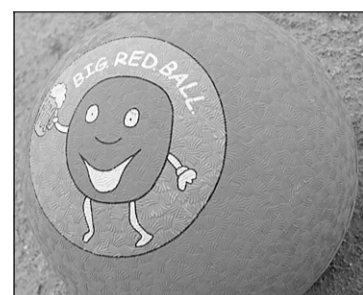
The kickball craze is in full swing, thanks to the laid back rules and a desire to return to simpler days.

"This is something from your childhood," said Mike Glass, the Midwestern Unconventional Sports Association coordinator. "Some people say it's a fad, I really don't think so."

The rules are similar to softball — with the exception that a player can throw the ball directly at a base runner for an out. Using a standard playground rubber ball, a pitcher rolls the ball over the plate. "Batters" can get a running start and kick the ball.

The team names are juvenile and slightly obscene. Some are clever — like "Militant Kindergarten Front" — but most involve references to beer or kicking male reproductive organs.

Certain teams show exceptional athletic talent — one player didn't even take the cigarette out of his mouth to tag a



Photos by Leah L. Jones — State Journal

The Midwestern Unconventional Sports Association's "Big Red Ball" is standard playground equipment — except this cartoon holds a beer mug.

runner out at second base.

In her second season playing for "Kick This, Drink That," Beth Staus of Madison said the league is a good way to meet people. She used to play softball, but after college, she said "it was like, now what?"

"It's cheap, you can drink beer and it's not too competitive," Staus said, sipping from a can of Pabst. "People have a good sense of humor."

Paul Willemssen of Madison is in his third season. Last year, he played most of the season with a pulled groin.

On Thursday, his knees were bloodied after making a heroic play. Runners were on first and second, with no outs. A ball was popped up on the line. Willemssen, the pitcher, went for it, diving on both knees to catch the ball.

It was a circus catch, and best of all, he avoided knocking over a can of beer in the infield.

Shawn Dugan, commissioner of Legends Sports, said it was hard to get kickball teams at first. Now, he's doubling participation every year.

"The game hasn't changed much since fifth grade," Dugan said. "We're just older and bigger."

Dugan is in the midst of a dispute with Madison parks officials over use of Wingra Park, where the popularity of kickball has outgrown the site, said Parks Director Jim Morgan.

Also, Dugan hasn't been paying permit fees for use of the park sites. Both sides said they plan to work something out.

"Adult kickball is all the rage; we recognize that," Morgan said.

Bill Zillmer of Madison has played kickball for five seasons.

"It's a way to get out of the house. It's just fun. People think it's childish, but it's really cool," Zillmer said. "It's better than sitting on the couch watching TV."

And there are the bragging rights.

"I can tell people — I play kickball," Zillmer said.

Contact Lesley Rogers Barrett at lrogers@madison.com or 252-6139.

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