

Blood, Golf and Saudi Arabia: The LIV Tournament in Adelaide

By [Dr. Binoy Kampmark](#)

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The recently concluded LIV Tournament in Adelaide was a matter of bread, circuses and golf. It was something of a triumph for the chief sponsor: the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and, more notably, the Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman. Critics, and criticism about the regime and the blood spattered House of Saud, were generally forgotten.

This vulgar display of denial and indulgence was typified by the face of Australian golf, Greg Norman. After three days of competition at The Grange, *The Advertiser* ran with the [painful headline](#): "LIV-ing the dream: Golf's boom weekend for SA." The South Australian Premier Peter Malinauskas, who scandalously threw his state's money into a mix also funded by Saudi Arabia's Public Investment Fund (his government refuses to say how much), [was also glowing](#). "To everyone who turned up and showed what Australia is about – thank you."

When questioned about the Riyadh connection and its blotchy human rights record, the insufferable South Australian Tourism Minister, Zoe Bettison, proved to be [a well of useless information](#). "I'm aware of the issues that people have raised," she stated. "But each and every one of us here uses equipment [and] different businesses every day that the Saudis are invested in." Presumably she does not mean hacksaws, which, in Saudi hands, have a habit of finding their way onto the necks of critical journalists.

Golfing professionals such as the unprincipled Mammon follower Dustin Johnson also [expressed](#) delight at the way the tournament had gone. "The support we've had from the fans and the city ... awesome. Obviously, the crowds were unbelievable this week, so it was a lot of fun."

Peter Uihlein [dreamily speculated](#) about future numbers, burgeoning in their promise: 90,000 attendees over three days in the 12th event would surely mean even greater numbers by the 40th or 50th? "People lose sight of that a little bit. This is literally the 12th event. The sky is the limit."

There were efforts made by the organisers to mimic their PGA Tour rivals, who, to be fair, are also corrupt, but not in the capital punishment-killing journalists sense of the term. A ticket to the “Cellar Door” Marquee back of the 12th green, *Guardian Australia* [reports](#), was called the “Watering Hole”; the PGA equivalent would have been the “Party Hole” in Arizona. The price of admission: \$1200. For that price, those attending the sports wash session could also be bored by Norman, Premier Malinauskas, and former Australian Treasurer and US ambassador Joe Hockey, talk about golf as “a force for good”.

The Kingdom has made no secret of its use of sport in softening a cruel, barbaric image, rinsing it in the progressive tones of sporting improvement. Obscene amounts of cash have and are being put into sporting tournaments by Riyadh’s Public Investment Fund. And they have such charming ignoramuses as Norman to play the role of useful, distracting dolt, able to bring on board other dolts bedazzled by the dosh.

In the [first season](#) of LIV Golf events, each regular-season event’s total value was counted at \$25 million, split between \$20 million for the individual event, and \$5 million for the team competition. The winner’s earnings came in at \$4 million, with the last-placed participant getting \$120,000.

There have also been the individual mercenaries, the condottieri of the golf circuit. They have taken the manna from Norman, and encouraged to forget the bloodthirsty, vicious tendencies of the medieval House of Saud; focus, instead, on a more tangible hatred golfers can understand: the PGA tour organisers. It is those stuffed shirts Norman has never forgiven in undermining his previous efforts to run a tournament, and it is an animosity that he has bred from.

In Adelaide, [when asked](#) about what the PGA boss Jay Monaghan might feel about the tournament, Johnson was instant in his reaction. “We don’t give a damn how he feels. We know how he feels about us, so it’s mutual.”

Others, like Bruce Koepka, [focused](#) on the golf-as-golf theme: players on the LIV circuit and the PGA tour were playing the same game. At the recent Masters, he could “run into 15 (PGA) Tour guys if [he] wanted to in a day and nobody really had any negative feedback, any negative thing to say – and that would be the time to say it.”

One can never accuse professional golfers of shaking the tree of knowledge, and 2020 US Open Winner and LIV participant Bryson DeChambeau [proved that point](#). “We talked about that [Saudi sportswashing] last year, and we already kind of kicked that to the kerb. It’s something that I truthfully believe is inaccurate.”

When asked last week if he had ever had a conversation with bin Salman, the man US intelligence agencies are certain ordered the murder of *Washington Post* journalist Jamal Khashoggi, nothing was forthcoming. “No, I have not,” he [replied](#).

As to why such a meeting had never happened, the answer was childish, though far from endearingly so. “Because I’m the chairman and CEO of LIV Golf Investments, and that’s where I focus. I focus on golf. I’ve been involved with golf ... as a player, as well as golf course design. I’ve built golf courses in third-world countries. I’ve built golf courses in Communist countries.” Here we have the Albert Speer of golf, dedicated to the building enterprises, riding high, and without fear. Speer, at the very least, faced a tribunal and received due punishment.

There have been a few indignant spoilsports. Human Rights Watch researcher Joey Shea made a few ripples in the ABC [for noting](#) that, “Saudi Arabia has experienced some of its worst periods for human rights in its modern history.” In March 2022, she reminds us, 81 people were executed in one day.

Strangely enough for a state Liberal opposition leader, David Speirs [had also detected](#) some principle in the tangle of sporting sponsorship. Why take “dirty money” from a “despotic”, fundamentalist government while condemning Russia?

Malinauskas had a reply for his sparring opponent: Speirs had supported the Harvest Rock Festival, run by Live Nation, yet another Public Investment Fund recipient. No matter, retorted Speirs. “We’re paying for print advertising, social media advertising ... we’re normalising the Saudi regime.” That normalisation, at least at the State level in Australia, is nigh complete.

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Dr. Binoy Kampmark was a Commonwealth Scholar at Selwyn College, Cambridge. He currently lectures at RMIT University. He is a regular contributor to Global Research and Asia-Pacific Research. Email: bkampmark@gmail.com

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