

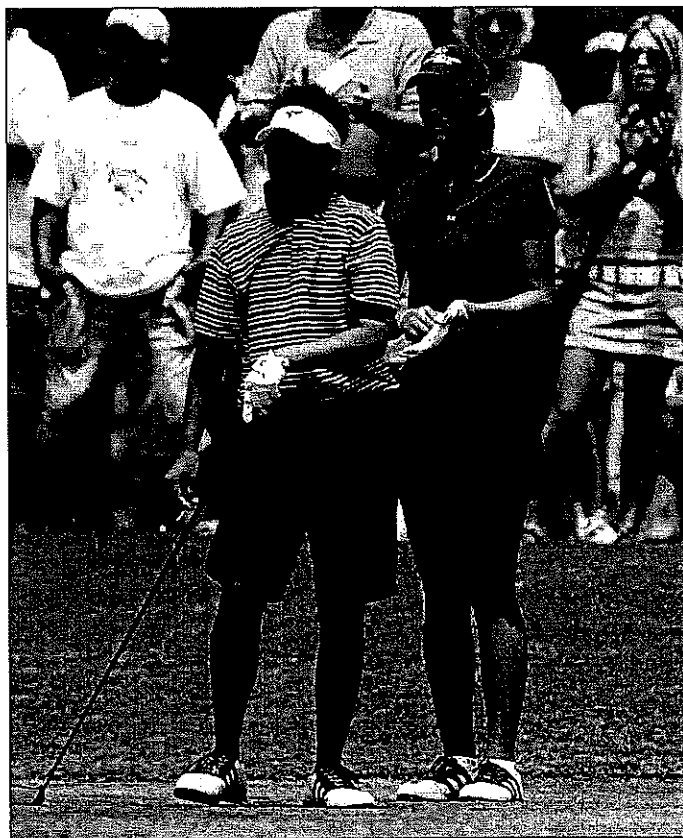
Summer School

Michelle Wie v. Yani Tseng at the 2004 Women's Amateur Public Links Championship

It hardly seemed possible, but the pace of 14-year-old Michelle Wie's celebrity accelerated dramatically in the early months of 2004 in the build-up to the Curtis Cup match at Formby in England in June and the U.S. Women's Open at Orchards Golf Club in Massachusetts in July. As she'd been doing since 2002, following her father's carefully designed script, Michelle was going to spend as much time as possible on the American mainland (away from her Honolulu home) to develop her preternatural golf talents. And she would continue to do so at the highest levels of competition that were available to her, which for Michelle included juniors and adults, male and female amateurs, and male and female professionals. With only one notable victory to her credit, the 2003 Women's Amateur Public Links championship, the six-foot tall middle-schooler built upon her unique ability to crush a golf ball 300 yards to garner sponsor invitations and break age and gender barriers with a vengeance, including top finishes against LPGA stars and missing the cut at a regular PGA Tour event by just one stroke. Once Michelle confirmed in a spirited 60 Minutes interview with Steve Kroft in April that her sharp wit and bubbly charm matched her precocity on the links, there was no denying she was the most intriguing female child athlete the U.S. had ever produced.

Within the narrower world of women's amateur golf, Michelle took a major step toward internationalizing her stardom by performing exceptionally well in her singles matches at the Curtis Cup. She dazzled opponents, spectators, and the press alike with her competitive spirit as much as her physical strength. But no sooner had she celebrated at Formby than she was whisked home to face major challenges on American shores: first, trying to become the only woman ever to qualify for the U.S. (Men's) Amateur Public Links (and thereby open a pathway to becoming the first woman to play in The Masters); second, defending her 2003 WAPL title a few days later in Virginia, where she might face Taiwan's 15-year-old budding superstar, Yani Tseng; and third, competing in her second U.S. Women's Open. It would be an early summer of historic moment in women's golf, and a Hawaiian teen of awesome talent, courage, and raw ambition was at the center of it all.*

* Steven Schlossman and Katherine Thomas, "The Young Americans," *Through the Green* (December 2021), pp. 22-27.



DOWN TO THE WIRE. Yani Tseng, left, and Michelle Wie fought a tough battle for the 2004 WAPL championship. The match wasn't decided until the 36th hole.
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Part I of a two-part article

By Steven Schlossman and Kari Thomas

The lessons Michelle learned during the Curtis Cup at Formby were multitude: accuracy is often more important than power, especially when a course features diabolical hazards like pot bunkers; playing with a partner is fundamentally different from playing by and for oneself; and nothing is quite as fulfilling as being a part of a winning team, which she now was. The experience of living in close quarters, having a roommate, and playing team golf with seven other young women was unlike anything Michelle had ever done before.

Michelle had always been a rogue — someone who broke tradition easily to satisfy her own aims — but being a trailblazer is often lonely. When Michelle first left the safe cocoon of Hawaii to summer on the mainland in 2002, she had stepped into a bright spotlight that heightened the stakes of each decision she made and increasingly isolated her from other junior golfers who were not getting as much attention. Then, after becoming age eligible at 13, she decided to forgo the AJGA circuit entirely and jump into the professional scene. She was a girl, barely teenaged, teeing it up regularly with full-grown women. Then, almost incomprehensibly, she was a girl teeing it up with full-grown men. All of this was spectacularly unusual — probably more unusual than the experience of any

child sports prodigy in history.

In retrospect, playing on the 2004 Curtis Cup team was almost too conventional for someone as iconoclastic as Michelle. But at Formby, Michelle was finally able to reach across the great divide of her own celebrity to forge deep and enduring friendships with Paula Creamer, Brittany Lang, and Jane Park. Inevitably, post-Formby, the speed at which Michelle was forced to return to her former trajectory – and to her public persona as golf's greatest child star – was almost jarring. But Michelle's father, B.J., had planned a jam-packed summer for his daughter, full of learning and celebrity-making opportunities. The 2004 Curtis Cup was only one stop on a much longer journey.

Just six days after dousing Martha Kirouac in champagne, on June 19, Michelle competed at the Manada Golf Club in Hershey, Pa., in a local qualifier for the (men's) Amateur Public Links. This was her second attempt to qualify and the last men's event she would play in 2004. "I really wanted to play in the Public Links this year because I really want to play in The Masters," she said. "That's my dream. And I'm the kind of person where if I really want something, I just have to do it."¹

Michelle's ambition was boundless, her confidence steely, and her emotional equilibrium surreal for a 14-year-old. Gone was the retainer that made Michelle whistle during her interview at the 2003 WAPL.² She was taller, leaner, more confident, and all parts of her game were continuing to mature. No one fortunate enough to be in Hershey doubted that she had the drive to pursue her cross-gender dreams all the way down Magnolia Lane, but, alas, she had not yet attained the full skill set necessary to realize them. On Saturday, June 19, Michelle played superbly, shooting a two-under par 142, but it wasn't quite enough. David Bradshaw and Alex Knoll, who both shot 140, snagged Southeastern Pennsylvania's only two spots in the 156-man Public Links field. Michelle, quite impressively, was named an alternate, one of four, should either David Bradshaw or Alex Knoll need to withdraw.

This was the second time Michelle had finished under par at a men's tournament, which was a truly remarkable achievement. But any fanfare that may have greeted this accomplishment was swallowed by the eager anticipation of Michelle's defense of her WAPL title, scheduled for Tuesday, just two days after the APL qualifier. The summer of 2004 was one high-profile event after another, where Michelle was always at the center of attention with not a single moment to relax in-between.

Not surprisingly, the USGA tried to capitalize on Michelle's celebrity at the WAPL by printing her face on the program cover. "I saw my picture on that program. It was a lot of pressure, and I kinda felt that," Michelle admitted.³ She knew that she was the favorite to win and that "a lot of people expected a lot from me coming in this year."⁴ But she

was trying to resist caving in to the pressure. "When I won last year that was a long time ago," she told herself and the press. "This year is a whole new and different story. I'm not going to think about last year (except) some of the tips that worked for me."⁵

Michelle opened medal-play qualifying with two sub-par rounds of 70 and 71, tying her for sixth place with 15-year-old Korean Inbee Park, whose own extraordinary precocity had sparked little media interest despite her consistently high finishes (including her advance a year earlier to the Women's Amateur semifinals). Both girls stood six shots behind medalist Brittany Lang, who broke the tournament record by two shots with a 7-under 135. Michelle was also two shots behind fellow 14-year-old Hawaiian Stephanie Kono. Michelle did not dominate medal play, but she had made it comfortably into the first round of matches, a format where she felt supremely confident, especially after routing two British opponents at the Curtis Cup. "Match play tomorrow is a whole different kind of story," she said, "and I feel like I'm really ready for that."⁶

In her first WAPL match, Michelle faced Brooke Goodwin from Fuquay-Varina, N.C., and did not win until the 17th hole. Most commentators agreed that Michelle should have "put her match...away much earlier, but her inability to make putts and Goodwin's scrambling to overcome a huge length disadvantage kept it close almost to the end."

"I got really frustrated after missing some putts because I knew I should have made them," Michelle admitted. "This whole week has tested my patience...If you're out there in match play and things don't start to drop and you start getting worried, that's when your mentality starts to fall apart."⁷ Michelle kept herself together to eliminate Melissa Martin of Altadena, Calif., in the second round, but again, she couldn't close out her match until the 17th hole.

The next day, Michelle faced her friend and Curtis Cup teammate Jane Park. "Coming in today, I didn't want to play Jane because we're just so close," Michelle affirmed. "It's always easier to beat somebody or to mentally be tough when you don't really know the person. It's one of those things where you say, 'I really like you, but I have to beat you.'" Park, sitting beside her, burst into laughter. For the third consecutive match, Michelle was extended almost to the limit as she barely squeaked by Park to win, 2 and 1. But the quality of play, on both sides, was excellent and Michelle was confident that her game was moving into championship mode. "I'm getting there...My game is getting better every day. In match play, you can't give strokes away and I've been doing that very well the last three rounds."⁸

Saturday's quarter- and semi-final competition at the Golden Horseshoe Golf Club consisted of two tiring matches, back-to-back. In the morning, Michelle faced

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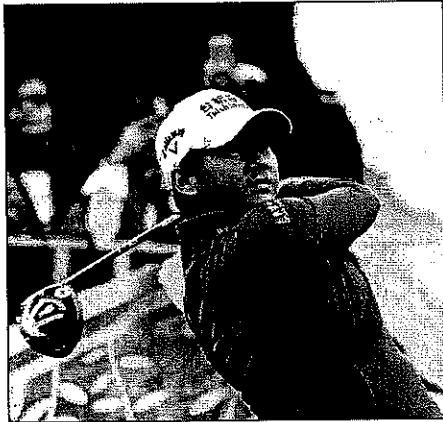
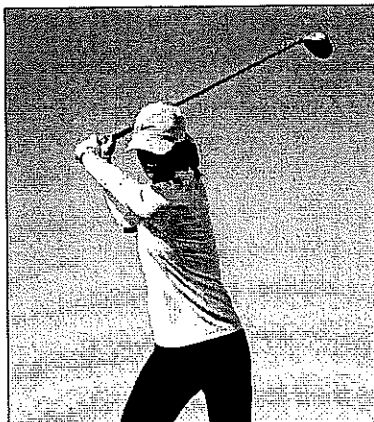
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collegian Jenna Pearson of Wheaton, Ill. She took control of the match early with a birdie on the third hole. She followed it up with another birdie on the fifth and the eighth. Meanwhile, Pearson bogeyed the sixth and the ninth, giving Michelle a five-up lead.⁹ Five holes later on the 14th, Michelle closed the match, winning 5 and 4. Pearson admitted afterward that “the putts didn’t fall for me. They fell for her. She took the lead and kept it. She isn’t going to drop a lot of shots.”¹⁰

In the afternoon, Michelle faced Angela Park, a distinguished 15-year-old Brazilian golfer of Korean descent who had immigrated to southern California in the mid-1990s with her parents and had taken the more traditional AJGA route, participating in both the Canon and Junior Solheim Cups. In a match filled with hot putting, Angela and Michelle together managed to record 12 birdies. Angela first took the lead on the third hole, but Michelle birdied the fourth to bring the score back to even, and, after that, neither competitor held on to the lead for more than a few holes. Michelle “couldn’t breathe the whole time.” “It was really tough [this afternoon]. Angela played superbly.”¹¹ The very close match came down to a putt on the par-3 17th hole that Michelle made and Angela didn’t (Angela 3-putted). “I had to make so many putts,” Michelle admitted after her 2 and 1 victory. “I’m so proud of myself that I did.”

Now there was only a single match left between Michelle and, like fellow Hawaiian Lori Castillo Planos a quarter century earlier, a successful defense of her WAPL title. All she had to do was defeat Yani Tseng, a 15-year-old long-hitting sensation from Taiwan (and future five-time LPGA major winner), who had spent her last four summers competing with mixed results in the United States. Michelle really did not “want to drop at the end. You know that kind of feeling when you’ve tried so hard, but you just didn’t get there. I don’t want to feel that.”¹² Planos knew exactly what Michelle was going through. “It’s different when people expect you to win. That’s why it was harder for her to defend her title. Everybody expects you to win. And people want to knock you down. She has to learn to deal with that kind of pressure and it’s good she’s learning it now.”¹³

While Michelle was fortifying her game under pressure, Yani Tseng was eagerly anticipating the match. “I’ve always wanted to play with Michelle,” she said through an interpreter. “Once the match-play tree came out, I was excited because I would have an opportunity to play with Michelle” as long as they both made it to the finals, which Tseng had no doubt they would. “I know Michelle probably was going



MICHELLE WIE, LEFT, AND YANI TSENG. Recent photos of the two young golfers show that their golfing prowess is quite undiminished.

MICHELLE WIE COURTESY TONAL / YANI TSENG COURTESY TSENG YANI INTERNATIONAL CO., LTD.

to make the final, and I was excited that we were not on the same bracket, so [there was] no chance being eliminated early on.”¹⁴ And whereas Michelle was beginning to feel the pressure of defending a title as well as the strain of a demanding tournament schedule, Tseng was blissfully confident. “I’m not really intimidated by Michelle. There’s a couple of reasons. One is I look at myself as a long hitter, too. And second is my friends who happen also to play in this tournament watched Michelle play and they told me, ‘You’re going to do fine, and you are just as good.’”¹⁵ Indeed, Tseng could match Michelle’s length off the tee when they both used drivers, although Michelle was using a fairway metal instead of a driver at least half of the time.¹⁶

The 36-hole, crazily up and down, final match pushed Michelle to her physical limits. Despite wearing Tiger’s colors, a red shirt with black shorts to give her a psychological edge, the toll of playing the Curtis Cup in England, a men’s qualifier in Pennsylvania, and now a match-play tournament in Virginia, all within three weeks, began to show. After six holes, Michelle was already two-down, but she rallied with an excellent chip out of a greenside bunker on the par-5 8th, which resulted in a winning birdie, followed by a successful long birdie putt on the 9th. By the 14th, Michelle was 4-up and hoping to extend her lead.

But Tseng broke that momentum when she won the 17th and 18th just before lunch. “Even though I was 2-up,” Michelle said in the post-round interview, “I felt like I was 5-down because I lost like so many holes in a row.” Michelle had missed a relatively short putt to halve the hole on the 17th, and her putt on the 18th just barely lipped out. “I think [Tseng] had a lot of grind in the second round,” Michelle said. “I tried to think it was a new round, but I had a lot of pressure on me in the second round. I don’t know, I just didn’t work, function. I didn’t function at all.”¹⁷

Michelle, who had shot a 68 over the first 18 holes, maintained her small lead through most of the afternoon but began to fall apart toward the end. On the 30th hole, a par-4,

Michelle overshot the green on her approach and landed in the deep rough behind. A few more yards and her ball would have been nestled in a walkway. She pitched onto the green but missed the long putt for birdie. Suddenly, Tseng was only 1-down with six holes left to play. On the par-4 32nd, Tseng finally squared the match with an eight-foot birdie putt.

Michelle got lucky on the next hole, a par-5, when Tseng sliced her tee shot into an unplayable lie and could do no better than bogey. Tseng kept her cool though. "I did not panic because it's not the last hole," she said through her interpreter. "I still had three holes."¹⁸ Proving Tseng's point, Michelle buckled on the 34th, missing a three-footer to 3-putt the green and return the match to even. Someone in the gallery, most likely Bo, shrieked when Michelle's second putt lipped out, while the teen smacked her putter against the brim of her hat in bitter frustration.¹⁹ "I think I got a little bit tired at the end. I couldn't keep my, what do you call, concentration level up. I just had a hard time putting. That was the main problem, and I couldn't get anything close to the hole. I got my drivers in the fairway, but that's the best it got."²⁰

After tying the 35th hole with par, the teens headed to the reachable par-5 36th still even; whoever won the hole would win the match and the championship. Michelle and Tseng both hit good tee shots and decided to try for the green in two. They both found greenside bunkers, although Michelle's sand shot was longer and more difficult. Michelle's recovery left her 35-feet short of the pin, whereas Tseng "blasted" her shot to within 12 feet of the hole. As the away player, Michelle putted first. She stroked the ball well, but it "drifted just to the right of the cup," despite the gallery's shouts of "Get in! Get in!" After the ball had stopped moving, Michelle stared at it for a full second before "slump[ing] over" with a palm to her face.²¹ Tseng, on the other hand, "rapped her [birdie] putt dead center."

As Tseng's ball dropped into the hole and broke the silence, tears sprang to Michelle's eyes. It was one of the few times during Michelle's long career that she would cry in public. Bo quickly enveloped her daughter in a protective embrace and whispered words of encouragement. "I think I cried because I wanted to win. No one wanted to win

that tournament more than me."²² Michelle had only a few minutes to compose herself before heading to the media tent where she would have to graciously put a positive spin on her defeat. While she waited with red, tear-stained eyes for the interview to begin, she silently devoured a granola bar.²³ But her answers were all honest; she admitted that "I didn't play my game." Overall, it was still a good learning experience. "A couple of days ago, I learned how to shape my ball. I did that really good today. I learned how to make the putts. I learned how to swing easy and put it in the fairway. I got a lot of my game plan done, and I think that this week will help me in the long term."²⁴ Obviously, she had learned how to lose with grace.

Outside the media tent, Golf Central's Steve Burkowski asked her, "Has the disappointment set in, a little, knowing that you came here the defending champ?" For a 14-year-old girl fighting back tears, this was really an unfair question. But Michelle answered optimistically, "I came all the way to the end. I didn't make it through the finish line, but I felt like I got close enough. And I think this week will help me next week."²⁵

Part II of this article, to continue in the Autumn edition of The Golf, follows Wie and her play at the 2004 U.S. Women's Open championship.

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FOOTNOTES

- [1] "Michelle Wie's goal is to play in The Masters," *Golf Today*, 2004.
- [2] "2003 U.S. Women's Amateur Public Links final (tape 1 of 1 b-roll)," USGA Archives, film.
- [3] Ryan O'Halloran, "U.S. Women's Amateur Public Links Championship: Teen With A Title," *Daily Press*, 22 June 2004.
- [4] Arthur Utley, "Wie reaches Publinx final," *Honolulu Advertiser*, 27 June 2004.
- [5] Ryan O'Halloran, "U.S. Women's Amateur Public Links Championship: Teen With A Title," *Daily Press*, 22 June 2004.
- [6] Hank Kurz Jr., "Kono, Wie, Wise advance: Three Hawaii golfers open match play in the round of 64 today," *Honolulu Star-Bulletin*, 24 June 2004.
- [7] Hank Kurz Jr., "Kono, Wie, Wise continue: Wie wins despite struggles with her short game in her bid to repeat," *Honolulu Star-Bulletin*, 25 June 2004.
- [8] Kurz Jr., "Wie's game comes alive as she advances," *Honolulu Star-Bulletin*, 26 June 2004.
- [9] "Wie advances to Public Links Championship," *Honolulu Advertiser*, 26 June 2004.
- [10] Arthur Utley, "Wie reaches Publinx final," *Honolulu Advertiser*, 27 June 2004.
- [11] Utley, "Wie reaches Publinx final," *Honolulu Advertiser*, 27 June 2004.
- [12] Utley, "Wie reaches Publinx final," *Honolulu Advertiser*, 27 June 2004.
- [13] Bill Kwon, "Planos offers advice, comfort after Wie loss," *Honolulu Advertiser*, 1 July 2004.
- [14] Arthur Utley, "Wie loses on final hole," *Honolulu Advertiser*, 28 June 2004.

- [15] Utley, "Wie loses on final hole," *Honolulu Advertiser*, 28 June 2004.
- [16] Sam Greenwood, "Ya-Ni Tseng Wins U.S. Women's Amateur Public Links Championship," USGA, 27 June 2004, www.usga.org/content/usga/home-page/articles/championship-archives/wapl/2004.
- [17] Michelle Wie, Interview with Rhonda Glenn at the U.S. WAPL, ASAP Sports, FastScripts Archive, 27 June 2004.
- [18] Greenwood, "Ya-Ni Tseng Wins U.S. Women's Amateur Public Links Championship," USGA, 27 June 2004.
- [19] "2004 U.S. Women's Amateur Public Links final (tape 1 of 1 b-roll)," USGA Archives, film.
- [20] Wie, Interview with Rhonda Glenn at the U.S. WAPL, ASAP Sports, FastScripts Archive, 27 June 2004.
- [21] Utley, "Wie loses on final hole," *Honolulu Advertiser*, 28 June 2004. Greenwood, "Ya-Ni Tseng Wins U.S. Women's Amateur Public Links Championship," USGA, 27 June 2004.
- [22] "2004 U.S. Women's Amateur Public Links final (tape 1 of 1 b-roll)," USGA Archives, film.
- [22] Bill Kwon, "Planos offers advice, comfort after Wie loss," *Honolulu Advertiser*, 1 July 2004.
- [23] "2004 U.S. Women's Amateur Public Links final (tape 1 of 1 b-roll)," USGA Archives, film.
- [23] "2004 U.S. Women's Amateur Public Links final (tape 1 of 1 b-roll)," USGA Archives, film.
- [24] Wie, Interview with Rhonda Glenn, ASAP Sports, FastScripts Archive, 27 June 2004.
- [25] "2004 U.S. Women's Amateur Public Links final (tape 1 of 1 b-roll)," USGA Archives, film.

"Bullet proof"

Tiger Woods' runaway victory at the 2000 U.S. Open

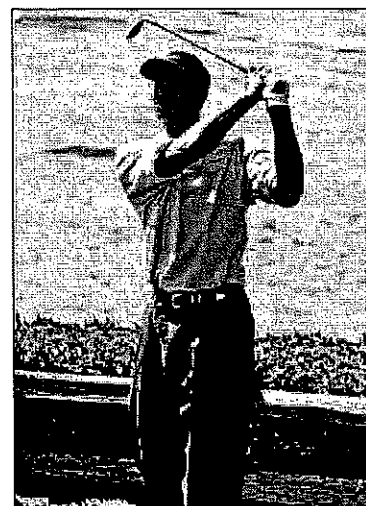
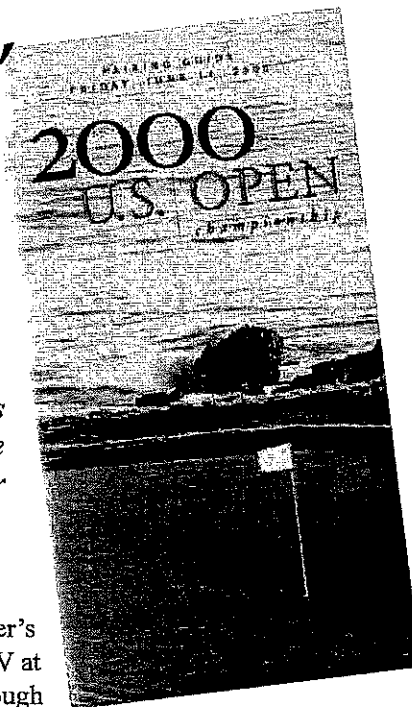
Steve Schlossman and Kari Thomas conclude their examination, begun in the Spring 2020 edition of The Golf, of Tiger Woods' 2000 U.S. Open victory.

By Steve Schlossman & Kari Thomas *

The man trying to describe and explain Tiger's performance to the millions watching on TV at home was the famously frank Johnny Miller. Though Miller unquestionably stood out among the announcers, the full *NBC/ESPN* crew for the 2000 U.S. Open was truly stellar, featuring Dan Hicks, Chris Berman, and Mike Tirico as lead announcers, and Roger Maltbie, Gary Koch, Bob Murphy, Mark Rolfing, Andy North, and Ed Sneed as expert analysts. Miller's commentary was strongly opinionated and periodically over the top, as when he demeaned Jimenez's golf game as "like watching paint dry" or when he labeled "ignorant" anyone who didn't acknowledge Pebble Beach as "the greatest golf course in America." (John Huggan, the superb Scottish golf writer, had done just that in a piercing *Golf World* column the week before.)³⁶ But Miller's comments were always effervescent, deeply knowledgeable, and periodically brilliant. In short, he kept the proceedings interesting, which was crucial given how fast and far Tiger was distancing himself from the field.

Though Tiger had yet to win a U.S. Open in his three-plus years on tour, Miller didn't hesitate to acknowledge his all-time greatness, even in comparison to Nicklaus. He marveled at Tiger's intellectual "brilliance" and fearless ability to execute shots others couldn't even contemplate — for example, the two very different but equally miraculous birdies Tiger scored on No. 6 from lies in dense rough from which everyone else would have had to pitch out. Miller was a Tiger fan through and through. As he responded to his colleague Roger Maltbie's observation that he'd "never seen anybody play golf this way, ever," Miller calmly observed: "We've waited a while, Roger, to have someone raise the bar." Or as he'd said earlier in repartee with Dan Hicks: "He's just better than everybody else."

At the same time, Miller didn't shy away from calling out Tiger for occasional errors or from lambasting other



PHOTOS/STAN LAPIDUS

recent "top guns" like Duval, Singh, Els, Montgomerie, and Mickelson for not putting up a better fight. Everyone remembers

Tiger playing four perfect rounds of golf en route to his 15-shot victory, but that really wasn't the case. Miller and several of his broadcast colleagues called attention to the up-and-down quality of Tiger's ball striking in rounds two and three that he compensated for with incredible scrambling (e.g., twelve one-putts in round one) and a rash of birdies. On Saturday, he carded a triple-bogey 7 on No. 3 after a poor tee shot and a horrid approach shot, followed by several dubious recovery efforts. And on the par-5 18th, Tiger double-crossed his tee shot and snap-hooked it far into Carmel Bay.³⁷ Picked up on a live *NBC* microphone, he shouted, "Goddamn, you f-ing prick!" which was then immediately broadcast live into homes across the country. "No more commentary necessary," Mark Rolfing quipped. Johnny Miller added, "That made my commentary look pretty mild."

Later, during Jimmy Roberts' first golf interviews for *NBC* sports, Tiger apologized: "I let my emotions get the best of myself. ... Unfortunately, I let them voice out loud."³⁸ "I regret doing it."³⁹ But even though any golfer who had ever sailed a drive into a water hazard could commiserate, Tiger was still sharply criticized for damaging his squeaky clean image as a role model. "Saturday Woods revealed what PGA writers have known all along. He has a bad temper and he has a very salty tongue when he loses it. Some have even said he still has a frat boy mentality, even though he's now 24. Now everyone knows that, not just the insiders. Do we want to know this much about Tiger?" asked Bob Padecky in *The Press Democrat* of Santa Rosa, California. "Until now, nothing was off limits with the guy. We couldn't get enough of Tiger because nothing seemed objectionable."⁴⁰ In other words, for one fleeting moment, Tiger was human just like everyone else, which contrasted

vividly with how he was tearing up one of the USGA's most prized championship set-ups.

But Padecky was right to ask: did people want Tiger to be human? Or did they want him to be perfect, beyond reproach? "I never saw Arnie [Palmer] do it. I never saw Jack [Nicklaus] do it. I never saw [Tom] Watson do it," claimed Tom Kite, winner of the 1992 U.S. Open at Pebble Beach. "I doubt Bobby Jones ever did it. There's no place for it."⁴¹ In reality, Palmer and Jones just didn't get caught. And that was Tiger's real sin: not that he cursed, which professional athletes do all the time, but that he got caught.

Tiger's gaffe after duck-hooking his ball into wet oblivion on the most famous golf hole in the world drew comparison with another popular, supposedly family-friendly celebrity-athlete of color: Michael Jordan. Miller commented later in the broadcast, "We didn't hear a lot of those out of Michael Jordan." Dan Hicks agreed: "Michael Jordan would have never done that."⁴² Really, it was an open secret that Jordan was one of basketball's meanest trash talkers of all time. Yet Skip Bayless still declared in the *Chicago Tribune*, "Until Woods convinces himself that he just can't curse on national TV, he will lack one quality Jordan had in abundance. Class."⁴³

None of this brouhaha seemed to matter to Tiger, who just kept making birdies when he needed them. Other than his singular outburst, Tiger was eerily calm throughout. "If Woods were any more relaxed," Thomas Bonk wrote, "he would need to install a recliner on the first tee, shove a pillow behind his back and then knock his first shot 290 yards down the middle while sitting down."⁴⁴ By the end of the third round, Tiger was 8-under in a tournament where everyone else was over-par. "Now the rest of the field knows the true danger sign," Ed Sherman wrote. "The only thing worse than an angry Tiger is a serene Tiger."⁴⁵

And for the rest of the field, the fact that they stood no chance of winning was starting to sink in. "I feel like after two rounds I was playing against everybody else," Jimenez admitted.⁴⁶ Indeed, Tiger had turned one of the world's premier sporting events into an exhibition. Tom Watson, speaking for the entire "B-flight," bluntly stated: "We're all playing for second place." Ernie Els, who played with Tiger in the final round and finished tied for second with Jimenez, struggled to find the right words for what he had witnessed. "He was awesome to watch. Just a dominating performance, and that's an understatement." Even the galleries were stunned. Glenn Sheeley reported, "Fans along the 18th bowed as Woods strode by, offering 'We're not worthy' chants."⁴⁸

Something drastic — such as Tiger being kidnapped or the U.S. declaring war on Canada — would have had to happen to prevent Tiger's coronation.⁴⁹ In the final round, he carded a bogey-free 4-under 67, which set all sorts of records. His

12-under-par 272 tied the lowest ever total stroke score in a U.S. Open.⁵⁰ His 15-shot margin of victory broke the record for majors (the U.S. Open, British Open, Masters, and PGA Championship) set by "Old" Tom Morris in 1862. And it was Tiger's first career wire-to-wire win.

"He dominated from Day One," Ernie Els emphasized. "From the first hole, he started dominating and never let go... When you have a guy playing like that, you have no chance."⁵¹ "If there's any good news for [Tiger's] fellow competitors after such an embarrassing week," wrote Glenn Sheeley, "maybe it's this: At least this looks like Tiger's 'A' game." "To understand what Woods is doing," Lowell Cohn expounded, "how he's murdering the competition, you need to think about something Jack Nicklaus said the other day... 'The U.S. Open to me is the total examination of golf... To a golfer it does more to make a man out of you than any other tournament.'... If the Open makes a man out of you, Tiger is Superman."⁵² Tiger finished tied for 10th in fairways hit.⁵³ He was sixth in putting (Nick Faldo was first with just 104 total putts). Tiger was first in distance off the tee and first in GIR (Greens in Regulation). Put another way, Tiger's game was so well-rounded that Pebble Beach never stood a chance.

"What Tiger Woods did in last week's U.S. Open defies description," John Davis marveled in the *Arizona Republic*. Everyone agreed that Tiger's phenomenal putting is what had made the difference. He confidently sank eight-to-fifteen foot par putts on greens that no one else seemed able to read. John Huston said Pebble Beach's greens were the worst he had ever putted on. "They're so bumpy, they're dead. It's pure luck where the ball's going to roll. You can't step up and say 'I'm going to hit a good putt just outside the left' and know it's going to break where it should. It's just terrible."⁵⁴

Yet Tiger never three-putted, the entire tournament. During practice rounds, he had been paying especially close attention to his putting stroke. "Before embarking on his pillaging and plundering of Pebble," Bob Verdi remarked humorously in *Golf World*, "Woods allowed that he was somewhat vexed about his putting. It wasn't that his putts weren't dropping. No, he didn't like *the way they were dropping*. I am not making this up. The ball just didn't look or sound right entering the cup."⁵⁵ So Tiger spent two-and-a-half hours the day before the first round on the putting green, adjusting his stance and stroke until it felt right.⁵⁶ "My posture was a little off," he said later. "My release wasn't quite right. I just needed to get some reps in."⁵⁷ He got those reps, and when it all finally clicked, it looked like "sorcery."⁵⁸

But John Davis went on to ponder a step further: "Before

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the event, other pros who have the knowledge, experience and talent to make a pretty good assessment, figured par would be an impressive score, and most predicted it would be higher. NBC announcer Johnny Miller noted that no other golfer had a particularly good week, but is it possible that the other 155 who started the event went in the tank at the same time? Or is it that Woods is simply that much better?"⁵⁹

It was a good question that analysts, fans, and golfers alike were asking. Certainly, Johnny Miller had quibbled repeatedly with the pros' approach to certain holes, especially Nos. 8 and 11, and was unimpressed by their overall performance. "To be honest with you, [Tiger] shouldn't have more than a 5-shot lead. It's very disappointing when you look at that leaderboard and all the great players and to think that they're all, at best, two over par, three, four," he said. "It's just one of those championships. Really, people aren't playing well." Thomas Boswell asked similarly in *The Washington Post*,

*Who has Tiger got [to challenge him]? David Duval needs to gain back 10 pounds just to look skinny. He's tried so hard to get into 'great shape' to compete with Woods that he's almost disappeared. Els has two U.S. Open titles and a swing like the reincarnation of Sam Snead. But he has no fire in his belly. He'd be the golfer of the year if a convention of psychiatrists got the vote. But a sane, mellow view of life ain't gonna beat Tiger. Phil Mickelson? Colin Montgomerie? Neither of them has won so much as one major tournament.*⁶⁰

Skip Bayless was even harsher, calling Davis Love, Phil Mickelson, and David Duval "content country-club products with weenie streaks." "They're making enough money from endorsement deals. They don't want to grind as hard as Woods does. They don't have Woods' killer instinct or against-the-grain nature."⁶¹ Hunki Yun, in the *Orlando Sentinel*, warned, "Tiger Woods is the alarm clock that should be waking up the rest of the golf world, but all they're doing is hitting the snooze button repeatedly and going back to sleep."⁶² Furman Bisher, writing in *The Atlanta Constitution*, agreed totally;

*Tiger Woods is only doing his thing. He has goals. He shoots for them and it is good. Those who should be challenging aren't. Their goals seem to be a comfortable lifestyle, a cherished paycheck at the next tournament. Back to the comforts of the plantation, the yacht, the fishing gig, a little golf-course designing, the endorsements and television commercials. Then back to the grind, the Greater Milwaukee Open, since Tiger won't be there.*⁶³

Ernie Els implied as much when he told reporters, "Maybe I have to change my schedule."⁶⁴ The rest of the PGA Tour had become too soft and apathetic to mount a serious challenge to Tiger.

Lee Janzen, a previous two-time U.S. Open champion, pushed back against this interpretation. "It seems like everybody worked out harder this offseason, practiced harder and came out more determined," he said, but even he admitted that Tiger was "on a level that nobody can catch."⁶⁵ It was demoralizing that 62 players finished over-par while the champion finished



ERNIE ELS, teeing off on 18 at Pebble Beach during the 2000 U.S. Open, was one of many players frustrated by the stellar play of Tiger Woods.

PHOTO/STAN LAPIDUS

12-under. Many of the pros afterward truly sounded like they couldn't imagine ever beating Tiger, so they were trying to convince themselves that second place was just fine – "I feel great finishing second in this tournament," Jimenez declared.⁶⁶ "We are all mortal, and he's not," Rocco Mediate rationalized.⁶⁷ Meanwhile, Nick Price told the press, "I feel sorry for the young guys. Basically, I've had my day. I'm 43 now. Whatever I win from here on in is a bonus. The young guys are taking a pounding from this guy. I don't know how to describe it."⁶⁸

And yet, Tiger promised his adoring public that he would keep pushing himself and improving his game. "Woods has outworked almost every rival, on the practice tee and in the gym," Bayless detailed. "He took one of the tour's most athletic frames, added 20 pounds of fast-twitch muscle by bench-pressing more than 300 pounds, and plugged this explosive package into swing mechanics he could teach at his alma mater, Stanford."⁶⁹ But Tiger evidently believed there was room for improvement. "You're always trying to work on little things in this game of golf, trying to get a little bit better. Always trying new equipment or new techniques."⁷⁰ "I'm going to keep trying to improve my game," he said. "I don't know what that level will be."⁷¹ Larry Guest joked in the *Orlando Sentinel* that the next level for the USGA might be equipping "next year's Open course with land mines in the rough and pit bulls tethered to each flagstick."⁷² Indeed, it was difficult to imagine what better than a 12-under 272 at a U.S. Open at Pebble Beach, where the next closest competitor finished 3-over-par, would look like. But Tiger wanted to find out.

And the public wanted to go on the journey with him. The British Open at St. Andrews was less than a month away, and Tiger, as the clear favorite to win, stood a good chance of becoming the youngest golfer yet to achieve a career Grand Slam. There was some concern that galleries and television viewers would get bored tuning in to see Tiger win every week. “Well, you need competition,” Tom Kite mused. “Otherwise, it gets to be boring. Kind of like Texas in the old Southwest Conference. You knew who was going to win. It was fun if you were pulling for Texas, but it wasn’t really exciting.”⁷³ By that metric this Open was the opposite of exciting because, as Furman Bisher warned, “Suspense was no factor in this Open, from the time the first blow was struck.”⁷⁴

But the numbers told a different story; fans wanted to watch Tiger make history. *NBC’s* ratings were up 23% over the previous year’s coverage, and the audience nearly doubled when Tiger was playing.⁷⁵ “For now, amazingly, televised golf’s popularity will continue to grow,” Skip Bayless predicted. “The compelling question won’t be whether Woods will beat Duval or Mickelson, but by how many. He has enough fist-throwing, cursing charisma to fill a leaderboard by himself. Sunday’s 18-hole victory parade held your attention because you wanted to see if he’d break the record for victory margin in any major.”⁷⁶ Which he did.

Tiger, at age 24, was now well on his way to becoming the first ever \$1 billion athlete. He had joined an elite echelon of celebrity-athletes that included Muhammad Ali and Michael Jordan, who were instantly recognizable even to those who didn’t follow their sports. And by year’s end, as Tiger continued to dominate the PGA Tour, almost everyone, duffer and pro alike, would switch to solid core balls (albeit the Titleist Pro V1 rather than the Nike Tour Accuracy).

Overall, the 100th U.S. Open at Pebble Beach had the air of a changing-of-the-guard ceremony – much more decisively than when Tiger first shocked the golfing world with his twelve-shot victory at the 1997 Masters. Tiger’s performance drew comparisons to Jack Nicklaus in his prime. In particular, writers resurrected Bobby Jones’ old quote about watching a young Nicklaus dominate The Masters in 1965: “He plays a game with which I am not familiar.”⁷⁷ Now, those words described Tiger. There was a certain poetry in the fact that Tiger cemented his place in history at the last U.S. Open Nicklaus played.⁷⁸ “Tiger Woods isn’t playing in the present,” Ed Sherman wrote. “[He] is playing against such legends as Jack Nicklaus, Arnold Palmer, Ben Hogan, and Sam Snead.” Sherman predicted that Tiger would overwrite all their records and become the standard “that future Tigers will shoot at.”⁷⁹

A few of Nicklaus’ records still stand, of course, including his record for most career major titles (18). So far, Tiger has won 15, but starting (presumably, if the coronavirus pandemic abates) on Aug. 6, 2020 – with the PGA Championship at TPC Harding Park located only 30 minutes from Stanford, and where he won the WGC American Express Championship in 2005 – Tiger will have another chance to chase history and not only win his 16th major but also tie Walter Hagen and Jack Nicklaus as five-time PGA Championship winners. As golf fans around the world watch in eager anticipation, no one will be counting him out. ¶

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Footnotes

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36 John Huggan, “What’s So Great About Pebble?” *Golf World*, June 16, 2000, p. 12.

37 This was the last hole of Tiger’s second round. Because of multiple fog delays, Tiger had not started his round on Friday until late in the afternoon, and he did not finish before sunset. So he played the rest of his second round on Saturday morning, which is when the unfortunate cursing incident occurred. Then, he got lunch, took a nap, and played his third round in the afternoon.

38 Skip Bayless, “Woods Needs to Put Tongue in Ball-Washer,” *Chicago Tribune*, 18 June 2000.

39 Bob Padecky, “Tiger’s True Stripes Slip Past the Facade,” *The Press Democrat*, 18 June 2000; Bennett and Ketyayan, *Tiger Woods*, pp. 205-206.

40 Bob Padecky, “Tiger’s True Stripes Slip Past the Facade,” *The Press Democrat*, 18 June 2000.

41 Skip Bayless, “Woods Needs to Put Tongue in Ball-Washer,” *Chicago Tribune*, 18 June 2000.

42 Skip Bayless, “Woods Needs to Put Tongue in Ball-Washer,” *Chicago Tribune*, 18 June 2000.

43 Skip Bayless, “Woods Needs to Put Tongue in Ball-Washer,” *Chicago Tribune*, 18 June 2000.

44 Thomas Bonk, “Woods Stars in His Favorite Role,” *Los Angeles Times*, 15 June 2000.

45 Ed Sherman, “Major Blowout For Tiger ‘At Ease,’ He Cruises To 15-stroke Margin Of Victory,” *Chicago Tribune*, 19 June 2000.

46 Ed Sherman, “Els, Jimenez Finish at 3 Over, Settle for ‘B’ Flight Title,” *Chicago Tribune*, 19 June 2000.

47 Larry Guest, “Gr-r-r-e-e-e! Watson: ‘We’re All Playing For 2nd Place,’” *Orlando Sentinel*, 19 June 2000.

48 Glenn Sheeley, “Tennis, even for Tiger: US Open Championship,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, 19 June 2000.

49 Lowell Cohn in Santa Rosa, CA’s *The Press Democrat* also offered food poisoning and loss of golf clubs as possible means of bringing about Tiger’s downfall. But “because I don’t expect any of the above to happen,” Cohn wrote, “Woods already has won this golf tournament, and what happens in today’s final round will have all the drama of an exhibition baseball game between the Giants and Padres.” Lowell Cohn, “Tiger Roaring into Open History, Overwhelming 10-stroke Lead,” *The Press Democrat*, 18 June 2000. For these purposes of comparison, we are not including J. Douglas Edgar’s 16-stroke victory in the 1919 Canadian Open at the Hamilton Golf and Country Club.

50 By sinking a lengthy birdie putt on the final hole of the 2019 U.S. Open at Pebble Beach, with victory already assured, Gary Woodland surpassed Tiger’s record by shooting 271.

51 Clifton Brown, “Jimenez Is Thrilled To Finish 15 Behind,” *New York Times*, 19 June 2000.

52 Lowell Cohn, “Tiger Roaring Into Open History Overwhelming 10-stroke Lead,” *The Press Democrat*, 18 June 2000.

53 Colin Montgomerie was first in fairways hit, and when someone informed him, he shot back, “That’s great. They should put the hole in the fairway.” Hunki Yun, “Back To Orlando,” *Orlando Sentinel*, 19 June 2000.

54 “Saturday Notebook: Putting the Field to Bed,” *Golf World*, 23 June 2000, p. 46.

55 Bob Verdi, “Looking Up from the B Flight,” *Golf World*, 23 June 2000, p. 40.

56 Hunki Yun, “Tiger Woods Completed His Wire-To-Wire Charge With A Record-Breaking Effort That Obliterated The Rest Of US Open Field,” *Orlando Sentinel*, 19 June 2000.

57 Dave Anderson, “British Open Looms As Tiger’s Kilty Dominating US Open Champion Tiger Woods Figures To Be A Heavy Favorite To Win At St. Andrews Next Month,” *Orlando Sentinel*, 20 June 2000.

58 Larry Guest, “Woods Toying With Open Field,” *Orlando Sentinel*, 16 June 2000.

59 John Davis, “Tiger Truly Mastered the Impossible,” *Arizona Republic*, 22 June 2000.

60 Thomas Borwell, “With the Course He’s On, Things Can Only Get Better,” *The Washington Post*, 19 June 2000.

61 Bayless almost deflated Tiger in his column, but his references to the divine were mostly tongue-in-cheek. He described Nick Price as rhetorically “geneflecting” to Tiger and noted, “Woods did mind his language on the course, letting loose with one ‘Jesus!’ But after all, father Earl predicted in 1997 that Woods would be Messiah-like.” Skip Bayless, “Woods Leaves No Doubt He’s In Class By Himself,” *Chicago Tribune*, 19 June 2000.

62 Hunki Yun, “Where’s The Competition? At Least Nicklaus Had To Work For His Wins: Tiger Blitzes The Field,” *Orlando Sentinel*, 21 June 2000.

63 Furman Bisher, “Also-rans’ comfort zone,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, 19 June 2000.

64 Larry Guest, “Gr-r-r-e-e-e! Watson: ‘We’re All Playing For 2nd Place,’” *Orlando Sentinel*, 19 June 2000.

65 Glenn Sheeley, “Rivals left in awe, then dust: 100th US Open,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, 19 June 2000.

66 Clifton Brown, “Jimenez Is Thrilled To Finish 15 Behind,” *New York Times*, 19 June 2000.

67 Larry Guest, “Gr-r-r-e-e-e! Watson: ‘We’re All Playing For 2nd Place,’” *Orlando Sentinel*, 19 June 2000.

68 Glenn Sheeley, “Rivals left in awe, then dust: 100th US Open,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, 19 June 2000.

69 Skip Bayless, “Woods Leaves No Doubt He’s In Class By Himself,” *Chicago Tribune*, 19 June 2000.

70 Ed Sherman, “Chilling News For Fellow Pros: Woods Out To Improve Game,” *Chicago Tribune*, 20 June 2000.

71 Ed Sherman, “Only Legends Challenge Woods Now,” *Chicago Tribune*, 19 June 2000.

72 Larry Guest, “Woods Toying With Open Field,” *Orlando Sentinel*, 16 June 2000.

73 Glenn Sheeley, “Rivals left in awe, then dust: 100th US Open,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, 19 June 2000.

74 Furman Bisher, “Also-rans’ comfort zone,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, 19 June 2000.

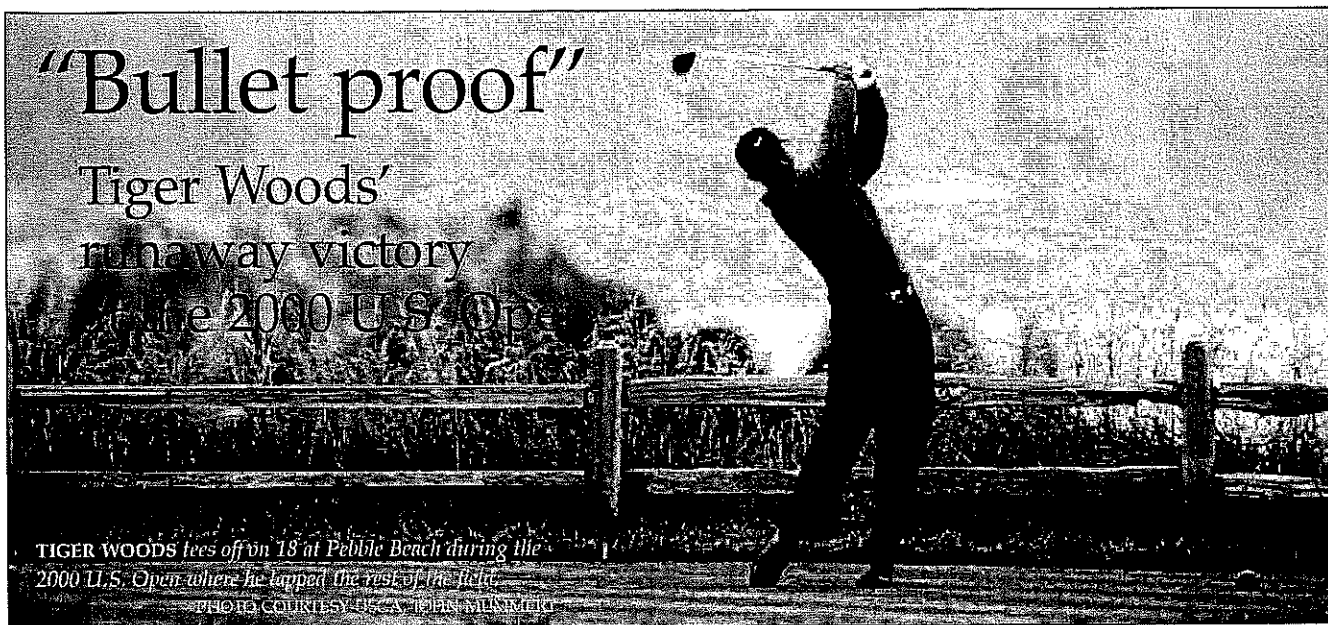
75 Ed Sherman, “Only Legends Challenge Woods Now,” *Chicago Tribune*, 19 June 2000.

76 Skip Bayless, “Woods Leaves No Doubt He’s In Class By Himself,” *Chicago Tribune*, 19 June 2000.

77 “Tiger Makes Golfing History,” *New York Times*, 20 June 2000.

78 Nicklaus missed the cut, but as he walked to the 18th green, he was greeted with a long-standing ovation and shouts of, “We love you Jack.” Tiger teed off a few minutes after Nicklaus’s round ended. Hunki Yun, “Golden Bear Bows Out As Tiger Toughens Up: Jack Nicklaus Thrilled The Adoring Fans In His US Open Farewell Before Tiger Woods Extended His Lead at 9-Under,” *Orlando Sentinel*, 23 June 2000.

79 Ed Sherman, “Only Legends Challenge Woods Now,” *Chicago Tribune*, 19 June 2000.



By Steve Schlossman & Kari Thomas¹

Tiger Woods had been making huge headlines in American golf well before the 100th U.S. Open began in June 2000 at Pebble Beach. After winning the 1997 Masters by twelve shots and then deciding to reconstruct his swing, Tiger returned to dominate the 1999 season, winning eleven of twenty consecutive PGA Tour events and finishing 10th or higher in all but one of twenty-five events worldwide. Week to week, at age 24, he was the man to beat. “Mortal PGA Tour players remain thankful that he doesn’t play every week,” Glenn Sheeley opined in *The Atlanta Constitution*.² Thomas Bonk in the *Los Angeles Times* was blunter still: “Tiger is the one to beat at this U.S. Open and he will be the one to beat at the next U.S. Open.”³ Enhancing the odds that the 100th U.S. Open would be the first that Tiger finally won, in February at the AT&T Pebble Beach Pro-Am, he overcame a seven-shot deficit in seven holes to win. Tiger had clearly demonstrated that he could “go low” at Pebble Beach when he needed to.

Predictably, the USGA toughened Pebble Beach considerably for the U.S. Open and it would not play the way it had during the AT&T. Nature dictates that Pebble Beach plays very differently in the wet winter season than it does in hot, dry summer conditions. Whereas causal water was a regular problem at the AT&T and golf balls frequently “plug[ged],” as Tiger put it, in the summer Pebble Beach played much faster and shorter.⁴ In 2000, the USGA capitalized on the course’s naturally firm, wind-glazed greens by growing out the thick rough to four-and-a-half inches (effectively eliminating the intermediate rough on several holes) and reducing the already small greens, in Bonk’s words, to the “size of paper napkins.” The Monday before the tournament, green

“It’s just amazing where he’s at in his game right now. He’s at the young part of his prime, which is sort of bullet proof, you feel like you could just tear out anybody’s throat, you know, everything is right on green light.”

Johnny Miller

speeds measured at 11.6. And analysts predicted that by the weekend, those greens would rate a 12.0.⁵

Commentators believed, and the USGA certainly hoped, that the extra precision required to master this U.S. Open-modified course would equalize the spectacularly deep and talented field. “With the weather hot and dry on the Monterey Peninsula, balls are dashing down the fairways at the Pebble Beach Golf Links or scooting into 4-inch rough, where the grass feels like rubber,” Sheeley reported in *The Atlanta Constitution*. “Does this mean that Tiger Woods... is no longer the favorite in the 100th U.S. Open? Hardly. More accurately, it just increases the amount of players, now that distance is no longer a factor and it becomes a matter of hitting the fairways and making putts, who can seriously try to alter such an obvious story line.”⁶

At the top of the list of players who might challenge Tiger were Vijay Singh, the reigning Masters champion, Ernie Els, a past two-time U.S. Open winner, and Phil Mickelson and Colin Montgomerie, the best players to not yet win a major championship.

In Montgomerie’s favor, European players arguably held a distinct advantage at Pebble Beach Golf Links: the seaside course was predictably windy, which seriously complicated the art of hitting narrow fairways, gauging green speeds,

and avoiding the thick, sticky rough that was everywhere. Even a slight ocean breeze could transform this picturesque dream-like golf course into an absolute nightmare. Johnny Miller, a three-time winner at Pebble Beach, commented, "Pebble is the kind of course that gives you a lot; it lets you make birdies and eagles. But it also can take it away real fast." After the 2000 U.S. Open was over, the history books closed, and the trophy awarded, England's Nick Faldo reflected, "It's been very linksy....It's not target golf this week. We [Europeans] are used to sort of bumping around in the wind and scrambling a lot." Which is probably why Spain's Miguel Angel Jimenez, England's Lee Westwood, Ireland's Padraig Harrington, and Faldo all finished in the top-10.⁷ In fact, unlike most U.S. Opens where Americans typically dominated, of the top-10, six players were from other countries, and in the top-5, only Tiger was born in the U.S.⁸

In the days leading up to the championship, some began to worry that the USGA's director of rules and competition, Tom Meeks, had stiffened the course's difficulty too much. Many still remembered the final round of the 1992 U.S. Open at Pebble Beach, where the scoring average was 77.26.⁹ Adding to players' concerns was the fact that the USGA had downgraded hole No. 2 from a par-5 to a par-4, reducing the overall par from 72 to 71. "When I heard that, I said, 'You've got to be kidding,'" complained Jack Nicklaus, who would be playing his 44th consecutive and final U.S. Open at Pebble Beach – his favorite course. "Here you are, you've played three Opens at Pebble Beach, you have comparable scores by everybody in the game, and all of a sudden you want to take a hole and change it? Why? Give me any kind of reason that's logical. It's been a par-5 forever. Why would you want to change it?"¹⁰ Tiger Woods was just as irritated with the decision. "I don't think that's right, just because now we can't really compare all the past champions," he said. "We've always played this golf course as par 72."¹¹ The recent loss of two tall Monterey pine trees – killed by "pitch canker" disease – that had previously toughened the lengthy approach shot to the green motivated the USGA's decision, as Executive Director David Fay explained to NBC's viewing audience.¹²

But No. 2 wasn't the only hole players and analysts were watching. No. 14, most unusually for a par-5, was expected to yield relatively few birdies. It was 573 yards long, uphill much of the way, with strategically positioned bunkers on both sides of the fairway and the most difficult green on the course to hold – on one's third shot, with only a wedge in hand.¹³ The breathtaking 8th hole, with its bewildering putting surface and yawning Ocean chasm that swallowed both tee and approach shots, was another hole on every spectator's radar.¹⁴ But the hole that really earned competitors' ire in 2000 was No. 5, recently redesigned by Jack Nicklaus.



JACK NICKLAUS' appearance at Pebble Beach in 2000 would be his farewell to competition in the U.S. Open.

PHOTO/STAN LAPIDUS

The new No. 5 was supposed to be a par-3, but when the wind picked up on Friday and Saturday, only a third of the field managed to hit the green in regulation. And that slowed play considerably. "When there are five groups standing on the tee, that's an indication something is wrong," Paul Azinger said. "The green is obviously flawed and needs to be redone." Nicklaus, the hole's designer, agreed with him. "I was with a couple of USGA guys who wondered why the hole was playing so slow" – there was a twenty-five to forty-five minute wait to play. Nicklaus told them, "It's because you guys won't let it be played the way it was designed."¹⁵

Nicklaus intended for the area short and left of the green to be fairway so that golfers could land their shots there and let the ball run down the slope onto the green. The USGA, however, decided to turn this ideal landing area into dense rough. The result, Nicklaus complained, was that "nobody can make par... You've got the cliff on one side and no shot whatsoever if you miss it left."¹⁶

Even Tiger struggled on No. 5 in 2000, averaging a quarter-stroke over par just like everyone else. The only other holes where he averaged over-par were the Cliff of Doom classic No. 8 and the relatively nondescript, dogleg left third hole (where he made a triple bogey in round three).

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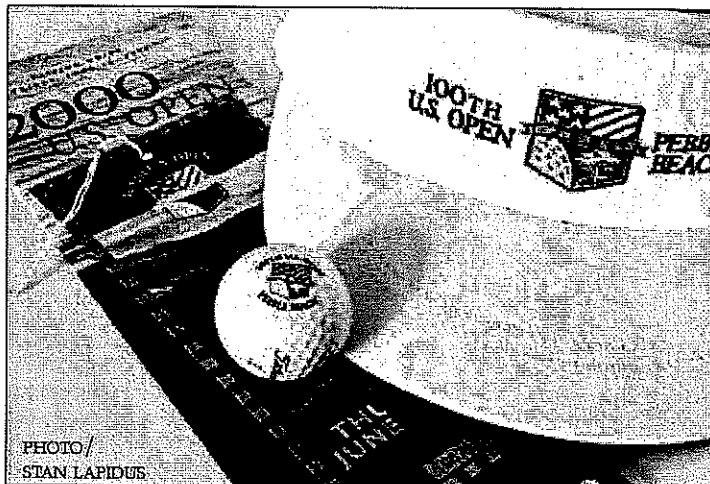
Otherwise, Tiger smoked both the course and the field, especially on hole Nos. 9 through 17. Glenn Sheeley theorized in *The Atlanta Constitution* that “playing Pebble is always about getting a few strokes under par early, to prepare for those that slip away at eight, nine and 10 or on the back nine.”¹⁷ Sheeley was correct that the back nine holes at Pebble Beach separate the men from the boys. The three prior U.S. Open champions at Pebble Beach – Nicklaus, Watson, and Kite – had averaged 2.46 strokes better than the rest of the field on the back nine, as opposed to just 1.16 strokes on the front nine.¹⁸

However, Tiger’s strategy was notably different in the 2000 U.S. Open. He chose not to take any undue risks by forcing birdies early on, and instead tried to avoid bogeys everywhere (remarkably, he was bogey-free in rounds 1 and 4). Relying on his towering ball flight and unmatched power – he officially led the field in driving distance by seven yards, but it often seemed much more than that – he scored periodic birdies on holes that badly beat up his competitors, especially on Nos. 2, 9, 10, 12, 14, and 17. He very effectively neutralized any competitors who sought to break away on the easier early holes to try to chase him down.

After Tiger turned in a first round 6-under 65, commentators were ready to call the tournament. Johnny Miller called it on-air after Tiger birdied No. 14. “I think it’s gonna be very tight with the rest of the field, but I really do believe, I got this hunch, that Tiger’s gonna break every U.S. Open record this week and win by, maybe a big margin. I just think it’s gonna be – not maybe a Masters, his first Masters win, but I just have the feeling if he could get off to a great start, which he has done, it could be a week that he just says, ‘See ya, guys.’”

The first round technically wasn’t even over yet; fog had interrupted play, and seventy-five players waited until morning to finish their rounds.

But Tiger’s mastery of the course was so intimidating that even though Miguel Jimenez was only one shot back with a 66, no one liked his odds of winning. “Back up the van, move out the bleachers, shut off the lights, stick a cork in the fog and close the door. This U.S. Open is already over,” Thomas Bonk declared in the *Los Angeles Times*.¹⁹



“The only man left in this Open who can defeat Tiger is Woods,” Skip Bayless wrote in the *Chicago Tribune*, citing Tiger’s effortless shot-making and first-round composure as superb reasons for the rest of the field to throw in the towel. “Surely no player has been considered a bigger shoo-in after playing his first round.”²⁰ Ed Sherman had to assure his readers, “No, The U.S. Open is not over.” After all, he joked, “The 18th hole could fall in to Carmel Bay.”²¹ And after Tiger turned in a second round 69, to go 8-under for the tournament and take a record-breaking six-shot lead over Jimenez, the *New York Times* ran the headline, “Woods Threatens To Make It Academic.”²²

Skip Bayless speculated, “The rest of golf has just one hope. Only Pebble’s unpredictable elements can keep this Open from becoming elementary for Woods. The bay breeze must kick up, the temperature must drop.”²³ This finally happened – or as Bonk put it, “The real Pebble Beach Golf Links showed up” – during the third-round, yet Tiger still shot even-par (only Ernie Els beat him that day with a stunning 68 before weather conditions toughened).²⁴ However, observers noticed something curious, or at least thought they did. Just as the worst of the fog seemed to hold off for Tiger’s rounds, the wind also stopped blowing whenever he teed off, “as if on cue.” “That used to happen when [Ben] Hogan teed off,” Nicklaus mused. “Now it happens when Tiger tees off.”²⁵

A more realistic explanation, perhaps, is that the wind did not affect the trajectory of Tiger’s new solid-core golf ball as much as it did the wound-core balls played by nearly everyone else. Before Titleist’s Pro V1 (which was first widely used on Tour in October 2000), there was Nike’s Tour Accuracy ball. Developed for Nike by Bridgestone in Japan, the ball “featured a solid, molded core injected with synthetic compounds, including polyurethane,” which allowed the ball “to maintain its velocity at its apex, minimizing the adverse effect of rain and wind.” Tiger was Nike’s most avid tester, and at Pebble Beach he played with a brand new

Bridgestone prototype that was not even available to other Nike clients like Paul Azinger. After a first test in Germany, Tiger played Nicklaus’s Memorial Tournament in late May and won by five shots at 19-under-par. That the prototype landed unerringly where Tiger hit it no matter the weather conditions is what ultimately convinced him to

permanently switch balls on the eve of the U.S. Open.²⁶

Tiger's unorthodox decision to switch balls just before a major caught the attention of many, but expert observers failed to connect his surreal ball-striking exhibition with the new ball. Quite the opposite, in fact. When Tiger won the Memorial, Thomas Bonk joked, "Tiger Woods is so good, he doesn't need a golf ball to win tournaments....[he] could still beat everybody if he hits a rock or an apricot or even a salt shaker."²⁷ Gerry Dulac, writing for the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, maintained, "Woods is going to play well, shoot low scores and win a lot of golf tournaments no matter what ball he plays."²⁸ The overall consensus in the golf press was that Tiger was scorching courses in spite of his equipment change, not because of it. "Titleist is the Mercedes of golf balls," David Teel wrote in the *Daily Press* of Newport News, Virginia. "Nike is Hyundai."²⁹ Ed Sherman joked in the *Chicago Tribune* that maybe the rest of the field would luck out and "Tiger Woods' shipment of his new Nike balls might be ruled non-conforming because they feature too many swooshes."³⁰ But neither Sherman nor any other leading golf reporters advanced the idea that Tiger's solid-core ball was giving him a special advantage or was in any way related to his record-demolishing performance.

Simply put, very few realized at the time how revolutionary this technology would be. Azinger, who was using the store-bought version of the Tour Accuracy, told reporters, "The guy is using the ball because when he was messing around with it, he just couldn't believe it....That's how much [Tiger] likes the ball."³¹ Journalists didn't buy it,

choosing to believe that Tiger's switch had less to do with the ball's performance than the \$2.5 million Nike reportedly paid him to use it.³² But the way Tiger's ball consistently flew long, flat, and straight, impervious to the wind, and the way it held the greens as everyone else's hopped and ran past the flagsticks, matches the way we now understand a solid-core ball behaves when struck perfectly by top-tier professionals.³³

The end result of this combination of Tiger's singular golfing prowess with a brand-new technology was a jaw-dropping performance at Pebble Beach. By the end of the second round, Tiger had a record-breaking six-shot lead.³⁴ By the end of the third, he was an unheard-of ten shots ahead, another new major championship record. "Tiger Woods keeps putting up birdies as if this were some faceless sponsor-name tournament," Ed Sherman marveled. "Meanwhile, the rest of the field is playing a U.S. Open course where red numbers are rumor."³⁵ ¶

This article will conclude with the summer 2020 edition of The Golf.

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Footnotes

1 Copyright 2019 Steve Schlossman and Kari Thomas. All Rights Reserved.

2 Glenn Sheeley, "Inside Golf: Main Attraction Tiger Woods in a Zone," *The Atlanta Constitution*, 1 June 2000.

3 Thomas Bonk, "Woods Stars in His Favorite Role," *Los Angeles Times*, 15 June 2000.

4 Glenn Sheeley, "Pebble Beach provides optimum atmosphere," *The Atlanta Constitution*, 8 June 2000.

5 Thomas Bonk, "Golf Not for Meek When He's Finished: USGA's director of rules and competition adds title to Pebble Beach this week," *Los Angeles Times*, 13 June 2000. For an excellent overview of Pebble Beach's evolution since the first U.S. Open was held there in 1972, see John Stuge, "The Coast is Clear," *Golf World*, June 9, 2000, pp. 47-56.

6 Glenn Sheeley, "U.S. Open Championship: Odds point to usual favorite: Woods Tailored for Tiger: Woods on top of his game, playing a course he has known since high school," *The Atlanta Constitution*, 15 June 2000.

7 Ed Sherman, "Els, Jimenez Finish at 3 Over, Settle for 'B' Flight Title," *Chicago Tribune*, 19 June 2000. Ed Sherman, "Mixing Beauty with History," *Chicago Tribune*, 14 June 2000. Larry Bohannon, "Pebble Beach has all the lore and lure," *The Desert Sun*, 11 June 2000.

8 John Reger, "Horrible: Foreign golfers are feeling right at home playing in the tough conditions at the U.S. Open at Pebble Beach," *Orange County Register*, 18 June 2000. Furman Bisher lamented the fact that Europeans had done so well in an American tournament. "Look at those in the chase, to use the term loosely, and you find more names off the European Tour than Yanks....From across the sea came Ernie Els, Padraig Harrington, Lee Westwood, Nick Faldo, Vijay Singh and Thomas Bjorn. But where was David Duval? Phil Mickelson? Davis Love III? Justin Leonard? Where were Fred Couples, Hal Sutton, Tom Lehman of the old class? Furman Bisher, "Also-rans' comfort zone," *The Atlanta Constitution*, 19 June 2000.

9 Glenn Sheeley, "Pebble Beach provides optimum atmosphere," *The Atlanta Constitution*, 8 June 2000.

10 Glenn Sheeley, "Golf: Pebble Beach provides optimum atmosphere," *The Atlanta Constitution*, 8 June 2000.

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15 Gary Van Sickle, "Taking the Fifth: The New Number 5 Hole at Pebble. A Deceptively Nasty Par-3, Forced Many Players to Hit Shots That Were Self-Incriminating," *Sports Illustrated*, 26 June 2000.

16 Gary Van Sickle, "Taking the Fifth: The New Number 5 Hole at Pebble. A Deceptively Nasty Par-3, Forced Many Players to Hit Shots That Were Self-Incriminating," *Sports Illustrated*, 26 June 2000.

17 Glenn Sheeley, "Golf: Pebble Beach provides optimum atmosphere," *The Atlanta Constitution*, 8 June 2000.

18 Much thanks to Jon Murcek and Emma Stoyton for assisting in our statistical analysis of historical scoring patterns at Pebble Beach.

19 Thomas Bonk, "Golf; Woods Rolls in With Cool 65," *Los Angeles Times*, 16 June 2000.

20 Skip Bayless, "With Woods in a Groove, This Open is Closed," *Chicago Tribune*, 16 June 2000.

21 Ed Sherman, "Woods Leaves 'Em In Fog Shoots 'One Of My Better Rounds' Before Play Stops," *Chicago Tribune*, 16 June 2000.

22 Clifton Brown, "Woods Threatens to Make It Academic," *New York Times*, 17 June 2000.

23 Skip Bayless, "With Woods in a Groove, This Open is Closed," *Chicago Tribune*, 16 June 2000.

24 Thomas Bonk, "Tiger Has This Open by the Tail: With a little bit of wind, Pebble Beach finally bared its teeth, and the world's best cringed," *Los Angeles Times*, 18 June 2000.

25 Ed Sherman, "Weather Clearly with Woods: Fog Lifts, Winds Die and Tiger Goes to 9 Under," *Chicago Tribune*, 17 June 2000.

26 Before the Memorial Tournament, Tiger used Nike's ball for the pro-am at the Deutsche Bank-SAP Open in Germany. However, he did not officially announce that he was permanently switching balls until a Nike shareholders' meeting after the Memorial Tournament. Jeff Benedict and Armen Keleyian, *Tiger Woods* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2018), pp. 197-203; Mark McCluskey, *Faster, Higher, Stronger* (New York: Hudson Street Press, 2014), pp. 124-125; Tony Manfred, "Tiger Woods Took a Chance on a New Ball that No One Else was Using in 2000, and It Was the Smartest Move of His Career," *Business Insider*, 17 February 2015; Rob Sauerhaft, "Cut Above the Rest," *Sports Illustrated*, 30 March 2015; "Innovation Shapes the New Nike RZN Tour Golf Ball," *Nike News*, 5 January 2016; Tim Rosaforte, "Going Ball-tastic," *Golf World*, June 2, 2000, p. 18; "The Bunker: Be Like Nike," *Golf World*, June 9, 2000, pp. 4-6; Ron Sirak, "Golf's Dream Team," *Golf World*, June 9, 2000, p. 82; Jonathan Wall, "Tiger Woods and the Golf Ball That (Almost) Changed It All," *Golf*, May 29, 2019 (<https://www.golf.com/gear/balls/2019/05/28/tiger-woods-golf-ball-nike/>).

27 Thomas Bonk, "Woods Is Still Having a Ball, Even While Using a New One," *Los Angeles Times*, 2 June 2000.

28 Gerry Dulac, "Fuss Over Ball Woods Uses of Little Consequence Except to Nike," *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, 1 June 2000.

29 David Teel, "Woods' Switch to Nike From Titleist Would Be A Joke," *Daily Press*, 24 May 2000.

30 Ed Sherman, "Woods Leaves 'Em In Fog Shoots 'One Of My Better Rounds' Before Play Stops," *Chicago Tribune*, 16 June 2000.

31 Gerry Dulac, "Fuss Over Ball Woods Uses of Little Consequence Except to Nike," *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, 1 June 2000.

32 Thomas Bonk, "Woods Is Still Having a Ball, Even While Using a New One," *Los Angeles Times*, 2 June 2000. Gerry Dulac, "Fuss Over Ball Woods Uses of Little Consequence Except to Nike," *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, 1 June 2000.

33 "When smashed with a driver, the [solid-core] ball would spin less than a balata ball, keeping it from hooking or slicing. When hit with a wedge, it would spin more quickly, giving the player more control to stop the ball on the green. And in every situation, it flew significantly farther than a balata ball when hit with the same force." McCluskey, *Faster, Higher, Stronger*, p. 124.

34 "The record for a second-round lead at the Open had been five strokes by Willie Anderson at Baltusrol in 1903. The 134 by Woods also tied the record for the lowest score through the first 36 holes of an Open, a mark held by three others, including Jack Nicklaus." Rob Gloster, "Woods' 6-stroke Lead Breaks 36-holes Record," *Chicago Tribune*, 18 June 2000.

35 Ed Sherman, "Tiger Running Away With It: Record 10-Shot Lead Leaves Foes in Dust," *Chicago Tribune*, 18 June 2000.