

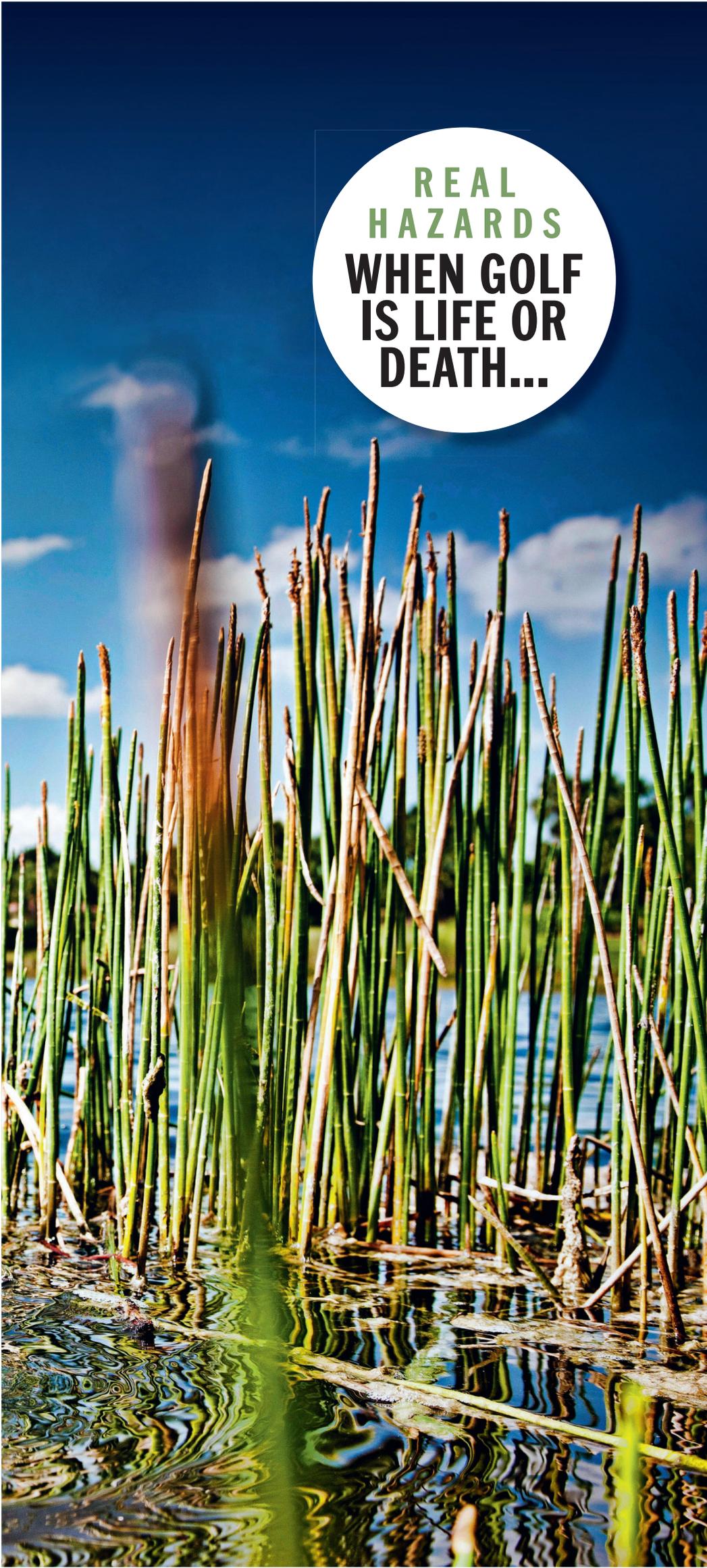
{ MOST DANGEROUS JOBS IN GOLF }

A RISKY BUSINESS

Playing golf may have a rather sedate reputation but these guys put themselves in some dangerous positions to earn a living from the game

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**REAL
HAZARDS
WHEN GOLF
IS LIFE OR
DEATH...**

GATOR BAIT

Glenn Berger dodges alligators in the pond to recover sliced and hooked balls

Why would someone dive into a murky pond knowing that a 13-foot alligator may lurk below? “White gold,” says American Glenn Berger. Or balls to you and I.

“There are two types of golf ball divers in Florida,” Berger explains to TG at his warehouse before a dive in the Sunshine State. “Those who’ve had bad experiences and those that are about to.”

He has a glint in his eye reminiscent of the old sea captain in the film *Jaws* when he talks about the state’s estimated population of 1.25 million gators. “Y’see, the old ones won’t bother you. They know who you are, they are used to you. It’s the young ones you have to watch out for. They...” He breaks off mid-sentence and looks around as if worried. “We shouldn’t really be talking about this. It’s a bit too much like tempting fate.”

Berger is a superstitious person. He goes through a certain routine before setting out on a day’s dive. If anything, no matter how small, breaks the set routine, the doubts begin to bubble to the surface.

“My work bag wasn’t where I left it one day. I knew then something was going to happen.” That something was a gator bumping his oxygen tank and Glenn getting out of the lake so fast that, “it was like I was walking on water.”

Why does the former chef, postman and Iraq War Veteran do it? Lake balls are a lucrative business, with Titleist Pro Vs fetching up to \$2 each in good condition.

This is especially true in Florida, whose 1,200 courses are almost all pitted with lakes due to the limestone geology.

At the lake, Berger scans the surface for what we all now refer to as ‘the things that cannot be named’. None are visible, but as he begins to wade in he says “if you see any when I’m down there, make a lot of noise.”

There are also other dangers lurking in lakes; cars, for example. “I’ve found a couple,” says the 35 year old. “The golden rule is to never put your hand inside. My friend did once and he touched a body! The guy had decided to commit suicide by driving his car into the water. So now, I report it to the police and leave it alone.”

After 15 minutes under water, Berger resurfaces, with a fantastic haul of nearly 700 balls. As he sorts through them, he tells us about more close encounters.

“One guy had his hand punctured clean through by a gator,” he says. “It was his own fault; he wanted a picture to show his kids and was throwing stones at it. And I once came screaming out of the lake thinking there was one on my back. There wasn’t.”

“It’s an OK living. But will I be doing it in 20 years time? No. I’ve been lucky so far – but you can’t always be lucky, can you?” >>