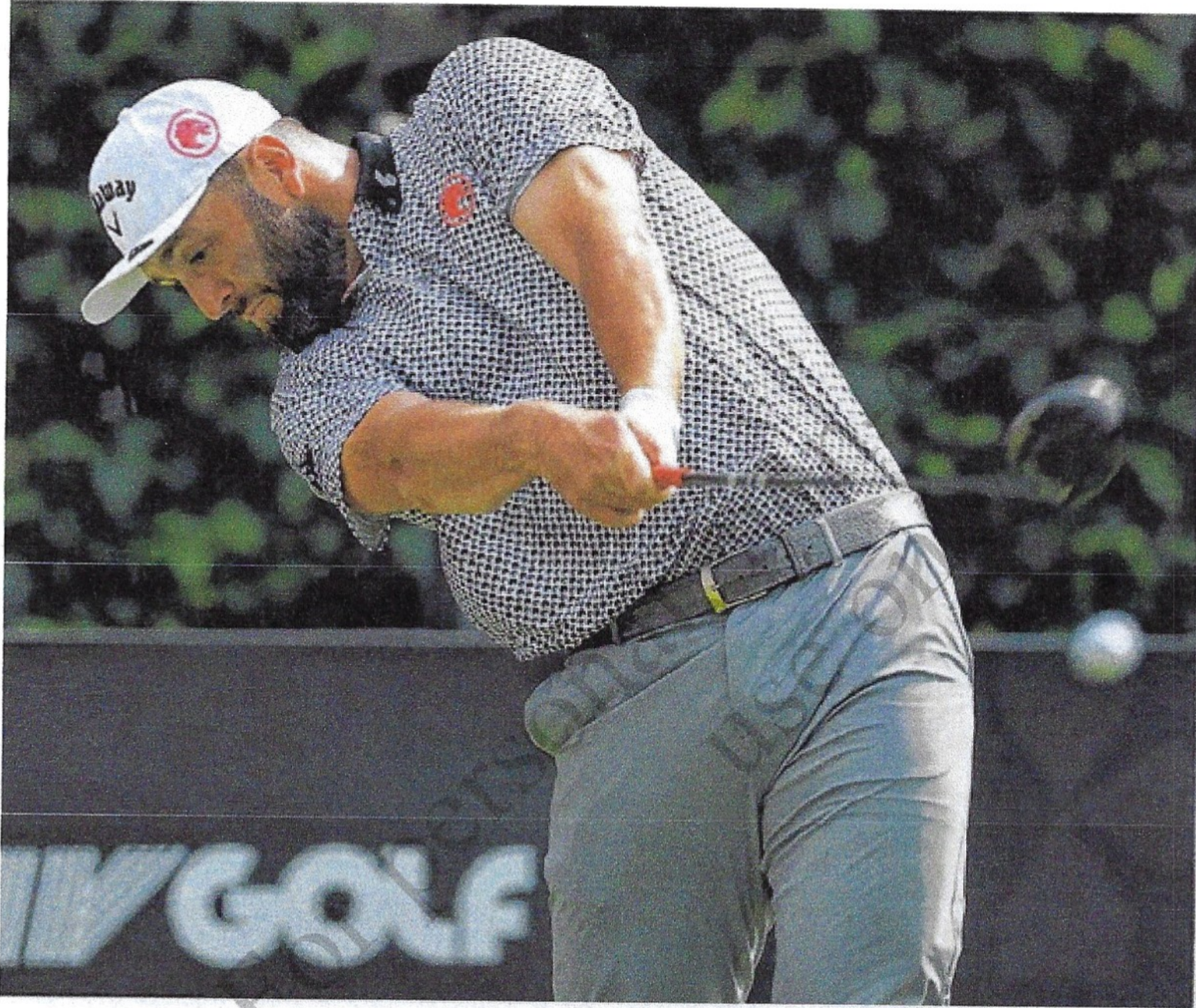


2020-4-20

GTK

WSJ Print Edition



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Life with LIV Golf appears to have stalled the career momentum of talented stars like Jon Rahm, a former U.S. Open and Masters champion. HECTOR VIVAS/ GETTY IMAGES



How Should LIV Be Remembered?

JASON GAY

As the Saudi-backed golf league grapples with its future, a debate is already under way about its legacy

LIV...lives? For now, at least. For how long—minutes, hours, weeks, years—remains murky. Visor-wearing buzzards with farmer's tans are circling the Saudi-backed league as the Kingdom considers terminating its munificent support of the lavish and comically irrelevant golf concern.

Has a sports startup ever been so simultaneously disruptive and inconsequential?

Note

LIV shook up the stubborn golf ecosystem and the PGA Tour when it poached aging giant Phil Mickelson along with stars like Dustin Johnson, Bryson DeChambeau and Jon Rahm, dangling centimillionaire contracts and elevated promises about globally growing the game.

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The incursion triggered a civil war that turned heated and geopolitical, punctuated by allegations of player disloyalty and accusations of "sportswashing" by a controversial regime.

And while LIV's roster raiding and seemingly endless budget offended the sport's grandees, it forced the sleepy PGA Tour to lift itself off the wicker couch, re-engage with its remaining talent and upgrade its product.

By and large, however, LIV's main contribution was making the rich richer—chief among them golfers and lawyers. It gave its recruits career-altering paydays. It even fattened the wallets of big names who chose to stay on the PGA mothership. It provoked litigation and an avalanche of billable hours that only cooled when both parties agreed to explore coexistence.

As an actual sports product, LIV has felt like a pindrop, especially when considering the money spent. *Note*

There have been successes with audiences in Australia and South Africa, and a recent, heartening moment with the career revival of Anthony Kim, but the U.S. embrace has been tepid at best. For players, the league has seemed like a golfing version of a witness relocation program. *Note*

If I had \$5 dollars for every time I've overheard people talking about the action at a LIV Golf tournament, do you know how much money I would have?

That's right. I'd have zero dollars.

Instead, LIV turned into an easy punchline, ridiculed for its dismal TV ratings, its schlocky apparel and teams with beer league softball names: HiFlyers, Crushers, Majesticks, Cleeks and Range-Goats.

None of this has achieved cultural penetration.

Has anyone ever pulled you aside at a barbecue and asked for the score of a RangeGoats match? Have your children or grandchildren begged for tickets to see the Majesticks? Can you name a single Majestick? No peeking and cheating!

(Lee Westwood is a Majestick. Ian Poulter is a Majestick.)

LIV players seem frustrated by the league's inability to gain traction. Defector Brooks Koepka skulked back to the PGA Tour, accepting penalties for going astray. Life with LIV appears to have stalled the career momentum of talented stars like Rahm and Cam Smith.

This is the part where you say: *Well boo-hoo they can comfort themselves with their 800-thread count sheets on their private jets.* And I don't disagree!

At the same time, I did have secondhand embarrassment watching DeChambeau strut around Augusta National in LIV-issue Crushers gear that made him look like the fry guy at a discount burger chain. (Though for the money they were paying DeChambeau, I would have played Augusta in a chicken costume.)

Who saw this peril arriving so soon? Early on, it was assumed that LIV's benefactor, Saudi Arabia's Public Investment Fund, would be formidable because the money didn't matter so much. Golf was a line item among much larger ambitions. As long as LIV made a little noise, it was worth the spend.

LIV wasn't some plucky upstart with owners who would eventually get tired of the burn rate. The PGA Tour groaned about fighting an asymmetrical war against a rival with a bottomless wallet.

Silly us—every wallet has a bottom. Speculation rages as to why LIV's sponsor is considering a withdrawal: a shift in Kingdom priorities, financial losses (a reported \$600 million in 2024), or even the ongoing turmoil in the Middle East region.

It cannot help that the golf itself failed to catch on. Even in the mostly-misbegotten history of new leagues challenging legacy sports, LIV feels like a money-burning miss. It makes the USFL look like Apple.

LIV's value has been as an antagonist. That's not nothing: The threat of LIV kicked the PGA Tour in its behind, mobilizing overdue change, and underlining what fans truly care about, which are the biggest events, contested by the best players.

A golf league still has to play golf. Being an antagonist isn't enough.

For now, Zombie LIV trudges on at a tournament in Mexico City that neither you or I watched. (If you tried, you may have encountered technical difficulties.)

Optimists claim that closure isn't a certainty, that a final decision hasn't been made, that the media is writing a premature obituary. The protests all sound a little bit like the "Not dead yet" scene in Monty Python.

If this is it, farewell LIV. We'll always have the RangeGoats.

Now try to name a RangeGoat.

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