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Golfsmith and MacGregor will focus on contemporary classic - Jeff Sheets Golf Design to handle R&D

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News came this week that one of golf's historically iconic brands (and one that has struggled mightily to be relevant in recent years) has found a new source of energy. MacGregor, a 112-year-old brand that for decades was the choice of 59 major championship winners including most notably Jack Nicklaus, will now be part of the family of brands controlled by golf retail giant Golfsmith International.

The deal was announced Wednesday by the Austin, Texas-based retailer, which also owns and distributes exclusively familiar brands like Lynx, Snake Eyes and Killer Bee. Greg Norman had acquired a substantial stake in MacGregor in 2006, and was serving as chairman. Terms of the deal were not disclosed. As part of the deal, Norman, who earlier this year signed a product endorsement contract with TaylorMade-adidas Golf will step down, and MacGregor's Albany, Ga.-based facility will be closed.

Meanwhile, Golfsmith officials believe the traditional respect for the MacGregor brand will provide an opportunity to attract customers to its retail stores and website. "Game improvement clubs will be where we think most of the sales will be, but we will not ignore the heritage of the MacGregor line in forgings," said David Lowe, vice president, proprietary and consumables merchandising at Golfsmith International. "We will have some beautiful forgings, but our whole approach will be what we'd call contemporary classics with a lot of the traditional MacGregor shapes in contemporary configurations."

Lowe said Golfsmith will bring the research and development side of the MacGregor brand under its design partner Jeff Sheets Golf Design. Industry veteran Sheets is the former head of research and development for Golfsmith.

Lowe said the plan would be for the MacGregor line to complement the premium products from major manufacturers (Callaway, Cleveland, Cobra, Nike, TaylorMade and Titleist, among others) already in Golfsmith's retail outlets. He expected drivers would fall in the \$200-plus range, while irons would be in the \$400-\$600 range. New products are expected to be launch by the end of the year, with a more extensive line set for 2010.

"We did not buy MacGregor to compromise the business of our premium brand partners," he said. "We don't want to compete with our vendor partners. We want to create supplementary offerings with MacGregor that addresses a new audience for Golfsmith that may not have been addressed as broadly as we'd like it to be."

While MacGregor in the last 10 years had ramped up its presence on the PGA Tour with endorsement contracts with Aaron Baddeley and Jose Maria Olazabal, as well as Greg Norman's recent presence, the plan currently will be for the familiar MacGregor logo not to be seen on the PGA Tour.

"For the foreseeable future, no," said Lowe. "But forever is a long time.

"We have a great respect for the history and the tradition of the brand as being recognized for the majority of its life for being one of the preeminent brands in this industry," Lowe said. "We're going to treat it as such, and we're going to make product that is consistent with its history."



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