

For his eyes only

AKRON, OHIO

There was Michael Campbell at Pinehurst, winning the U.S. Open in a major upset and, in the process, going into those portable toilets over and over and over. He ducked in there at least three times per round, so much that we thought he had a bladder-control problem, so much that Depends jokes weren't out of line.

Without question, Campbell set the unofficial record for most trips to the bathroom during a major championship, single round and 72 holes. Just how much water was he drinking in that North Carolina heat? Was Open pressure turning him into a sieve if not a Seve? Maybe you really can't make a full turn with a full bladder.

His visits to the loo were beamed into living rooms all over the world. During the final round, cameras picked up the New Zealander making his way through the crowd and heading into those plastic portable johns on the 12th hole and then again on the par-3 17th.

You'd have thought he was the pro from Kohler. Turns out, though, Campbell didn't go into those stinky boxes to relieve himself. That's right. No. 1 wasn't going No. 1. He wasn't going any number. He wasn't vomiting or meditating or calling home.

Rather, in golf's best-kept secret of the year until now, Campbell disappeared into those movable obstructions every time to do eye exercises.

Eye exercises.

Exercises to strengthen eye muscles. Exercises to help balance his eyes, enable him to see the putting line better, improve his focus and relax him.

"It's a great story," Campbell said, smiling.

That's one word for it. Odd is another. Weird works. Ben Hogan never did this. Not even Mac O'Grady. Yet the exercises in those odorous and private confines helped Campbell win the U.S. Open.

"Absolutely," said the man who really did go from the outhouse to the penthouse. "I felt like I had a competitive advantage. After I won the Open, I told the PGA Tour I had a great story but I

couldn't tell it until after the PGA. I didn't want anyone else to know about it because I wanted to keep that edge."

During the final round of the Open, he took about 20 seconds to do the drills. He came out of that loo on No. 12 and promptly made a 30-footer for birdie. He came out of the toilet on 17 and sank a 20-footer. He also holed a 25-footer at 10, a 15-footer at the first and a 6-footer at 15. For the day he one-putted 10 times and had only 27 putts. That enabled him to hold off Tiger Woods by two strokes.

Next thing you know, the whole Tour will be fighting to get into port-a-lets.

Campbell started doing the exercises after having his eyes and more tested in late April at the Leadbetter Academy at ChampionsGate near Orlando, Fla. Canadian Paul Gagne, a kinesiologist and postureologist for the Sports Performance Center there

and in Montreal, told him he was seeing the greens in the wrong perspective. One of his eyes wasn't looking at the same point as the other. The non-convergence caused him to tilt his head to compensate.

"My left eye was looking down and left and my right eye was up and right," Campbell said. "He had me read a few putts and I saw them wrong. One I thought was going left and it went right. After the eye exercises, I saw the correct line."

Campbell does the routine daily, about every six holes. He puts a tee about 15 inches in front of his face and then pulls it in until he sees two tees. Then he pushes it back out until he sees one. Then he watches as he moves the tee in circles and then in figure-eight loops.

"After a few seconds you feel a strain on your eyes," Campbell said. "It's like getting your eyes loose. I can see the true line now because my eyes are aligned properly."

He did the exercises away from public view for a simple reason: so people didn't think he was a nut job. Johnny Miller might have called him Wacko Cambo.

"If I did that in front of the TV cameras, everyone would have thought I was loony," Campbell said. "So what I do is plot out where all the port-a-loos are."

Tiger Woods and Phil Mickelson map out course strategy. Campbell? He figures out where the real waste areas are.

So far, so good. Campbell followed the Open victory with top-10 finishes at the British Open and PGA. His career has never been close to this good.

"To see Michael come out of nowhere was great," said Jay Kiss, a therapist who is Gagne's partner at the Sports Performance Center. "He e-mailed me after the Open and he was laughing. He said he was telling everyone that he was taking a leak because he couldn't say he was doing eye exercises. They do sort of look silly. He went in there because we didn't want guys in the white jackets to take him away."

Back in April, Kiss helped balance Campbell's pelvis and fix his shoulder at ChampionsGate. That came after a 45-minute full-posture exam, including 10 minutes on the eyes. Michelle Wie also has been put on an eye program by Gagne.

"It has to do with eye muscles connecting to the brain," Gagne said. "There was an imbalance in Michael's eyes. It was my job to give him exercises to rebalance. The exercises also can help increase coordination, lower stress and improve attention span and concentration. When Michael went into the port-a-let, his heart rate went down because in doing the eye exercises, his focus was directed to something else (than Open pressure). When he got back to the course, he was more relaxed."

Campbell's longtime instructor, Jonathan Yarwood, sensed the outhouse breaks did calm his man.

"It was like staying in the moment and quieting himself," Yarwood said. "I think it had a psychological effect on Michael. It was another way to get into the present. It helped."

Campbell has a trophy to prove it. It's large enough to see with can't-read-the-big-E bad eyes.

"The proof of the pudding," Kiss said, referring to the eye exercises' impact, "is in the taste."

The proof of the putting, too, you might say. ○



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