

19-20 DECEMBER 2015 | THE BUSINESS TIMES WEEKEND

Swing

by sphgolf



Clive AGRAN

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SCORING SYSTEM

GOODBYE TIGER BY RAHUL PATHAK

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WATCH FEATURED SUBJECT TO STOCK AVAILABILITY



BY
RAHUL PATHAK

TIME TO RETIRE?

HIS SPIRIT IS STILL WILLING BUT HIS FLESH IS WOUNDED BEYOND REPAIR

Tiger Woods has indicated that he may never play a tournament again and the obituaries are pouring in. Some say they are premature. But on reading his detailed, and often disturbing, interview with TIME magazine, I cannot help feel that they come several years too late.

The sporting career of this golfing great has been dead for a while.

He has refused to acknowledge this and titillated his fans by faking sporadic sparks of life.

Until now.

Now, three months after yet another back surgery, he accepts that he still cannot swing a club. He does not know when he will be able to. He says that all he wants is a quality life with his children "even if I don't come back and I don't play again".

Cue: Internet meltdown.

Tiger (right) clarified, of course, that this was not quite the final chapter that he had in mind. "But if it does (happen), it does. I've reconciled myself to it."

Lorne Rubenstein, the writer who scored the interview, was even more emphatic that Tiger planned to be back.

"It was clear to me that Tiger wants to return to competition if and when he can get healthy again," said Rubenstein. "He is not remotely interested in retiring."

But that misses the point completely.

The taut and chiselled body that carried Tiger to 14 Major titles by the time he was 32 (he hasn't added to that tally since 2008) quit on him years ago. He refused to accept that and just kept sending it back for another mission, another round of battering.

Today, there is almost a touch of relish and barely concealed pride when he dwells on the torture that he subjected his body to.

Cast your mind back to his last Major win, when he made the trickiest of putts to get into an 18-hole playoff and then won, almost on crutches.

"If you look at the '08 US Open, I played on no ACL (anterior cruciate ligament)," he says. He had ruptured his ACL the previous year but kept playing through pain, refusing to listen to screaming ligaments, overriding the crunch of bones because – and this is the disturbing part – he drew a certain satisfaction from this.

"I think anyone can win when they're playing great golf...that's easy. But trying to dog out a win when it's really not there is really hard. It's hard on the mind. Sometimes it can be hard on



the body."

And so this most driven of men makes demands of his body that scrape the boundaries of what it can deliver. In his mind, he is challenging himself.

On the outside, he keeps a game face, talks a good game and hides his pain – lest the admission give his opponents hope.

He is like those old soldiers that you read about, hiding in the jungles years after the war that they enlisted for was over. And lost.

Only, he didn't know it. He tried to swing with a knee brace on. He endured a back so bad that when he tried to putt "bending over would cause my back to go and eventually other parts of my body would start to go".

In a particularly poignant narration, he talked of practising a flop shot over a bunker behind his house and collapsing as it jangled a nerve. He hadn't brought his phone along and lay there, alone and helpless, until his little daughter spotted him and summoned help.

It is this body that he has kept sending back to battle. It breaks down, gets taped up and is ordered back. Each time, the breaks come quicker. Each time, the body can give less of itself.

Somewhere between his early days of ignominy and his more recent years of injury, I suspect the body had no more to offer.

That's when the curtain really fell on his career. That's when we should have paid homage to this unreal athlete whose spirit is still willing but whose flesh is wounded beyond repair.

BUILDING UP HIS GOLF PROWESS

BY ARUL JOHN

Winning the Rickie Fowler signature orange Cobra driver was like a dream come true for the young golfer.

When Mr Joel Rohan Livingston Owen (below), 22, learnt that he had won the golf club in a contest organised by SPH Golf, he was ecstatic.

The full-time national serviceman, who has a handicap of 10, said: "I have been playing golf regularly for eight years.

"My father signed me up for golf lessons when I was six or seven years old but I lost interest in the game after I turned eight.

"I then took up tennis, but returned to playing golf when I was about 14 years old. I practise at the range three or four times per week, and play golf once a week if possible."

The Republic Polytechnic graduate plans to enrol in a golf school in Australia after his national service, and return to Singapore after a year there.

He said: "I would like to see how far I can go in the sport, and aim to turn professional by the time I am 28 years old.

"One golfer who inspires me is Spanish golfer Miguel Ángel Jiménez, because I love his style."

Jimenez, 51, has won 21 times on the European Tour and been a member of several victorious Ryder Cup teams.

But all those aspirations are for the future. For now, Mr Owen is just raring to try out his new club.

He said: "I am looking forward to adding this driver to my golf arsenal."



photos by Action Images, Nabillah Nordian