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# Sonoran Shootout

## **Brown** and **Kessler** Last Ones Standing in the Desert

■ Anyone that plays “partner golf” has heard the term “brother-in-law”. That is the great feature of four-ball stroke play; one partner can perform well when the other is struggling to make a par on one hole then reverse the role on the following hole.



*Chris Kessler, Tournament Co-Chairman Dorsey Lynch, and Trent Brown.*

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# Greetings

## Dear Trans-Miss Supporters,

- As with many ventures or organizations, the old adage "there is strength in numbers" applies to the Trans-Mississippi Golf Association as well.
- Over the last few years the Trans-Miss has been supported by a loyal group of member golf clubs. For modest annual dues of \$200, these clubs help fund the granting of over 40 turfgrass scholarships at 19 universities through out the nation.
- However, when I look over the list of current Trans-Miss member clubs, I see two things:

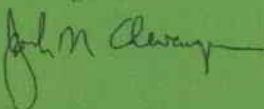
*1. With slightly less than 200 member clubs coming from the states west of the Mississippi River (a few from east!), there is vast potential for growth in the number of our member clubs.*

*2. There are about 25% of our current member clubs that have been members for only one or two years.*

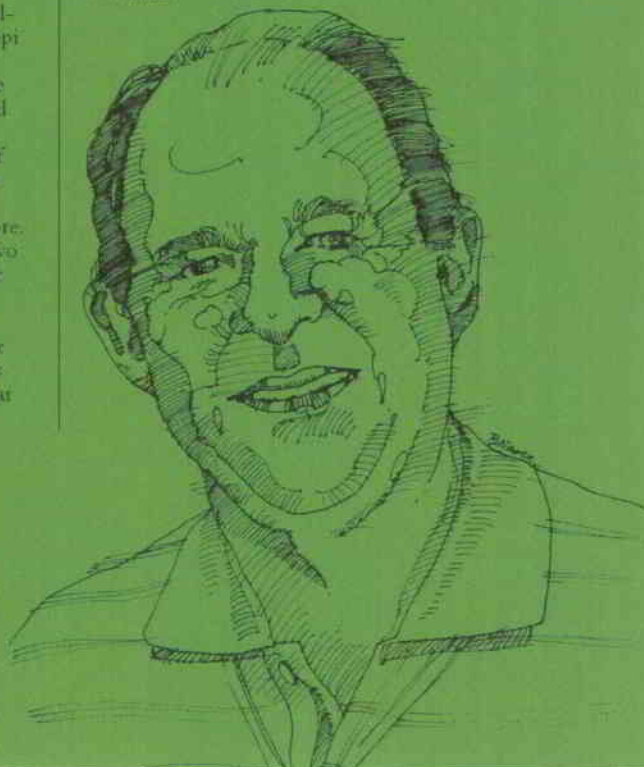
- My fellow directors and I are engaged in an all-out effort to grow the assets of the Trans-Mississippi Turf Scholarship Fund so that it is truly an "endowed" Fund. Then we can begin to increase the size of our annual awards, giving much needed financial support to our scholars.
- With the number of quality and successful golf clubs and operations in the western United States there is no reason that the Trans-Miss should not have at least 400 member clubs, or even many more. Since we require that an entrant for one of our two championships be a member of a TMGA member club, we will now require that a "new" member club joining to facilitate one of its member's tournament entry actually pay an initial three-year dues of \$600. We would like clubs to stay with us over the years rather than joining only for one year from time to time.

- We will also begin a person-to-person campaign to invite former member clubs to come back to the fold, and we will also use the same personal approach to get the newest clubs and facilities to know who and what we are and join our association.
- If you and your club are one of our core supporters, we say thanks! Anything that you can do or say to other clubs in your area to learn about and support the Trans-Miss will be appreciated.

Best regards,



Jack N. Clevenger  
President



- Trent Brown and Chris Kessler are real-life brothers-in-law (Chris is married to Trent's sister). While they attend family gatherings, no doubt they enjoy each other's company the most on the golf course. Having finished a close runner-up in last year's Trans-Miss Four-Ball at Castle Pines Golf Club, Brown and Kessler came to the Sonoran Desert with their guns loaded for a title shoot-out in September at Desert Forest Golf Club.

- Their plan appeared to be play aggressively and not worry about the ever-present danger of the native desert bordering each hole, and to use their putting skills on the tricky and quick Desert Forest putting surfaces. But could the strategy last over 54 holes?

- After the first trip through the desert the "brother-in-law" approach was present. Brown and Kessler earned a little reward for their risk. Kessler managed only two birdies, one on the reachable par five 7th hole, while Brown saved par on four holes where Kessler did not. The total was a two-under par 69, good for seven-way tie for fifth place.

- Minnesotan's Carl Horsch and Tom Smith, veteran Trans-Miss participants, found the warm weather to their liking as they recorded seven birdies (five by Horsch) and a single bogey to take the early lead at six-under par 65. Scottsdale locals Jay Anderson and Ron Burns used their local knowledge to record a second place 66.

- The last two Trans-Miss Four-Ball champions played well enough to stay in the hunt. Eddie Lyons and John Pigg, four-time winners, managed four birdies after two early bogeys and shot one-under par 70. Defending champions Gary Young and Kevin Kobalter shared three birdies, but lost two strokes to par on the last two holes to post a 70 as well.

- While most of the 47-team field struggled to keep a ball out of the desert and within two-putt range of the hole, everyone raved about the beauty and quality

of the golf course itself. The Red Lawrence designed course, which opened in 1962, was living up to its billing as the best golf course in the Valley of the Sun. Superintendent Karl Olson had the playing surfaces firm and fast in the final week before fall over-seeding.

- With the first time to impose a 36-hole cut in the 26-year history of the event, many eyes were on the scoreboard as the "over-par" scores paraded to the finish of round two. 146 or four-over par made the cut. Considering the difficulty of the golf course, an average of one-over par per nine holes played was very good for the highest scoring teams to advance to the third and final round. But there were 21 teams that posted sub-par 36-hole totals.

- The round of day two came from Russell McCarty and James Wheeler, Desert Mountain members, who posted a late eight-under par 63. Their bogey-free round gave them a 132 total and a one-stroke lead over Oklahoman's Andy Lucas and Blake Heldmar. Lucas had eagled the par five 7th hole, to match the same feat of his partner in the first round, and then contributed five birdies on the day. These two teams would have the honor of playing in the final group in the third round.

- When Eddie Lyons approached the scoring table with a smile and scorecard showing a six-under par 65 second round, he and partner John Pigg saw an opportunity for their fifth championship title. After all, sitting at 135 they trailed by only three strokes and neither team ahead of them had their experience of success in the event.

- Brown and Kessler made their first (and only) bogey of the tournament on the third hole, and then proceeded to make five birdies over the final 12 holes and post a four-under par 67 and a 136 total. "So far, every time but one that Chris has made something higher than par I have been able to get us a par," remarked Trent. "If we can get hot tomorrow, we can win."

- So far the aggressive strategy was working for Brown and Kessler, so why not keep it going. Trent birdied the opening hole and started to shoot down the



*Cont'd on page 4*





Trent Brown.



Chris Kessler.

leaders playing three groups behind them. No one in the last two groups could return fire. McCarty and Wheeler struggled with four bogies over their first twelve holes and shot two-over par 73. Lucas and Heldnar could only manage even par over the front nine despite two birdies. Their back nine took its toll with three bogies giving them a 74. Lyons and Pigg could not find the ammo while making four bogies in the opening seven holes. Birdies at #8 and #9 turned out to be shots fired in retreat to their total of 73 and 208 overall.

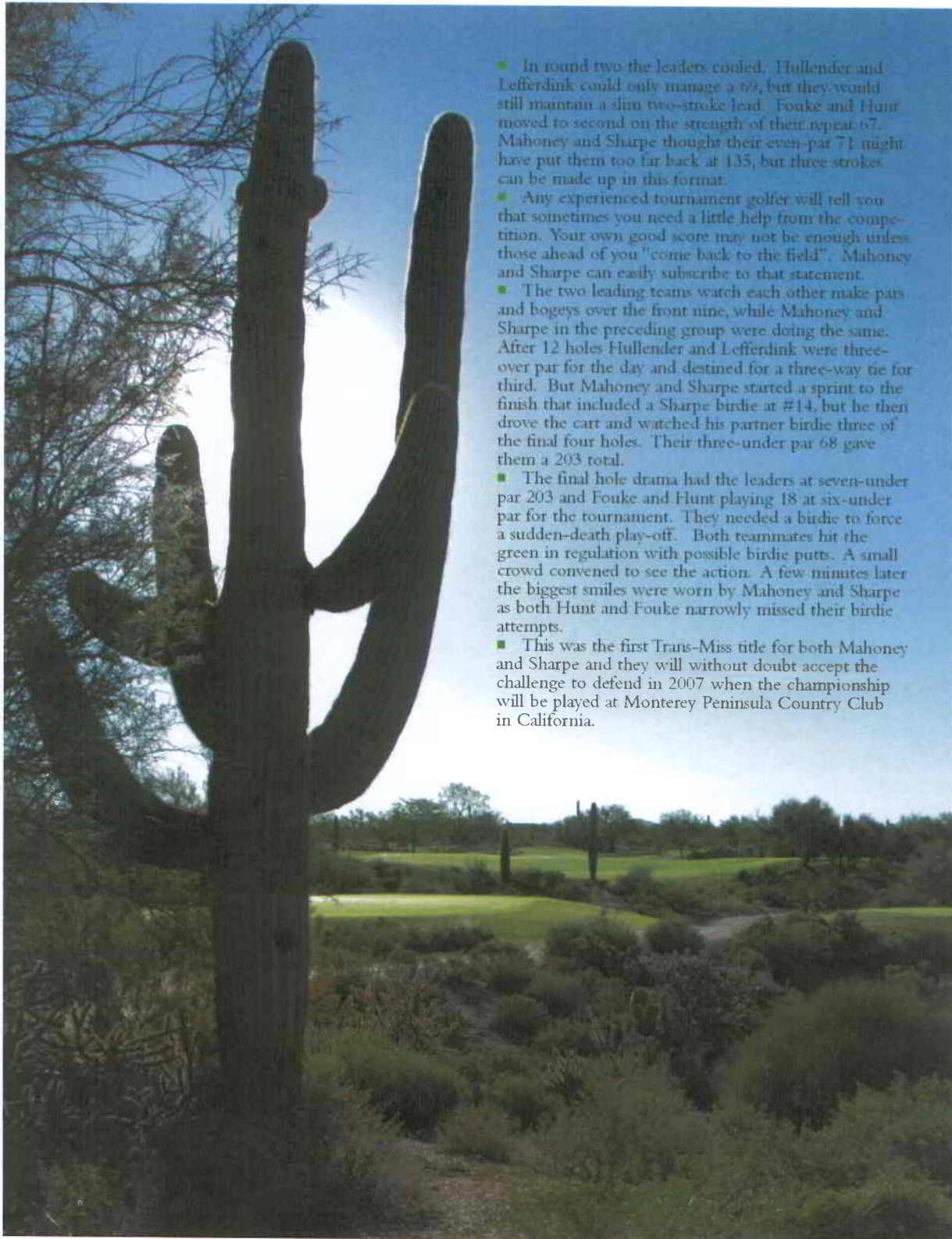
■ By the time Brown and Kessler made their third birdie of the day at the par five 7th hole, they had the lead. But not knowing their status, Trent worried that "we need to make about five more birdies!"

■ That is exactly what they did over the back nine. Trent made birdie at #10 and #17 while they both birdied holes 11, 14 and 16.

■ Their play of the 16th hole was worth watching. Trent drove safely to the middle of the fairway on the 523-yard par five hole. Chris must have reached for a little too much and blocked his drive right into the desert where he was able to find it in an unplayable position. His one-stroke penalty drop put him just off the 18th tee in a very good lie. Trent hit a long iron to the middle of the green leaving himself a 20 foot eagle putt, while Chris hit a rescue club onto the green about 30 feet from the hole, but on the same line as Trent. They each studied Chris' putt and then he casually put it in the hole for birdie. Trent's only comment was "you're stealing the glory" as he left his eagle putt a few inches short. Their 199 total, 11-under par, was six strokes better than the two runner-up teams.

■ It was a "six-shooter" win at the Desert Forest corral for a true "brother-in-law" team.

*For complete results, see [www.trans-miss.com](http://www.trans-miss.com)*



- In round two the leaders cooled. Hullender and Lefferdink could only manage a 69, but they would still maintain a slim two-stroke lead. Fouke and Hunt moved to second on the strength of their repeat 67. Mahoney and Sharpe thought their even-par 71 might have put them too far back at 135, but three strokes can be made up in this format.
- Any experienced tournament golfer will tell you that sometimes you need a little help from the competition. Your own good score may not be enough unless those ahead of you "come back to the field". Mahoney and Sharpe can easily subscribe to that statement.
- The two leading teams watch each other make pars and bogeys over the front nine, while Mahoney and Sharpe in the preceding group were doing the same. After 12 holes Hullender and Lefferdink were three-over par for the day and destined for a three-way tie for third. But Mahoney and Sharpe started a sprint to the finish that included a Sharpe birdie at #14, but he then drove the cart and watched his partner birdie three of the final four holes. Their three-under par 68 gave them a 203 total.
- The final hole drama had the leaders at seven-under par 203 and Fouke and Hunt playing 18 at six-under par for the tournament. They needed a birdie to force a sudden-death play-off. Both teammates hit the green in regulation with possible birdie putts. A small crowd convened to see the action. A few minutes later the biggest smiles were worn by Mahoney and Sharpe as both Hunt and Fouke narrowly missed their birdie attempts.
- This was the first Trans-Miss title for both Mahoney and Sharpe and they will without doubt accept the challenge to defend in 2007 when the championship will be played at Monterey Peninsula Country Club in California.





*The Sonoran Desert was a perfect late summer setting for the 26th Trans-Mississippi Four-Ball Championship. Aside from the challenging and beautiful Desert Forest Golf Club, the contestants were treated to a special exhibition by Chuck "The Hitman" Hiter and the after-dinner comments from 2006 NCAA Men's Golf Champion coach Mike McGraw of Oklahoma State University.*