



Quietly, with little fanfare, NBC's Capps helps on-air talent shine

Early in NBC's U.S. Open coverage, Dan Hicks and Johnny Miller will sit shoulder-to-shoulder in the booth near the 18th hole. They'll set the stage for the telecast, introduce the announce team and direct us to the action at Olympic Club. That's Gil Capps' cue. Once the lights in the booth dim, Capps, a mild-mannered 42-year-old North Carolinian, will uncap his Sharpies, don his headphones and wedge his chair in between Miller and Hicks.

Basketball has its sixth man. Capps is NBC Golf's ace off the bench, backing up Hicks and Miller as scorer, statistician, researcher, fact-checker, writer and overall editorial conscience of the broadcast. Given his vital role in NBC's standout coverage, Capps is arguably the least-known important figure in golf television.

His title is associate producer. A better one might be go-to guy. His primary responsibility is updating a small custom-made scoreboard he keeps in clear view of his announcers. But Capps' work goes far beyond birdies and bogeys. During his downtime he's an unrivaled researcher, preparing hulking three-ring binders crammed with every conceivable bit of insight, trivia or detail Hicks or Miller could ever need. As much as 90 percent of his material never makes it on air. Asked recently for an example of a forlorn fact, Capps says, "No one knows that Ponte Vedra Beach was once known as Mineral City."

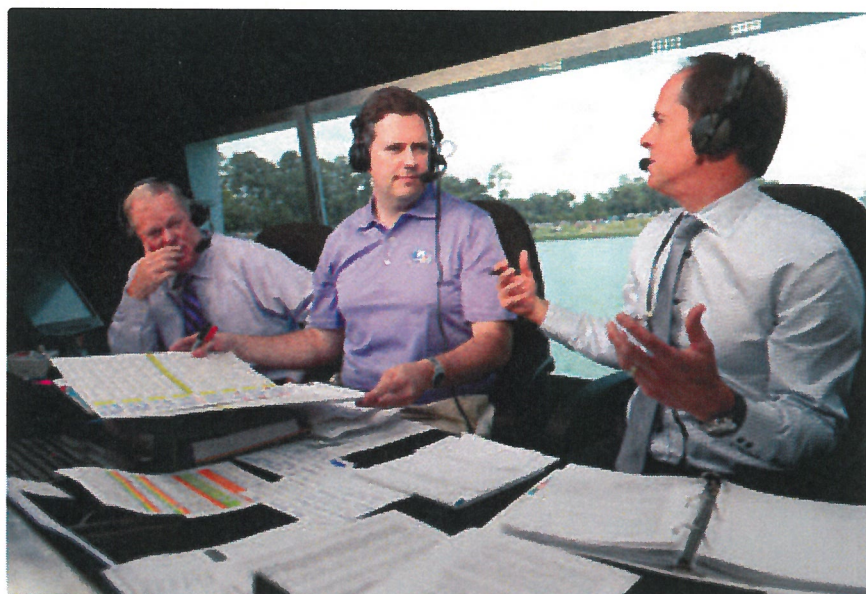
Capps grew up a basketball fan. It wasn't until his junior year at Davidson, studying abroad at the University of St. Andrews, that he caught the bug. After graduating in 1991 he started (and has since sold) Charlotte's Metrolina Golf magazine. Then in 1993, looking to defray CMG's expense of sending him to the Ryder Cup, he tapped an NBC contact for a job as a walking scorer. At the Belfry, however, Capps got marching orders that would define his career.

"They said we actually need somebody in the tower with Jim Lampley and Johnny Miller to do their scoring and spotting," he recalls. Rather than excitement, Capps felt a tinge of disappointment: "Who doesn't want to be walking inside the ropes with the matches and stuff, but spending three days in the booth with Jim and Johnny is how I got my start."

As if monitoring the field and compiling a golf atlas per month isn't enough, there's the ever-present cache of blank index cards. In a digital world this is the decidedly analog

way in which Capps silently communicates with his boothmates. "When things are happening very quickly," Hicks says, "Gil is able to get his hands on information and put it on a card, old-school. No computer or person out there can give you what he gives you, especially when the action and information are flowing that fast."

Miller and Hicks have come to rely heavily on Capps' highly specialized golf knowledge (he doesn't work other sports) and his timing. For instance, Hicks' first U.S. Open as anchor for NBC was 2000 at Pebble Beach, when Tiger Woods' 15-stroke victory ravaged the record book. If ever there was a run on statistical, historical or personal factoids this was it. Capps went into a Sharpie-fueled data frenzy.



Information, please. Capps (center) is a one-man research bureau who has been assisting the Miller-Hicks team since 2000.

According to Hicks, the floor of the 18th tower "looked like there'd been a raid on paper and research materials. Everything that we had in our arsenal was exhausted." Woods might have won the Open, but Capps won Hicks' lasting admiration. "That gave me the earliest indication of Gil's talents and how plugged into a tournament he is."

A few weeks prior to Olympic, Hicks likened his colleague to a contestant in the national championship. "He's kind of like a player who puts a real premium on the big events," Hicks says. "You really have to be extra-prepared in the big ones, and Gil comes to play the Open. He's ready." **GW**