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Long-shot Shark thinks he's a chance

By Martin Blake

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He hasn't won a tournament in almost seven years but Greg Norman says he still has his eyes on the prize in the Heineken Classic this week.

A week out from his 49th birthday and with his world ranking down to 267, Norman remains optimistic. However, he has long since given up on his dream of winning another major championship. With his chronic back injury - the result of tens of thousands of those violent, uncoiling golf swings - feeling moderately better recently, he has increased his devotion to practice under the tutelage of Craig Harmon, brother of the legendary Butch Harmon, in Florida.

It has left him feeling that he has a chance in this week's \$2 million tournament at Royal Melbourne, scene of so many of his triumphs. "My goal is still to go out there and win," he said yesterday. "I've said this consistently. If I didn't think I could perform and have a chance to win, I wouldn't do it. That tells me I'm having positive feedback about where I'm taking my game.

"My back has allowed me to spend more time [practising]. If you don't work on it, I don't care how great a player you are, you're not going to be able to play at your peak."

Norman, who secured the most recent of his 88 professional wins in 1997, has added some tournaments to his early-year schedule, and will next play in the Los Angeles Open at Riviera. Last year he played just seven times on the US PGA Tour, withdrawing after the first round of one of those tournaments because of his back.

"Is my back any better? No, my back's not any better. It's almost a day-to-day thing. Don't make anything big out of this, guys. It's not like I'm coming back to play 25 tournaments a year."

Norman is at \$41 in the betting, with South African Ernie Els, winner of the past two Heinekens, a hot favourite at \$4.25 with SportsTAB.

Meanwhile, Nick Faldo has turned to technology in his quest for another tournament victory.

Faldo, a six-time major championship winner, took to the driving range at Royal Melbourne yesterday wired up with electronic sensors to measure the body movement in his swing, with three-dimensional images appearing on a laptop computer nearby.

The Briton was using relatively new American technology being employed by Melbourne company Golf Bio Dynamics.

"We're analysing what's moving where, when, and how in the swing," said Scot Ryan Lumsden, a former British national amateur squad member and a biomechanist who operates the technology. "We're quantifying it, and from there we're looking at the aerodynamics, their co-ordination, the timing, the club-head speed, which affects power; we look at address posture and set-up positions, which determines how they swing the club.

"We look at body movements and swing shapes, how much everything rotates, if the head is moving during the swing. We look at consistency and we learn how variable a player is from swing to swing."

The images and data are immediately available in virtual reality.

Golfers around the world are experimenting with more rotation in their swings as a response to Tiger Woods's domination, and Lumsden said players were stretching and working out more to prepare their bodies for the modern swing. "There's been

a shift from the classical swing to the big finishes, the real coil swings," he said.

The Australian Institute of Sport and the Victorian Institute of Sport are already using the technology, although Lumsden warns it is not a panacea for the average amateur. "It might look like a gimmick, given the laptop and the funky sensors, but at the end of the day it's the numbers that are produced that matter. It's scientific. It's not a solution to your problems at all. It's about measuring certain things in your swing and applying that data to see how you can swing better."

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