SHOWTIME!

THE BIGGEST U.S. HURDLE
ENGLAND

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Under Covers
This year the country's toughest tournament is an Open book

By Jeff Silverman

There's a reason Johnny Miller never gets tired of reminding us about his final round in the 1973 U.S. Open. It was that good. And his mystic 63 gets even better in the context of its surroundings. Like most memorable Opens—1913 at Brookline, '29 at Winged Foot, '50 at Merion, '60 at Cherry Hills, '82 at Pebble—the drama at Oakmont built from a foundation of story lines that border on the Shakespearean.

Consider the elements: a resurgent Arnold Palmer (43 years old and 0 for the majors since the '64 Masters), playing for a slice of redemption on home turf; Jack Nicklaus, Tom Weiskopf and Lee Trevino all in the thick of the hunt; the troubled, hard-drinking John Schlee in the mix as a spoiler; the malfunctioning sprinkler system that turned a terrifying track into a receptive layout. And, of course, Miller, who shot a score that resembled a mirage more than a number.

Reining in a narrative with so many plot lines is no gimme, but Schlossman, a history professor at Carnegie Mellon, and Lazarus, his former pupil, take on the challenge with aplomb. Through extensive research and interviews, they cannily loop the tales together, and the momentum they build en route is palpable, an achievement, certainly, since the outcome is no secret. In the end it's the cast of characters themselves—their dramas, comedies and motives inside the ropes and beyond—that heighten this chase and keep it moving through a series of biographical codas that extend decades past the trophy presentation.

No surprise, Miller and his 63 make the cut for One Week in June: the U.S. Open edited by Don Wade (Union Square Press) 422 pp. $19.95.

Chasing Greatness: Johnny Miller, Arnold Palmer, and the Miracle at Oakmont by Adam Lazarus and Steve Schlossman (New American Library) 420 pp. $24.95

Shot Link
Tom Watson's new DVD, Lessons of a Lifetime, begins with our man on Pebble Beach's 17th tee in the 1982 U.S. Open in need of two pars to force a playoff with Jack Nicklaus. After Watson's tee shot into the rough, ABC's Jack Whitaker tells a glowing Nicklaus that he's "the second green of a fifth Open." Then we see Tom's famous chip-in and, for good measure, his birdie on 18 too.

Golf fドed firmly established, Watson proceeds to systematically teach the game, and he is what makes the lessons work so well. He's authoritative yet friendly (he'd be a delight in the TV booth if he ever stops almost winning British Opens), has passion and keeps the material brilliantly simple.

He shares the knowledge accumulated from Stan Thirsk, his childhood teacher; his father, Ray; and players such as Nicklaus, Byron Nelson and Sam Sneed. The DVD rates the ultimate compliment: The tips are terrific for beginners and good players alike. I couldn't watch the second of this two-disc set before a visit to the range to work on my grip.

The first disc covers the full swing, and Watson gets an A-plus for explaining golf lingo that might confuse beginners, including swing plane, target line and spine angle. The second disc focuses on the short game, and it shows why the phrase Watson par came to define an unlikely up and down. The disc begins with Watson back at Pebble's 17th green. His second demo chip from the famous spot dives into the hole. "Yeah!" Watson exclaims with a smile. His Lessons of a Lifetime merits the same pleased reaction.

—Gary Van Sickle