



Tiger Woods and the 2007 PGA Championship

By Patrick Neuner

“Did you meet Tiger Woods?”

That was the question I was most frequently asked after returning from the 2007 PGA Championship at Southern Hills where I worked on the Operations staff. I was never quite sure how to answer the question because in my mind, meeting someone entails a handshake, an exchanging of pleasantries, or maybe a brief conversation. Under this definition, no, I did not meet Tiger. But when you think about it, it's just not as exciting to tell people that you worked at one of golf's preeminent events and didn't get a chance to meet the game's best player. So I decided that I was going to adopt a more far-reaching definition of “meet”, something that might read like “posed for a quick photo opportunity amid a hectic swarm of photographers on the 72nd green.”

Under this new and improved definition, yes, I did meet Tiger.

Championship Week wasn't the first time I had seen Tiger Woods at Southern Hills. He had been on the course about a month prior to the tournament getting in some practice rounds. I had heard some rumblings about his arrival on site, but I never really gave it a second thought until I actually saw him while I was working at the corporate village adjacent to the 12th hole. The 12th is both a beast and a beauty of a par 4, as it's a 460-yard dogleg left with a creek that runs right in front of the green. It's actually very similar to the 13th at Augusta National. In any case, there was Tiger in the middle of the fairway getting ready to play a few second shots into the green. Unhappy with our tree-obstructed view from the village, a couple of my buddies and I decided to hop in one of our carts and head down the cart path of the 12th hole. It didn't bother me that I had been relegated to the scalding bed of our golf cart, which had been left to

toast out in the Tulsa heat, because we were no more than 50 yards away from the greatest golfer on earth. There wasn't a massive crowd, no swarm of photographers, and no crew of volunteers to push us back; just three avid golf fans getting a glimpse of the world's best in action.

So there were Tiger and Steve Williams walking off yardages, looking at the treetops to figure out the wind, and dropping balls at various spots in the landing zone. I doubt that either one of them actually knew we were stalking them, but if they did know we were there, they did an impeccable job of pretending we weren't. I guess when you're used to playing in front of tens of thousands of screaming people on a weekly basis, ignoring the three of us really wasn't that hard. At one point in the proceedings one of my buddies decided to take out his phone to get a few pictures. Being that Steve Williams has a rather unique and aggressive way of dealing with these sorts of distractions, I decided that this probably wasn't the best of ideas. Nonetheless, the duo wasn't bothered by us as they headed towards the green. Pleased with ourselves for having avoided our boss while watching the world's best at work, we headed back up to the corporate village to resume our work. Those flowers weren't going to plant themselves after all.

After this initial encounter, it wasn't until Sunday, the final round, that I ran into Tiger again. A few of the other interns and I were assigned to the 18th fairway where we would move the gallery ropes across the fairway so that spectators couldn't get all the way up to the green as the final group putted out. So there I was, about 100 yards from the 18th green as Tiger and Woody Austin walked up the hill to the green. Everybody watched as Tiger putted out to move one step closer to Jack Nicklaus' record of 18 major championship victories. After Tiger had raised his arms and the crowd had settled, our team gathered just off the fringe of the 18th green knowing that in years past, the winner typically made the rounds to take pictures with the PGA staff, the greenskeepers, and other groups

who enable the championship to be put on. So we waited patiently as Tiger emerged from the scoring area and made his way back to the 18th green for the trophy presentation. The PGA of America made a brief presentation before Tiger raised the Wannamaker Trophy for the second straight year and fourth time overall, and then Tiger made his way to the edge of the green with the trophy where a swarm of photographers waited to greet him. We stood nearby anxiously waiting for Tiger to head over our way. It took a while, but he made it, and he stood in the middle of the group, trophy in hand, for about half a minute while a bunch of pictures were taken. I was thrilled, as we all were, to be within an arm's length of Tiger. Tiger didn't seem to be as thrilled as we all were, but he gave us a nod and a smile. You could tell that he had done this sort of thing many, many times before, and it was all a routine for him: stand, hold trophy, smile, and move to the next group. For us though, it was the highlight of our three months in Tulsa.

Later in the summer after I had returned home from Oklahoma, I received a package from the PGA. Sure enough I opened to find a framed picture of our staff with Tiger Woods and the Wannamaker Trophy on the 18th green at Southern Hills, and there I am, just to the right of Tiger. All you can see is my head, but it's all the proof I need. That picture has followed me from St. Louis to South Bend, Indiana and on down to Lafayette, La., where it sits above my TV.

So yes, I did meet Tiger Woods.

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