

THE TALE OF THE TIGER

by

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It seems that the old Stanford Farm has long been the breeding ground for new ideas, the breaking of barriers and the expansion of new frontiers. Long before the university was founded, it was Leland Stanford himself who combined a love of horse flesh with his fascination for photography to prove his longheld notion that a horse, at full gait, had all four feet off the ground at the same time. It seems of little importance now, but back in the 1870's this was earth shattering news. In fact, this historic revelation has often been called the "breakthrough" for the ultimate development of motion pictures, and a monument on Campus Drive, close to The Old Red Barn, commemorates that today.

Since the founding of Stanford University in 1891 new discoveries and achievements in the sciences, medicine, law, geology and all other fields of academic endeavor have become commonplace within the "Stanford Family".

This pattern was quickly established in athletics also with scores of early Olympians and record breakers of all description. In the 1930's "Blazin Ben" Eastman ran a quarter mile faster than anyone ever before... by a full second! In 1938 Hank Luisetti scored 50 points in a basketball game against Duquesne in Cleveland (still a Stanford record), and he did it by shooting with a one hand pushing motion...never used before by any player preceding him. Two years later Frankie Albert wore white football pants and directed something called the "T"

formation, unheard of in American football. Stanford went 10-0 and beat Nebraska in the Rose Bowl that year, and everyone has known about the "T formation" ever since. There was also Bob Mathias with two Olympic Decathlon medals back to back in 1948 and 1952. More recently in football Darrin Nelson caught 50 passes and rushed for over 1,000 yards...in one season!!! Hardly considered possible until Darrin did it.

These things were all beyond belief at the time, and now comes a young man by the name of Tiger Woods. Let the record show that between August 19 and August 25, 1996 this incredible young man won his third consecutive U.S. Amateur Golf Championship. Not since the legendary Bobby Jones failed to accomplish this feat in the 1920's, has the "National Amateur" generated so much excitement and anticipation. Tiger, after all, has been something of a phenomenon since he was three years old. At that age he actually shot 48 for nine holes on a U.S. Navy regulation golf course. As a child prodigy with cut down clubs, he appeared on all kinds of television shows and achieved celebrity status long before his teenage years.

But, his real march to fame probably started at the age of 15 when he first won the U.S. Junior National Championship, exceeding all expectations by defeating a whole field of young talent, most of them as much as two years older than the eventual Champion. Following the same pattern of over-accomplishment, Tiger won the Junior title again in both 1992 and 1993, not knowing then that "three in a row" would later have an even more familiar ring to him.

As a high school senior in the Fall of 1993 Tiger accepted the offer of Coach Wally Goodwin for a scholarship at Stanford. In August, following his graduation from Western High School in southern California, Tiger moved up in class to the U.S. Amateur Championship at The TPC Ponte Vedra in Florida, where he was once again playing against older and much more experienced players. Undaunted neither by the star-studded field nor the publicity and hype which preceded his first venture into "Major" competition, Tiger ran his USGA Championship string to four in a row by edging "Trip" Kuehne 2-up in the final 36 holes.

Assuming legendary proportions, Tiger did it again a year later in Newport, Rhode Island, following his freshman year at Stanford. In a tight struggle, he edged veteran Buddy Marucci 2-up to join this celebrated list of those who had previously won two U.S. Amateur Championships in a row: H.J. Whigham (1896-97), Walter Travis (1900-01), H. Chandler Egan (1904-05), Jerome Travers (1907-08) and (1912-13), Robert Tyre Jones, Jr. (1924-25 and 1927-28), Stanford's Lawson Little (1934-35), E. Harvie Ward, Jr. (1955-56) and Jay Sigel (1981-82). Tiger now had something before him which not even the celebrated Bobby Jones could ever claim. Where Jones and all the others for one reason or another, had failed to make it "three in a row", the young Tiger would have the opportunity to etch his name in golf's history book for all time to come.

Returning to school to begin his sophomore year just a month after his triumph at Newport, Tiger embarked on what would be an unprecedented parade of fabulous golf, extending through 14 events from Fall into late Spring. Against the

very best which college golf has to offer, the two-time U.S. Amateur Champion won eight of them and finished in the top three in four others. Along the way he fired a course record 61 at Big Canyon Country Club in Newport Beach, California while winning the Pac-10 title. The miraculous 61 was part of a four round score of 270 (-18), a new Pac-10 record.

Just a month later he followed the same script, setting a course record at The Honors Course in Chattanooga with a 5-under par 67, while nailing down the NCAA Championship individually. This was the first time a Stanford player had achieved this honor since Frank "Sandy" Tatum did so in 1942.

The awards he was accorded at the end of the academic year are too numerous to mention, but, obviously, he won the Jack Nicklaus trophy as the top male collegiate Golfer-of-the-Year. At Stanford he shared the Al Masters Award with National Volleyball "Player of the Year" Cary Wendell. This most prestigious award goes to the athlete at Stanford attaining the highest standards of athletic performance, leadership and academic achievement.

Following the NCAA Championship and before his bid for a third U. S. Amateur Championship in August, two experiences really stand out. In July he played with all the world's elite at the 125th British Open at Royal Lytham & St. Annes. He finished 22nd in the oldest "Major" of all Majors. More importantly, along the way he fashioned a dramatic 6-under par 66, the lowest round ever recorded by an amateur in this highly prized event. Mark that for future reference.

While his performance at "The Open" was something for the scrapbook, the same could not be said for his brief appearance at the Western Amateur shortly thereafter in Benton Harbor, Michigan, in early August when he was rudely ousted in the very first round by Terry Noe on the 20th hole. Mark this for future reference, too.

The 96th U.S. Amateur Championship was staged at Pumpkin Ridge Golf Club, about twenty miles west of Portland, Oregon. It is a rather colossal golf haven, with two courses, one open to the public and the other quite private, with an enormous practice range between the two. As if they were named by a goblin on Halloween, Ghost Creek is the public course (6,745 yards/Par 71), and Witch Hollow (6,975 yards/Par 72) is the private club.

As Tiger approaches this challenging venue for a possible "three-peat", let's consider some odds for a moment. There were 5,538 entries filed for this year's championship...5,538 really good players from forty-four states!!! After regional qualifying all over the country, the very best 312 survived to tee it up at Pumpkin Ridge.

Once there, all 312, including Tiger, who was exempt from first stage qualifying as Defending Champion, play two rounds of medal play (score only) to narrow the field to the top 64, in two brackets of 32 for Match Play. This is where two players "Match" up against one another, playing for low score on the 18 separate holes, or, in the case of the final championship match, 36 holes.

To open his charge for a third successive Amateur title, Tiger registered two stroke play rounds of 69-67 --- 136 (-7) to take medalist honors. Here is another one to mark for future reference.

To win the 1996 U.S. Amateur at Pumpkin Ridge a player would have to endure seven straight day of punishing heat, where the mid-day temperature would rise to over 90 degrees every single day. Along the way he would have to win six straight matches, starting on Tuesday and extending through Sunday. The USGA, not totally familiar with the summer weather patterns in western Oregon, would cram two matches into a Thursday marathon to guard against a rainout. Bob Robinson, the venerable golf writer for The Oregonian observed that summer rainouts in the Portland area are "about as rare as a Tiger Woods loss in match play."

Robinson proved right, because Tiger played beautifully, winning his first four matches without ever having to suffer the indignity of even playing the 18th hole. For that span of 101 holes he was 17-under par and seemingly getting just a little sharper each day.

It was in the semi-finals on Saturday, when his dear friend and Stanford teammate Joel Kribel threw a 4-under par 32 at him on the front nine and Tiger found himself staring a big -2 after ten holes. But, as he has so many times in his young career, the tenacious Tiger turned on the heat with his enormous length off the tee. On the 11th, a 553 yard Par-5, Tiger hit two gigantic shots to reach the green and 2- putt for a win. After winning the 13th with a Par-4, when Joel missed

the green to the right, Tiger exploded again on the Par-5 14th. He bombed his tee shot well over 300 yards, hit a short iron to the green and holed the putt for an Eagle-3. Pars on #15 and #16 were good enough to set a very talented Joel Kribel down easily with a 3 and 1 tally. At this point Tiger was 22-under par for 118 holes and cruising into the finals which would break all records for drama, great play, excitement and historical merit.

Steve Scott, a precocious 19-year old sophomore from the University of Florida, is a proven performer. He was a semi-finalist in this very championship a year ago. He not only qualified for this year's U.S. Open, but he fired 71-73 to make the cut, establishing himself as one of the bright young players in the country.

Starting championship play at 7:15 A.M. on Sunday morning at Witch Hollow, Steve Scott did nothing that would give Tiger Woods any other impression. With an even Par 36, Steve was 5-up over a Tiger Woods who seemed uncertain of everything and totally "out of sync" with himself, his surroundings and his historic mission. Though medal scores are not kept in these matches, Tiger could not have been any better than 4-over par 76 for this morning exercise.

Looking at a board which showed him 5-down Tiger tried to hold down a light lunch, while "consulting" with his Dad, Colonel Earl Woods, a former Green Beret, and his golf tutor, the highly regarded Butch Harmon.

It must have been something like a Knute Rocke half-time talk the way this Tiger came roaring back in the afternoon round. He birdied #3 and #4, won the

troublesome 5th with a par 3 and suddenly had closed the gap to -2. He made a joke of the Par-4, 463 yard 9th with a rocket launch of 338 yards. With little more than a short pitch Tiger left it 15 feet from the hole, rolled it in for birdie-3 and closed the match to only 1-down.

But, the feisty Scott, not one ounce of doubt or fear in him, pitched in from the right rough on #10 for birdie-2, and with only eight holes to play Tiger was now 2-down. More importantly that one swing had returned the momentum to the young Gator from Coral Springs, Florida...but, not for long.

At this point Tiger had a look in his eye and a more determined "in sync" air about him. That "out of sorts" feeling of the morning was long gone. Deeply confident and much more comfortable with himself now, Tiger blasted his tee shot on #11 some 355 yards. The double dog-leg routing of the hole left him just about 200 yards from the flagstick, but two very tall Oregon firs, like nature's giant goalposts blocked his intended flight to the hole. It was here that the young Mr. Woods hit the one shot which truly made the difference on this very historic day. He arched a missile-like 5-iron into the upper atmosphere, right through the "goalposts" and to within 35 feet of his "nirvana" on this very special day. As if it was his destiny that 35-footer found the bottom of the cup for Eagle-3, as the "never give up" Scott had already chipped to within four feet for what would have been a Birdie-4.

Speaking of "Birdie-4" that is exactly what Scott did on #14, as Tiger missed a tying 7-footer for tie. Now it was -2 for Tiger once again with only four holes to play.

With a certain resolve which is born into only the greatest competitor, Tiger Woods rolled in birdie putts of 5 feet and 35 feet on holes #16 and #17 to square the match going to the final hole. On this 545 yard Par 5 Tiger reached the green with an iron, but the ball drifted into a "collection area" to the left, and he could not get it up and down for the win.

Everyone now knows the rest of the story. The two gallant players halved the 9th, the first playoff hole. Then Tiger won it all with a Par-3 on #10 as Scott took three to get down from close to the very same spot where it had only taken him only one magic swing just two hours earlier.

The conclusion of the story is almost a blur. Three time U.S. Amateur Champion! Six years of USGA Championships is succession! Decision to turn professional! Rush to Milwaukee to join the Pro Tour! Agreement with Nike, Titleist and others for huge sums of money! Press conference on Wednesday to share his thoughts and decisions with the media and his literally millions of friends and admirers in the world of golf and well beyond.

In that gathering at Milwaukee Tiger talked of the love and discipline which his parents had bestowed on him. He said that after winning the NCAA Championship and his third Amateur Championship that "there was nothing more to achieve" as an amateur. He talked of being the medalist for the Championship,

indicating that this made it all even more complete. He talked of his 66 in the British Open as a proving ground that he could REALLY play with the best in the game. He also talked of his ousting in the first round of the Western Amateur and how nothing can be taken for granted in golf. He spoke with a combination of humility and confidence and with a sense of maturity far beyond his years.

Then he spoke with deep feeling about Stanford, his many friends and the "growth experience he was putting on hold for a while." He said he promised his parents and himself that he WOULD get his degree even if it took 15 years...no time limit, but he would get it.

He talked again about his buddies at Stanford, listening to music, going to parties, just sitting around and shooting the bull.

Then he said with the hint of a tear in his eye, "Thank you, Stanford."

This young man represents all the good things we all strive for. He has an enormous appetite for winning, and yet he is gentle and caring in meeting the basic responsibilities of life. He conducts himself as a gentleman at all times. He sets goals and he achieves them in grand style. In an age where behavior patterns of young people are being questioned, this young man is impeccable.

As the young Tiger takes on a new and exciting life with ever increasing challenges ahead, it seems that Stanford unanimously returns his courteous statement of gratitude:

THANK YOU TOO, TIGER!!

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