

Our **exclusive survey** of amateur play at Torrey Pines reveals this: The gap between you and the pros is **even bigger** than you think.

# The real difference between you & Tiger

**Our field test:**  
Torrey Pines South  
Here is the par-4 fourth, one of the toughest holes on one of the toughest PGA Tour venues. This is how Tiger played it during the third round of the 2003 Buick Invitational, along with a representation of how our amateur test group fared. Below are more statistical comparisons of amateur and tour play at Torrey Pines South.

Driving distance	
TIGER	298 yards
PGA TOUR	285 yards
AMATEURS	212 yards

Fairways hit	
TIGER	48.2%
PGA TOUR	66.2%
AMATEURS	42.3%

Greens in regulation	
TIGER	73.6%
PGA TOUR	64.0%
AMATEURS	20.2%

Putts per hole	
TIGER	1.51
PGA TOUR	1.78
AMATEURS	2.10

Scoring average	
TIGER	67.3
PGA TOUR	73.3
AMATEURS	96.0

You're here in 3, facing a tough chip and likely two putts for double bogey.



Tiger's on in 2, with a chance for birdie or, at worst, a routine par.



## Amateurs vs. Pros

annual home of the Buick Invitational (which Tiger Woods won by four strokes in 2003) and is the site for the 2008 U.S. Open, not to mention the munny track of choice in Southern California for some 72,000 locals and visitors a year.

A 7,568-yard par-72 layout where even the PGA Tour pros scored an average of 73.3 during three rounds in '03 (the pros play one of the first two rounds on the statistically easier North Course), Torrey Pines South habitually attracts a level of play far above the publinx norm, and it did on our randomly chosen day. Data was gathered on 87 male players, who were also asked to analyze their games. (Only three women played during our test period, too small a sample to analyze and include. Sorry, ladies.) Among the 33 golfers who had a course handicap of 10 or below, seven were scratch players, helping lower the amateur group handicap to 12, well below the national course-handicap average of 17.

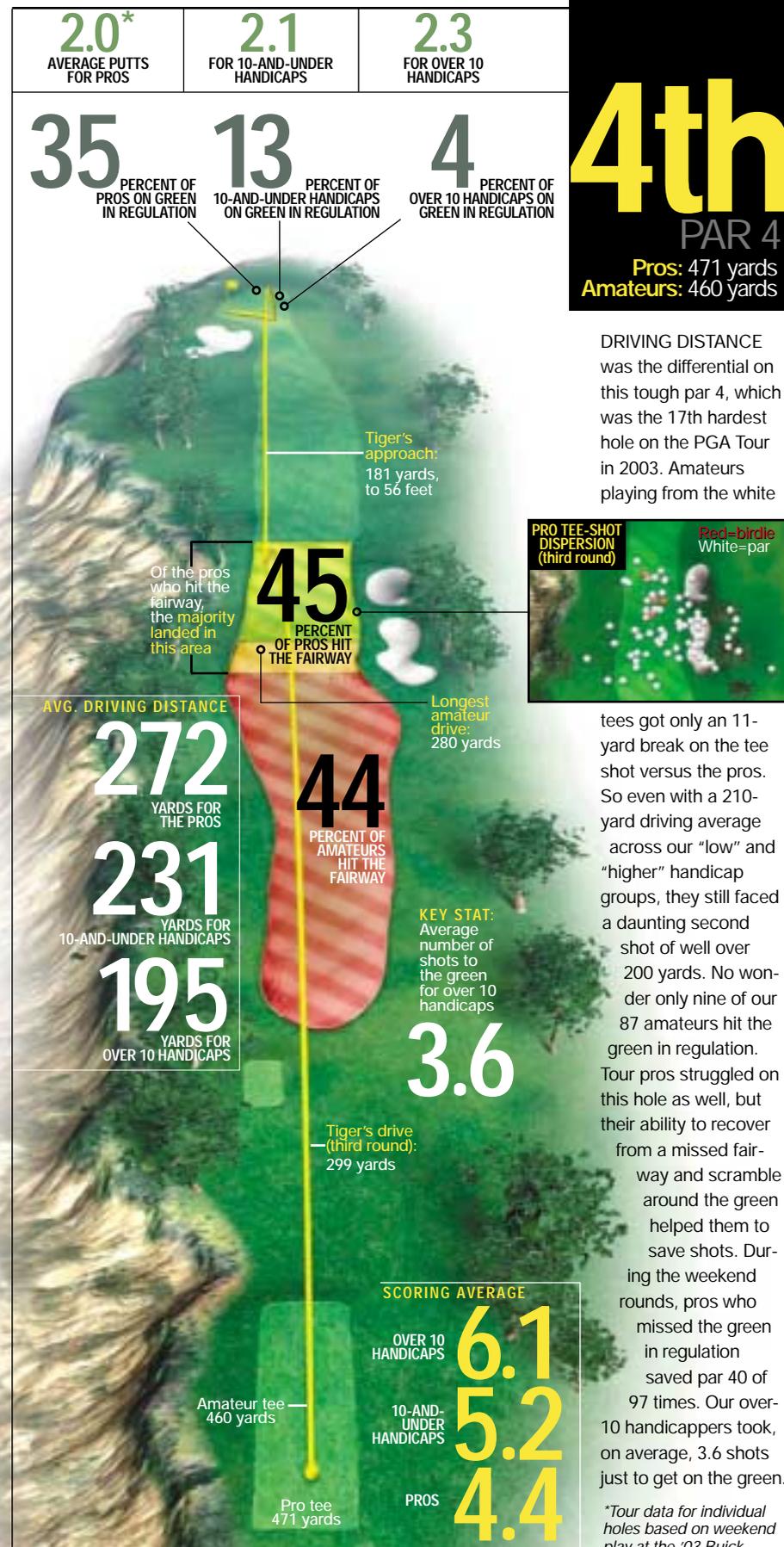
So how did these better-than-average amateurs fare? **The average score for the entire test group was 96—24 over par—six shots worse than their reported averages.** When broken down into higher handicap (over 10) and lower handicap (10 and under) players, even more major differences reveal themselves. (See accompanying diagrams for more detailed hole-by-hole analysis.)

### Distance and accuracy off the tee

The golfers in our test averaged 212 yards per drive on the measured holes (Nos. 4 and 9). The tour average during the Buick event was 285 yards; Woods averaged 298.

**So Tiger has an 86-yard head start on our players.** Our 10-and-under handicappers bridge this gap by nearly a quarter, to 232 yards, trailing Tiger by 66 yards. Woods' driving accuracy at Torrey Pines in '03 was subpar (48.2 percent; the tour average was 66.2 percent). **Tiger made up for it with his approaches, hitting 73.6 percent of greens in regulation, against the field's 64 percent.** On the year, Woods hit 62.7 percent of fairways (ranking 142nd in driving accuracy) and reached 68.6 percent of greens in regulation (26th).

The difference in driving accuracy between our higher- and lower-handicap players was fairly small, 44 versus 40 percent, on the two longest measured holes.



DRIVING DISTANCE was the differential on this tough par 4, which was the 17th hardest hole on the PGA Tour in 2003. Amateurs playing from the white



tees got only an 11-yard break on the tee shot versus the pros. So even with a 210-yard driving average across our "low" and "higher" handicap groups, they still faced a daunting second shot of well over 200 yards. No wonder only nine of our 87 amateurs hit the green in regulation. Tour pros struggled on this hole as well, but their ability to recover from a missed fairway and scramble around the green helped them to save shots. During the weekend rounds, pros who missed the green in regulation saved par 40 of 97 times. Our over-10 handicappers took, on average, 3.6 shots just to get on the green.

\*Tour data for individual holes based on weekend play at the '03 Buick.

## Amateurs vs. Pros

One of the most telling numbers was how dramatically the amateur players inflated their driving distances. The lower handicappers claimed their average drives went 247 yards, while driving-distance stats taken on two holes documented an average of 232—a 15-yard exaggeration. Poorer players claimed a driving average of 227 yards and, in actuality, hit it 198 yards—a 29-yard lie of the mind.

Many conclusions can be drawn from this data, but the hard lesson on this aspect: The worse the players, the more they kid themselves about how good (and long) they are. Nobody, it seems, wants to admit he drives the ball less than 200 yards. Succumbing to self-delusion, it seems most amateurs tend to equate their best drive with their average drive.

### From the fairway (or thereabouts)

While our amateurs largely held their own in finding the fairways, their performance typically went downhill from there: For example, although 27 of 87 golfers hit the fairway on the 432-yard par-4 first hole, only seven of the 27 also hit the green in regulation.

On the shorter (347-yard) par-4 second, GIR percentage for those who hit the fairway improves to 66 percent. Among those who missed the fairway, however, only 7 percent found the green. In short, if you miss one shot, the chances greatly increase that you will also miss the next one.

Our 10-and-under handicappers hit 30 percent of greens in regulation. When they missed, they got up and down 44 percent of the time. **On tour, the average up-and-down rate is 58.3 percent; Tiger in '03 was at 60.2 percent.**

In looking at the self-assessed strengths and weaknesses from the amateurs who hit a fairway and then missed a green, “driving” was named a strength as often as it was a weakness. No other weakness was cited as much, with responses scattered among “short game,” “putting,” etc. The amateurs’ emphasis on the long game was clearly underscored regardless of their performance in our statistical sampling.

### On the greens

Tiger’s putting at the 2003 Buick was outstanding—even for him. He averaged 1.51 putts per hole; the tour average that same week was 1.78 putts per hole. The Torrey

**8th**  
PAR 3  
Pros: 176 yards  
Amateurs: 154 yards

**1.9**  
AVERAGE PUTTS FOR PROS

**2.1**  
10-AND-UNDER HANDICAPS

**2.3**  
OVER 10 HANDICAPS

**83**  
PERCENT OF PROS ON GREEN IN REGULATION

**64**  
PERCENT OF 10-AND-UNDER HANDICAPS ON GREEN IN REGULATION

**21**  
PERCENT OF OVER 10 HANDICAPS ON GREEN IN REGULATION

**KEY STAT:** Amateurs paid a price of at least a half shot when they didn't hit this green. Their scoring average

**4.4**

**SCORING AVERAGE**

OVER 10 HANDICAPS **3.9**

10-AND-UNDER HANDICAPS **3.5**

PROS **2.9**

Amateur tee 154 yards

Pro tee 176 yards

### HERE'S A SNAPSHOT OF HOW ACCURACY COUNTS.

The tour pros’ precision is clear from the inset below showing tee-shot dispersion from the third round, even though the front bunker did plenty of business, too. Of the 11 tour players who found that front bunker over the weekend, six got up and down for par; 15 of 24 got up and down from around the green. From the amateur group, of the 48 who missed the green, only nine got up and down. Of the nine amateurs who hit into a bunker, two made sand saves. Three times as many over-10 handicaps missed the green as the 10-and-unders.



The pros’ distance control on this tiered green was superb. They had the front hole location tightly surrounded.

### UP AND DOWN

PROS **63** PERCENT

10-AND-UNDER HANDICAPS **21** PERCENT

OVER 10 HANDICAPS **32** PERCENT

Tiger’s tee shot in the third round landed 34 feet behind the flag. He putted to one foot.

### HOW WE DID THE TEST

Data was gathered on 90 golfers last March by volunteers from the Torrey Pines men’s club on five holes from the South Course’s front nine—three par 4s (Nos. 1, 2 and 4), a par 3 (No. 8) and a par 5 (No. 9). The results were analyzed by Contributing Editor Dean Knuth, then cross-referenced with ShotLink statistics of PGA Tour players from the 2003 Buick Invitational. Playing conditions were much the same, albeit with shorter rough and slightly slower greens (and different pin positions), and most golfers played from the white tees—at 6,885 yards, 683 yards shorter than the pros’ course setup.

## Amateurs vs. Pros

Pines amateur average per hole was 2.10 putts, 0.59 worse than Tiger, 0.32 worse than the tour. **Over the course of 18 holes, this adds up to 10.6 strokes separating Tiger from the rest of us on the greens alone (and multiplied over a four-round tournament, a whopping 42.5 strokes).**

On average in '03, the pros left their approach putt (the distance to the hole after the first putt where the green was hit in regulation) 30 inches from the hole.

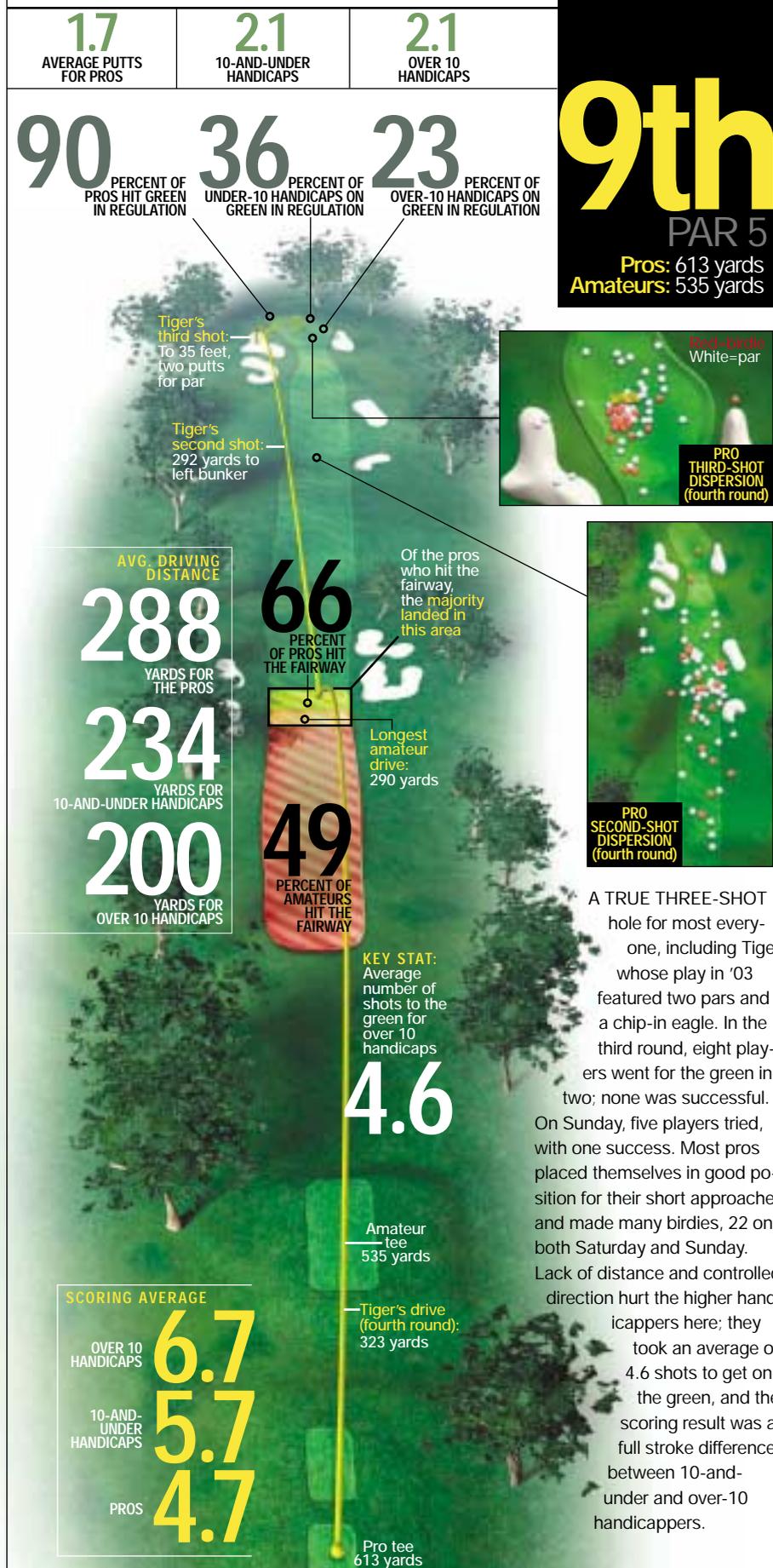
Scrutinizing the length of putts holed by amateurs that day, surprisingly few were made from more than 10 feet—just 15 to be exact, over 435 holes on which data was gathered. The longest? A 54-footer on the eighth hole. Compare this 15-of-435 performance with that of the tour pros at No. 8 on Sunday, when they went four for 15 on 10- to 20-footers, two for 16 from 20 to 30 feet, and made two of 32 putts longer than 30 feet.

**For the average tour pro, on a relatively flat green, the breaking point, or "metric," from which they will make half of their attempted putts is nine feet. For the amateur golfer, the make-or-break point for holing putts is one-third of that: three feet.**

What lessons are we to take from all this number-crunching? For sure, Torrey Pines is one tough munny track, even for the pros. And after you get the playing field as level as possible by comparing tour players and average golfers on the same course, the conclusion is, as advertised: The PGA Tour players *are* good, and Woods, when on, is a statistical step above all of them.

And for the rest of us? Put it this way: We've got a lot of ground to make up. 🏌️

**Eager to test your own game** against Torrey Pines South? You can call the golf shop at 800-985-4653 to book a tee time up to eight weeks in advance. Golf fees are \$185 on weekdays and \$205 on weekends (includes cart, \$10 gift voucher, three holes with the pro). An alternative is to stay at The Lodge at Torrey Pines or the Torrey Pines Hilton. Each has access to five tee times a day. Or call the course's automated reservation system at 619-570-1234. Tee times become available at 7 p.m. PST a week in advance and sell for \$105 on weekdays and \$125 weekends, without cart (locals get a price break).



A TRUE THREE-SHOT hole for most everyone, including Tiger, whose play in '03 featured two pars and a chip-in eagle. In the third round, eight players went for the green in two; none was successful. On Sunday, five players tried, with one success. Most pros placed themselves in good position for their short approaches and made many birdies, 22 on both Saturday and Sunday. Lack of distance and controlled direction hurt the higher handicappers here; they took an average of 4.6 shots to get on the green, and the scoring result was a full stroke difference between 10-and-under and over-10 handicappers.