



Arizona State golfer Phil Mickelson won the Tucson Open last week.

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Eye contact

Mickelson now views feats from afar

By Doug McConnell
THE PHOENIX GAZETTE

► Cook, Simpson lead in Hawaii, C2

Phil Mickelson had a new tool in his golf game for his victory in the Northern Telecom Tucson Open.

Sight.
Mickelson was fitted for contact lenses the week before Christmas by Jeff Eger, part-time golfer, full-time optometrist.

"I hadn't been able to see anything longer than an l-wedge land for the last four years," said Mickelson, who will play in next week's Phoenix Open.

"That's what made me excited, being able to see my drive land."

Arizona State golf coach Steve Loy said, "We've known for some time Phil's eyesight wasn't up to par, and he had an opportunity over the Christmas break to adjust to contact lenses."

"There was hardly any period of adjustment," Mickelson, an ASU junior, said. "It was

amazing to be able to read street signs." "Phil is the best nearsighted athlete I ever saw," Eger said.

Mickelson was hitting everything from a pitching wedge to a driver out of his sight when he won the 1990 U.S. Amateur Championship, the 1989 and '90 NCAA championships, six other college championships with 26 top-10 finishes in 2½ years.

"I was almost afraid to give him a full correction," Eger said.

"Dr. Eger wanted to make a gradual correction," Mickelson said.

"He wanted to start with one set and replace them with a stronger set and work up, but I was impatient and didn't want to go through all that."

"It took a little adjusting. I'm nearsighted and the ball was a little blurry at first, but not now. I guess I've adjusted."

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Phil Mickelson

Commenting on his vision before contacts

Mickelson dragged his feet in seeing an eye doctor. "Maybe I was a little scared," he said. "I was afraid it might change my depth perception a little bit playing golf."

"When I first went to him, he told me to read the eye chart as far down as I could. All I could read was the big 'E.' I have that memorized."

Mickelson isn't the first golfer Eger has helped. Gil Morgan, one of Eger's classmates at the Southern College of Optometry in Memphis, Tenn., barely made the cut in last year's Phoenix Open.

Eger noticed Morgan was missing 4- and 5-foot putts. The golfer saw a blurred golf ball.

Eger prescribed a contact lens to correct the vision in Morgan's non-dominant eye at a 3½-foot distance. His vision in his dominant eye, which he used for distance, was perfect.

"He said he'd try it the next week," Eger said. "I said: 'You barely made the cut. You're not going to collect much of a check. What have you got to lose? Try it now.'"

Morgan did. He shot a final-round 3-under-par 71. Four weeks later he was second in the Los Angeles Open. He won the Kemper Open and pocketed \$702,629 for the year.

Eger spoke to the ASU golf team last month.

"I had a one-hour presentation, but they kept me for another hour with questions," Eger said.

"If you want to lower your golf score you go to two schools," Eger said.

"You go to a school of swing mechanics, taught by a golf professional, and a school of vision mechanics, taught by a sports optometrist."

"I call it sports vision enhancement. I talked about the seven parts of vision, and I gave them drills to do to enhance these skills."

"Once you have all these skills, you will see easy, feel easy and play easy."

"I learned a lot," Loy said. "How to better skill my eyes. The team benefited from it and it helped Phil tremendously."

Eger has improved the unaided vision of three of his patients, bringing one from near blindness, to where they are now commercial airline pilots.

One patient said he could barely see the big 'E' on the top of the eye chart with his good eye (about 20/400) and described his other as "only sensing light."

Using an accomatrac vision trainer over an eight-month period, Eger helped him improve to 20/40 in his good eye and 20/70 in the other.

Nearsightedness, Eger said, is often brought about from heavy reading or work with computers, overworking the ciliary muscle that does the focusing.

"If you overwork it and it spasms from overfatigue," Eger said, "it won't let go and you can't see the wall."

With the accomatrac vision trainer, a piece of equipment endorsed by several professional teams, the patient is taught through biofeedback to relax the ciliary muscle and vision improves."