



Mediate: "I'm a solid ten handicap."

## ■ PASSIONS

# ROCCO Antes Up

*Rocco Mediate, 43, a five-time winner on the PGA Tour, is also a fanatical poker player sponsored by PokerStars.com. He placed 600th out of 5,619 players in the 2005 World Series of Poker's Main Event, and he was recently disappointed when golf obligations forced him to miss a big card tournament in the Bahamas.*

### Why aren't you in the Bahamas?

I wish I could have gone, but I had to get ready for the golf season. I had to test new balls with Callaway. I really wanted to go, but I had to make the decision: Am I a poker player or a golf pro? I'm a golf pro. I'm definitely a poker amateur.

### When did you get into poker?

Only about a year ago. I saw some buddies playing online and I liked it. Then I started playing, and that's the end of that.

### Did playing in your first live poker tournament, at the World Series, feel like your rookie year on Tour?

Way worse. At least when I got on the Tour I had a clue. Here, I was like a deer in the headlights. When I won my first hand, I couldn't stack the chips because my hands were shaking.

### What is it about green surfaces that attracts you?

That's a good point. What I like about poker most of all is that you're by yourself, reacting to what you see in front of you. Which is what I do in golf—I'm very much a feel player.

### Last summer, when you were at the World Series of Poker, your golf peers were at the British Open. Which would you prefer to have—

### Claret Jug or gold bracelet?

I would have loved to be at the British Open, but being that I was still hurt and unable to play, I was glad I was [in Las Vegas]. It was one of the coolest experiences I've ever had in my life.

### How do you rate your poker game?

I do okay. I've won a bunch of online tournaments with nine players. I've never won a 2,000-person event, but I finish up in the top thirty here and there. I'm a solid ten handicap.

### Where do you want to go long-term with it?

I still have a bunch of good years left in golf. And if I go out and do really well and win a major or something, then I might try to play in some more poker tournaments.

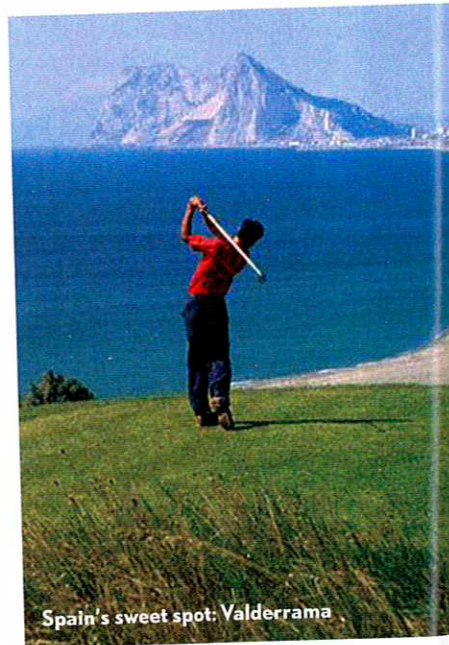
### So you're saying if your golf career goes well, you'll play more cards?

Absolutely. And I'm not going to let that happen until it does. So it's almost like an incentive for me. If I do well, I'll play more; if I don't, I'll just have to wait. But I'm sure I'll throw a tournament in here and there, because that's what I like to do. It's fun.

—Jonathan Lesser

## Q&A HAVING "DONE" THE BRITISH ISLES, I'D LIKE TO PLAY IN CONTINENTAL EUROPE THIS YEAR. WHICH ARE THE FIRST PLACES YOU'D GO?

Practically every European country (including the Eastern ones) now has quality golf, but Spain's Costa del Sol still has perhaps the largest concentration of top-notch courses on the continent. Play there is highlighted by a pair of neighboring Robert Trent Jones Sr. layouts: Valderrama—site of the 1997 Ryder Cup—and the daunting Sotogrande. Also highly ranked are Las Brisas and the San Roque Club (see T+L GOLF, May/June 2004). The Algarve region along the southern coast of Portugal boasts a



Spain's sweet spot: Valderrama

series of excellent courses, too, including San Lorenzo, Vilamoura and Vale do Lobo (see T+L GOLF, March/April 2001). Wherever you go, you may want to bring balls from home: A dozen Titleist Pro V1s, for example, can retail on the continent for 57 euros (about \$70) or more.