

YOU THE Hombre

As a boy, comedian George Lopez learned to play golf by hitting lemons in his backyard in San Fernando, Calif., using a garage-sale 7-iron purchased for home security. Now an 11 handicap, Lopez and his game have come a long way. One of stand-up's biggest draws, his sitcom, "George Lopez," is entering its fifth season on ABC. And success has allowed Lopez to feed his golfing passion. He's a member at Lakeside Golf Club, where Bob Hope played, in Burbank. He has a house at Pebble Beach. And in an ultimate fantasy fulfillment, he's been tapped to host the 48th annual Bob Hope Chrysler Classic, which starts Jan. 15 with practice rounds outside Palm Springs. *The Hollywood Reporter's* Chris Koseluk caught up with Lopez to discuss his determination to make the tournament — which features celebrities and athletes playing with the pros the first four rounds — the hottest stop on the PGA Tour.



Chris Comlos/PGA TOUR/WIREIMAGE.COM

The Hollywood Reporter: How did you get the Hope hosting gig?

George Lopez: I got invited in 2003. I couldn't play because of my production schedule, so I made room for it the next year. The attention from the fans was overwhelming. I ran into people's backyards. I ate what they were eating. I drank beer. I threw balls to the kids. I signed gloves and gave them away. I was just really happy to be playing. To me, that's what golf is.

We started talking about hosting the next year. They were receptive, but Bob had just passed, and they didn't want it to seem as if someone was taking his place. For a Chicano dude to step in and replace Bob Hope ... I mean, that wasn't going to be easy. But I said, "Look, whatever happens, happens." I had the support of the celebrities and the players because it was evident that I was having a good time and respected the game. I wasn't going to disrespect what the pros had to do. It came about when Dolores Hope said that I would be a great choice to continue Bob's legacy.

THR: What concerns you more about the tournament: being funny or hitting it well off the first tee?

Lopez: I've been playing pretty hard for the past year and understand the game bet-

dialogue

ter. So I expect the tee shot to be pretty straight and pretty far. I've got a house in Hawaii, and I was playing by myself and kicking ass. I'm this badass and nobody's watching — a couple of gardeners and, what, the wild turkeys? And I'm thinking, this is not going to happen in front of a lot of people.

The strongest part of my game is the short game — the wedges from 100 (yards), the putting and sand (shots). I really don't have a problem with driving or fairway woods. But the weakest part is the long irons ... it's that 175-, 195-yard shot. I use a hybrid sometimes, but I'd still like to be able to hit a 4-iron that far. I love it. It's a sword, man!

THR: What will your duties be as host?

Lopez: They're not really clearly defined, but you can feel you want this to be the best tournament it can be. It has a template of what it used to be. So, what I've done, since I knew about it in March, has been to restore the celebrity aspect.

I got Clint Eastwood to play. He hasn't played there in like 13 years. He's a friend, so he's playing on Saturday. Jimmy Kimmel doesn't play a lot of golf, but he wants to play.

Huey Lewis plays in the AT&T (the pro-am tourney at Pebble Beach), he's going to play. Sam Jackson's going to play. I got (Oscar) de la Hoya to come back. Andy Garcia's never played, he's coming. Ray Romano's never played, he's coming. I've got invitations out to Donald Trump and Bill Clinton. I'm going to land one of those big fish.

It's not going to be boring. There's going to be things to do. When Bob got older, it became sort of the same ever year. There really wasn't a drive to do things because he was unable to attend a lot of the functions. Not me, dude!

I want it to be spring break for golfers. We're not going to turn cars over. We're too old. But I've got a party going every night. I'll be at them all. I'm going to the golf course to get away from the parties. I'll have a '70s night, and then there's a big party with go-go girls on Wednesday. I'm performing with War on Friday night at Fantasy Casino. I play the cowbell on "Low Rider." I've got a jam session at the Classic Club (one of the four courses used in the Hope) after the round on Saturday. On Tuesday, I've got an In-N-Out Burger truck to make burgers for the guys. They're like, "We don't travel that far." But for me, they did.

There's great actors who play golf, and a lot

See **LOPEZ** on page G-4

Lopez

Continued from page G-1—

of them don't play celebrity events. So many guys play ... (Greg) Kinnear, Luke Wilson, I think Owen Wilson plays, Dennis Quaid, Michael Douglas, Catherine Zeta-Jones, Jack Nicholson. ... All those people would be great to have. If they could just remember when they weren't celebrities and playing and how much fun they were having. To get the adulation of fans ... as corny as it sounds, man, those are the people who buy tickets to see your movies or sit down and watch your TV show. It's really kind of a vote, and you need to keep that vote.

THR: What about the pros?

Lopez: My dream would be to get Phil Mickelson to play the celebrity rotation again. He got turned off. He told me he was putting for birdie and a ball came out of nowhere and hit his ball. It was an athlete practicing putting. That scared him away from the celebrity part of it.

You're never going to get Tiger (Woods) out there. If Camilo Villegas played, or some of the Latino guys, they would be exciting. Or if Sergio (Garcia) were to come. Mike Weir and Justin Leonard always come. The guys who are there always make the Bob Hope one of their stops.

You gotta be patient because it takes a long time to play. And then there's five rounds. Those guys are just starting their season. Five rounds is long.

THR: I understand that Chrysler presented you with a limited-production, high-performance, black 2007 300C SRT8.

Lopez: Yeah, that thing is hot. The first thing I did was what any Chicano would do; I took the stickers off and I tinted the windows. Don't tell them that I got a blow dryer and took the Bob Hope Chrysler Classic stickers off the side. I couldn't roll like that.

Jesse James (of the Discovery Channel's "Monster Garage") is working on a '51 Chevy for me that he gave me for Christmas. If that's ready, I'm driving that. If it's not, I'll probably take the Chrysler. A gang of dudes who work on my show golf. So I'll have lots of people with me. In fact, I hope I can take both cars.

And there's a guy in San Fernando, where I grew up, who has a \$45,000 low-rider, custom hydraulic golf cart. That's coming on a flatbed. You know how Bob had his ski nose golf cart? I'm rocking this thing. It's crazy. It's going to get a lot of attention.

There's a picture of me from Pebble Beach in mariachi pants. And my caddie had a leather bandoleer with golf balls in it instead of bullets. The lady who made it is a master leather craftsman, and she's making me a leather bag with an Aztec calendar and different Latino designs. It's an \$18,000 golf bag. I'll be using that.

I don't mess around when it comes to golf. You know, my wife doesn't know how much that bag cost.

THR: Well, your secret's out.

Lopez: Yeah, go ahead. But you know what it is? Nobody played in my family, in my neighborhood. For me, it's been like a father I've never had. It's taught me to control my temper. It's taught me respect and patience. The game has taught me so much, and to be rewarded by being asked to host the Bob Hope tournament ... I don't care if I shoot 300, man. To be playing with so many friends who are celebrities, who I used to watch when I was growing up, is something that I'll never be able to understand — but I'll appreciate it every time I grab my clubs. n

More Online

We look at how the golf course is a great starting point for Hollywood to conduct business. Plus, find a 2007 listing of selected showbiz tournaments for charity.

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AP/WIDE WORLD



Johnny Weissmuller

Bel-Air Country Club

Opened: 1927

Members include: Robert J. Dowling, Engelbert Humperdinck, Al Michaels, Jack Nicholson, Chris O'Donnell, Dennis Quaid, Pete Sampras, Vin Scully, Stephen Stills, Jack Wagner, Luke Wilson, James Woods
Legend has it: A hidden cave in the rock outcropping above the fourth hole served as the setting for several of the Johnny Weissmuller "Tarzan" movies. It is said that Weissmuller, when he played that hole, would climb up the rock landing and let loose with his famous Tarzan yell, which would echo around the course.

Source: www.amlor.com and "Hollywood on the Links" by Tom Cunniff

Brentwood Country Club

Opened: 1941

Members include: Brad Grey, Jeff Koz
Legend has it: A member in his 80s was playing with his long-standing foursome when he suffered a heart attack on the No. 4 fairway and passed away. His companions were saddened, yet conflicted. One wanted to stop the round, but the others argued to continue, believing "he would have wanted it that way." Meanwhile, the impatient foursome behind this group was pushing to play through.

Source: Jeff Koz, founder/creative director, HUM

Hillcrest Country Club

Opened: 1920

Members include: Michael Douglas, Sidney Poitier, Adam Sandler
Legend has it: The club suspended Harpo Marx and George Burns for two weeks after they played a round without their shirts. The pals soon realized, however, that there was no rule about playing without pants. So, back on the course, off came their pants at the No. 3 tee, and the duo gleefully finished up in their undershorts (and shirts).

Source: "Harpo Speaks," by Harpo Marx and Rowland Barber

Lakeside Golf Club

Opened: 1925

Membership include: Kevin Costner, Andy Garcia, George Lopez, Jack Nicholson, Joe Pesci, Ray Romano, Sylvester Stallone, Eddie Van Halen, Scott Wolf
Legend has it: A few weeks after a disastrous stay in a trap at the sixth hole, Oliver Hardy returned with a refurbished niblick. Sporting a six-inch-wide head, the club

CLUB Selection

Here's a few of Hollywood's favorite places to hit the links

worked perfectly, plopping the ball out of the trap and onto the green. Golfing buddy W.C. Fields was infuriated. It is said he told Hardy, "Any man who would use an illegal club like that would strangle his mother." Source: "Lakeside Golf Club of Hollywood 50th Anniversary Book" by Norman Blackburn

L.A. Country Club

Opened: 1897

Members include: There are no Hollywood stars at this old-money bastion in Beverly Hills because, frankly, their kind is not accepted.

Legend has it: For actors, membership was out of the question. Even Bing Crosby, who had a house on the course, couldn't get an invite. So, actor Randolph Scott, who also made a fortune in oil and gas, had to promise the committee that he would never act again. "If you ever saw any of my movies," Scott is quoted as saying, "you'd know I never acted in the first place." Source: Golf Digest "Legends of Hollywood" by Tom Callahan

Riviera Country Club

Opened: 1926

Members include: Billy Crystal, Larry David, Dennis Hopper, Robby Krieger, Johnny Mathis, Sylvester Stallone, Peter Weller
Legend has it: Tommy Smothers was playing in the pro-am at the Nissan Open, held here in 1991. To entertain the crowd, Smothers did his "putting the yo-yo" trick (he plumb-bobs it, and while it's spinning, sets it on the green and points it at the hole). This day, it found the cup from 27 feet away. The crowd roared. "That's the only time it's ever gone in," the surprised Smothers said, "and I try it every hole." Source: "Hollywood on the Links"

Wilshire Country Club

Opened: 1919

Members include: Tommy Smothers, Mark Wahlberg
Legend has it: Howard Hughes resided in a Spanish villa overlooking the No. 8 green. During a big-money match, a naked woman appeared on the balcony as his foursome approached. His distracted opponents all missed their putts, and Hughes, denying he had anything to do with the incident, collected his winnings. Source: "Golf in Hollywood" by Robert Z. Chew and David D. Pavoni

Chris Koseluk