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## Golf's future drives in view

There are no caddies in the golf of a brave new future. Lee Brandon carried her own bag onto the Bear's Best Golf Club in Suwanee on Sunday. It contained six drivers and a 7-iron.

There are no tee times. Who needs them? For that matter who really has time for a long, grinding round of golf anymore? Brandon flew cross-country from Los Angeles to, basically, hit six balls as hard as she could. She corked her last one 309 yards into a slight wind over soupy terrain, did a little celebration shimmy on the range and pocketed a quick \$2,500.

The Long Drivers of America came to town this weekend, and we're not talking a Greyhound convention. It was one of six LDA Tour events leading to an October world championship of gripping and ripping. And just think of all the time Jim Furyk wasted Sunday on iron play, chipping and putting. Sometimes the details of golf do get tiresome.

In a future where surely home run hitting contests will replace baseball, where the X Games supplant the Olympics and the poet laureate is a rapper, long driving will have its day.

When that comes, a player nicknamed "The Beast" will be bigger than Tiger Woods. Alas, Sean Fister (the aforementioned "Beast") did not triumph Sunday. Actually, a rather quiet fellow by the name of Greg Wellong, a buyer at a hotel-casino in Las Vegas, launched a 364-yard drive to win the big open division and \$12,000.

Certainly not a career best for Wellong -- whose very name defines his goal. But he never did explain how many 747s he hit when he got off that 441-yard shot, for it must have been struck on a runway, right?

So, how does it feel to hit one only 364 yards?

"It feels good when it's the longest one," he says.

In the new wave golf there is as yet very little of the tedious swing science that has elevated the humble instructor to the rank of mentor. At least, not to hear Sunday's champion tell it.

Asked to break down his swing, Wellong simply says, "It's reckless.

"I try to swing as hard as I can and stay fundamentally sound. You gotta swing hard, or you're not going to win." Any more questions?

The new golf is completely unrelated to old game. This has been a big month for women's champion Brandon. She broke 90 for the first time, and broke a long driving slump that dated almost all the way back to her world long driving championship in 2001.

Said Sunday's senior winner (351 yards) John Tutty of Fullerton, Calif., "They say I'm a



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scratch golfer from tee to green and a 10-handicap around the greens. I don't have time to practice that other stuff."

Ah, but in this golfing mutation, there are no holes. Nor is there ceremony. These players are not rattled by the gentle click of a camera or a butterfly's sneeze. In fact, rock music plays in mid-backswing. Shoes are required, but only so the competitors can hit out of them.

There are no excuses. Twenty-four years ago, the 41-year-old Brandon nearly lost her left arm when she accidentally put it through a window. For years, she had limited feeling in the arm. But as a strength and conditioning expert -- who once worked with the New York Jets -- Brandon is her own best advertisement. She has built herself back into a semi-professional rocket launcher.

And, oh by the way, in your face, Vijay.

"When women are consistently able to hit it over 300 yards, we are going to be a real force to be reckoned with," Brandon said. "Men are going to want to see how we do it."

As of yet, there is no big TV deal. But surely that will change.

Here is a kind of golf where one hits the ball as hard as one can, if it goes out of bounds it doesn't count, and the best part is someone else chases the ball. What's there not to like?



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