



EVEN BY TIGER'S STANDARDS, THIS WAS *THE* IMPOSSIBLE

By Kerry Schmidt

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It is highly unlikely that we will ever see a golf match like the one we were fortunate to witness during the 5-day "weekend."

David vs. Goliath. The "old man" – at 45, Rocco Mediate vs. the greatest golfer in the world in the middle of his prime.

In major NFL games, we hear multitudes of injuries affecting players. Some tough it out, others, not wanting to risk their new, upcoming multi-million dollar contract, will "sit this one out."

Not Tiger.

Majors are what he lives for.

He made small talk of his arthroscopic surgery on April 15, just a little less than eight weeks before the Open.

He was told, bluntly, by his doctor that he "should be on crutches, definitely not playing golf."

When the doctor told Woods that, he simply said, "I'm playing in the U.S. Open and I am going to win."

It was obvious to viewers that he was in considerable pain, and after virtually every drive, you could see him wince, and on more than one occasion he had to bend over and rest. At times he even walked using one of his clubs as a cane.

But he did not let anyone know the severity of the injury. He simply said he was "in a little pain."

All that was wrong with him was that his left ACL was torn and he had, not one, but two stress fractures of the left tibia!

Hank Haney, Woods' trainer said that Tiger is a "stickler for preparation, but because of the knee, he was unable to even walk the 18 holes before the tournament." He added that "He (Woods) hit no more than 50 balls before each round and did not practice afterward, totally un-Tiger-like."

Bill Mallon, an orthopedic surgeon and former professional golfer, said, "I cannot even fathom how he was able to put the pressure and torque on that knee at all, let alone over 91 holes. I knew his pain threshold was high, but that was beyond anything I can imagine."

Again, Tiger did not give any details of the seriousness of his knee until after it was over. He said, "I know how much was made of my knee throughout the week. It was important for me to disclose my condition publicly at an appropriate time. I wanted to be respectful of the USGA...and make sure the focus was on the U.S. Open, not my knee"

Had we all known the severity of his injuries, said Mallon, we would have done everything possible to convince him not to play."

Tiger's driving motion puts an enormous amount of pressure on his knee. He virtually locks his knee straight, and when he uses the torque from his 135 MPH swing, the knee absorbs all the weight of his body from the torque.

Surgeons' views on any potential permanent damage to the knee were varied, but most agreed that given today's medical advances, they felt that he would be back at 100% in about one year.

One doctor, who did not want to be identified, said that "his knee will never be the same. At best, it will be about 90% of where it was." Hell, at only 90% he'll still beat them all.

And the incredible facts of this situation were that he had actually incurred the torn ACL way back in late July of 2007.

All he did after that was: Win the WGC at Bridgestone on August 5. Win the PGA major on August 12.

Then the pain must have gotten to him, because he only came in 2nd at the Dutsche Bank Championship on September 3. Then on September 9, he won the BMW Championship, followed



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that with a win on September 16 in the Tour Championship and finished out the month by leading his Team USA to a 19 1/2 to 14 1/2 win in The Presidents Cup in Montreal.

He then took two months off – damn slacker, but came back December 16 to win the Target World Challenge in Thousand Oaks, CA.

He thus ended the season winning seven PGA tournaments, placed 2nd twice and played on only 15 tournaments. All with the torn ACL!

Doctors did not know exactly when he suffered the two stress fractures, saying only that without the use of his ACL, all the force was put on the tibia.

Woods described this win as “probably the best ever.”

So why did he play with such a bad, painful knee, and the possibility of doing more damage?

Because it is a “Major.” Ever since he was six, Tiger has had a poster of Nicklaus’ 18 Majors, and he openly admits that breaking that record is one of his foremost goals.

During the regular four rounds, there were several lead changes. After day one, Woods was behind by 2 strokes. After the second, he was one down.

After round 3, he was up by one, and he has never lost a tournament when

leading or tied for the lead after the 3rd round. Now it’s 14-0, but No. 14 could not have been any tougher.

Mark Twain once said, “Golf is a good walk wasted.”

Well, for Tiger it sure as hell was a “painful limp” in the park.

Rocco – great name for the fun loving old fart, who has never won a major and has not won a tournament since 2002, gave gimpy all he had and more.

And, as much as Tiger is always the favorite, many, probably over 50% were rooting for the “good ole (old) country boy.

After birdying the 17th to pull within one on the final hole in regulation on Sunday, Woods needed to make a tough 16 foot put to send the Open to Monday’s 18-hole playoff. Swish, in the hole. “I knew he would make it,” said Rocco. “He always does. He is not real.”

On Monday, you saw Woods up by three strokes after 11 holes, only to make three bogies and see Rocco go one up with two holes left.

Still down by one stroke going into the 18th, Woods again needed to sink a 10 foot put to tie.

Again, swish, in the hole.

“He defies descriptions,” said Mallon. “When he has to, he never fails.”

Then on the sudden death final hole, Tiger hit a huge drive right down the middle, while Rocco hit into the right rough. As Tiger sent his second shot onto the green, Rocco went into a sand trap. Tiger again made a winding, difficult put for par, and when Rocco missed a 20-footer, game, set, match.

“It was absolutely incredible, said Rocco. “I gave him all he wanted. I kept up with the greatest. I know I scared him, but, well, he is Tiger. His concentration and intensity is beyond anything I have ever seen. When he needs it, he always makes it. But I feel great. I stayed with the king and almost knocked him off this throne.”

Only when it was all over, did Tiger allude to the pain. “Yes, it was pretty bad at times, but you just have to play through it.” I believe he did that.

When asked when he would play next, he said, “I don’t know. I’m going to shut it down for awhile.”

He never did personally tell the media of the extent of the damage. That came from Henry. When told of the ACL and two fractures, this great battle quickly took on the aura of an unworldly tale. The media immediately built this saga into a mountain of near legendary proportions. And for once, they did not overdo it.



Nicklaus had said before it began that he could not see how Tiger could win, given the short recovery time on the knee. Then he did add, “but, if anyone can, it would be Tiger.”

Arnold Palmer just shook his head, and said, “What you saw out there those five days, you will likely never again see such a sense of awe, a performance like no other.”

Already a legend, Tiger’s performance launched him into the stratosphere.

As one announcer said, “It will be impossible to top this.”

While he does not know when he will have the 4th surgery on his knee, the doctors said it will take a full year for him to recover from this one.

Mallon said, “it will be successful, but the rehab will be 9-12 months and be very painful.”

Yet as we had just witnessed, pain is not a problem for him.

But what about the game of golf, sans Tiger?

Veteran PGA Tour player Kenny Perry, 47, described it eloquently when he said Woods’ absence would be very difficult on tournament sponsors and the Tour in general,” and then summed it up quickly and perfectly: “Tiger **IS** our tour.”

Woods’ absence is a mixed bag for golf. For the “other” players, it gives them all a chance at something besides 2nd.

No. 2 ranked Phil Mickelson and the others will have the rest of the season to themselves.

Perry, who won the Memorial – after Tiger dropped out – said, “It’s definitely an opportunity for the rest of us. But the Tour will come down a notch, a very big notch. It won’t have near the excitement he brings.”

Proof: This year, Woods has won 5 of the 7 tournaments he has played worldwide. And 9 of his last 12, including the 2007 PGA major and last week’s Open.

Tour’s VP Ty Votaw said, “TV ratings will be down, but to focus on that is shortsighted.” OK?

But he admitted that Tiger is an international celebrity, and his absence will be felt among people who follow golf just because of him. Like me. I’m not a huge golf fan, and I must admit that I only watch when Tiger is playing.

But Votaw did not mention that nearly 55% of all viewers fall into that category.

And it is the sponsors who are reeling from this “disaster.”

Nike, Gatorade and Buick are scrambling to figure out what to do.

But the spin-meisters of Madison Ave. quickly will try to make chicken soup out of chicken shit. They will, to the utmost, glorify his incredible win and weave a Lance Armstrong-like fairy tale saga of this epic Open.

Already into the clichés, marketing consultant Ernest Lupinacci said, “When life hands you a lemon, we turn it into lemonade flavored Gatorade.”

Damn clever, that guy. They’ll have to do a hell of a lot better.

Buick, FedEx and Gatorade execs are pulling what hair they have left on their bald heads trying to figure out what to do.

One TV exec. estimated that “ratings could easily fall 50% or more.”

“Sponsors are kidding themselves if they think Woods’ absence won’t hurt,” says Terry Lefton of the *Sports Business Journal*.

“It’s a huge hit. I don’t see how you could say anything else.”

The sport is hoping that an alternative can fill the void. If you can’t have Tiger T-ing it off, why not have him TV-ing it off?

Sean McManus, president of CBS Sports says he wants to get Tiger in the booth. “Let’s see,” he said. “You have the world’s greatest golfer, he’s incredibly articulate, has a wonderful sense of humor and an enormous fan base. It would be an obvious 2nd choice.”

But hold on. Mark Steinberg, Woods’ agent, bogeyed that idea. In a short e-mail he said, “We’ll take a pass on that.”



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Thus, it will be at least a year until we next get to see this other-worldly perform his magic again. People will be talking about this one for a long time. It was estimated that 17 million people watched this great performance. Well, by the time he gets back, over 100 million will say they watched it.

Tiger will have plenty of time to oversee the building of his new \$44 million house, on the private island he bought.

I guess he can then sell the other house he built a couple of years ago for a mere \$33 million.

Must have been a dump.

I wonder if he likes Single Malt? I'll share some in your new little cabin, El Tigre! I won't hold my breath waiting for his call.