The Comings And Goings Of Two Left-handers

You half-expected the 23-year-old Bob McIlntyre to stand back and watch a fellow left-hander in Phil Mickelson during what was his first practice session ahead of this week’s WGC-HSBC Champions at Sheshan. Instead, McIntyre continued to do as he has always done since he appeared on Tour at the start of this year. “I just do my own thing,” he explained.

Ernie Els had noticed as much when he and Charl Schwartzel played alongside the shinty-playing Scot in what was his first tournament. “Just carry on being yourself,” advised Els. “You don’t need to feel nervous out here. You’ve qualified to be where you are and your game’s entirely good enough.”

As, indeed, McIntyre has amply demonstrated with his three second-place finishes during the course of this past season. The first of them was in the British Masters in May, the second in Denmark, and the third in Germany. Most recently, he finished in a share of fourth place in Italy.

Since playing with Els and Schwartzel, the former Walker Cup man has found himself playing alongside one great name after another, with Rory McIlroy and Ricky Fowler his companions for the first couple of rounds at the Scottish Open at the Renaissance. He much appreciated how these two friends did everything they could to make him feel comfortable as he played in front of far and away the biggest home crowd he had ever known. “I was a wee bit scared,” said McIntyre, “but they made me feel like I was part of their scene.”

He is used to playing with the bigwigs now, though he doesn’t mind saying that there are still two guys in the game who would make him feel a tad scared were he to find himself teeing up alongside them at some point. One is Tiger, the other, the aforesaid Mickelson, whose progress he used follow when he started out in golf.

Mickelson and McIntyre are at very different stages in their golfing careers. Where the now 49-year-old Mickelson, who was ranked second in the world as recently as 2013, has slipped to 50th on the World Rankings, McIntyre has soared from his 12th place on the 2018 Challenge Tour to 88th in the world.  It cannot be too long before their paths cross.

McIntyre, as everyone is beginning to recognise, is no fist-pumping go-getter. Unlike some others who will double a fast-start on tour with a correspondingly fast car, he has just acquired an unostentatious four-by-four. And when his sponsors, Arnold Clark, asked if he would like to choose something more fancy, he apparently thanked them very nicely before explaining that he was happy with what he had.

No more has he done as many another in hurrying to buy himself a flat near Heathrow, the better to take off on the round-the-world forays which now feature on his schedule. Rather, he remains in Oban, a quiet town on Scotland’s North-West coast. He loves the place and will tell you that every time he nears the end of a journey home, he revels in his first sight of the sea.

That sight never changes and neither does he. As you will have guessed, he doesn’t swan around town covered in logos and the latest golfing gear. McIntyre is comfortable in his own clothes, comfortable in his own skin.