

COMMENT By DEREK LAWRENSEN

So depressing as Phil commits to the Saudis

IT IS hard to think of anything more depressingly predictable than Phil Mickelson's request for a release from the PGA Tour to join the inaugural Saudi cash grab at St Albans in June.

Once the organisers made it clear some weeks ago that he would be 'welcome any time' and that he had been forgiven for his unguarded description of the Saudis as 'scary motherf---ers', you know that he would follow the money trail. He can't help himself.

Mickelson has owned up to being one of the original architects of the proposed Super Golf League, now pushed down the road until 2024 at the earliest. And he has now unsurprisingly put

his name forward for the opening event of the LIV Invitational Series, a programme of eight events that has been scheduled instead.

It won't cost him anything in terms of burning bridges back in America.

The PGA Tour will grant him a release because the event is not taking place on US soil. When the LIV Series moves to America in July is when Mickelson will have a decision to make.

He will be banned from the PGA Tour if he plays in one of those, but it looks as if he's committed lock, stock and oil barrel to the Saudis.

The 51-year-old hasn't been seen, of course, since two shocking interviews emerged in February.

First he accused the PGA

Tour of 'obnoxious greed' and became persona non grata both in the boardroom and the locker room, and then came his Saudi comments.

All told, 15 of the world's top 100 have supposedly requested releases for the LIV opener, with all the usual names banded around. Lee Westwood, Ian Poulter, Sergio Garcia, Martin Kaymer — if there's a European Ryder Cup hero coming to the end of his career, it seems, he will be down to play.

The interesting thing will be if the DP World Tour follow through with their threat to prevent anyone who signs up for a Saudi event from becoming a Ryder Cup captain in the future.

It looks as if Westwood, Poulter and Garcia — three

shoo-ins for the job under normal circumstances — are ready to call their bluff and see who blinks first. It would certainly damage the credibility of the Ryder Cup if all three were overlooked for the post.

As for the Saudi event at the Centurion in St Albans, get ready for something far from gladiatorial.

There's a war going on, people are struggling everywhere to pay their bills, and yet 48 golfers, half of whom will be journeymen at best, will play a glorified exhibition 54-hole tournament for a \$4million first prize, with even last place getting \$120,000.

Is it possible to conceive a worse optic for golf than that?



Blood brothers: Norman (left) and Mickelson have sold out GETTY IMAGES

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