

Marathon Man

By: Nathan Crace Date: Oct. 25, 2004

Change his driver? No problem. Change his putter? No problem. Win the PGA Championship at one of the toughest venues to date for a Major? No problem. Keep him away from practicing on the range? Now you've got a problem. Of course, the man in question is a tall, lanky Fijian named Vijay who now finds himself atop the world golf rankings—unseating Tiger Woods after more than 330 weeks in that spot.

Singh, who has long held the reputation for being the guy who hits more practice balls than the rest of the guys at any given Tour stop combined, now enjoys the fruits of his labors with another stellar year on Tour. Perfect practice makes perfect.

When it comes to time spent beating balls, Singh is the anti-Carlos Franco. He hits enough balls each year to stretch to the moon and back—more than once. He works on his game like an artist who loves his handy work. His hands may bleed, but he seems to enjoy it. To thrive on it. To feed off of it.

Let's flash back to the year 2003 shall we? At the end of the 2003 Tour schedule, many speculated whether Singh could unseat Woods at the Player of the Year. Sing argued that his lead in the money list was a better indication of consistency since he played better in more events than Woods. For his part, Tiger discounted such logic. In the year of the "slump," Tiger managed zero Majors (same as Singh) and only five other wins. So what's a guy to do?

Singh has all but eliminated any guesswork this year by leading the money list, dethroning Woods from the coveted numero uno spot on the globe, and hoisting eight winner's trophies (so far) this year. Oh yes, and he threw in a Major at the PGA Championship for good measure for one of those trophies. Even my Chihuahua picks Singh for this year's player of the year. But what does that really mean for Singh and the state of the game overall?

It proves that practice pays off (sorry Carlos) for most people both on the Tour and off. So for those of you wanting to improve your game, take note: p-r-a-c-t-i-c-e. Although you can improve your short-term enjoyment of the game through technology, improving your long-term success directly correlates to the time spent improving all areas of your own game.

For Vijay, it must seem like a century since the fallout from his comments about Annika Sorenstam being given a free ride into the MasterCard Colonial last year. In fact, he almost seems to enjoy spending time with the media these days. Who could blame him? He is still the quiet type and enjoys his privacy, but now appears to be more at ease with himself as the superstar he has evolved into over the past fifteen months. Now the stage seems to be set for next year's showdowns between Singh and the new number two Els—of course, Woods may be able to concentrate on his game more now that he has tied the knot. We'll see.

It can be difficult for a person such as Singh who may not be as comfortable with the spotlight as his or her fans would like for him or her to be. But as Singh loosens up before the media, his fan base is sure to expand. And when his off-course personality becomes as laid back as his on-course mannerisms, the Vijay fan club will be bursting at the seams. Not all fan favorites and superstars are born. Most are made—one range ball at a time.



Nathan Crace is a golf course architect whose freelance "Lipouts" column is based, at times, on topics submitted to the author by readers like you. If you have a topic you would like to see discussed or wish to read past columns from the archives, log on to www.lipouts.com and let him know. Copyright 2004.