

BY S MURALI

# TIME FOR A RAHM BREAKTHROUGH

By all accounts, Jon Rahm had a spectacular 2019.

Not only did he win the European Tour's Race to Dubai in November, he also rose to World No 3 in the official rankings and got married a couple of weeks ago to his childhood sweetheart Kelley Cahill.

And now, almost without argument, the 25-year-old Rolex Testimonee wears the tag of the "Best Golfer to yet win a Major".

Unfortunately, he carries a couple of other tags on his broad shoulders these days too: The next Seve and, here it comes ... The next Tiger.

The first of these two is unavoidable, ever since he emerged from the Basque region in Spain in 2014 and went 60 weeks as the top-ranked amateur in the world, an all-time record.

Like Jose-Maria Olazabal and Sergio Garcia before him, immediate comparisons were made to the late Severiano Ballesteros, whose charismatic play and five Majors is still talked about in reverential tones all throughout Europe.

Unfortunately for Olazabal (two Majors) and Garcia (one Major), neither climbed the heights Seve reached, leaving young Mr Rahm now squarely in the crosshairs.

Last month's finish as Europe's top player was a good sign, as the only other Spaniard to have achieved that was Seve.

But now, Rahm is expected to take that next step and claim a Ma-

jor, or maybe five?

Looking at his golf trajectory thus far, five does not seem out of the question.

The problem often arises, however, when that silly tag of "The Next Tiger" is somehow added to the mix.

It must be the favourite tactic of the tired golf writer, scrambling to find another way to describe a very good young player.

Look at those who have been called the next Tiger over the years: Garcia, Adam Scott, Rory McIlroy, Jordan Spieth, Dustin Johnson and now Brooks Koepka.

Combined, they have won one fewer than the 15 Majors Tiger owns.

So can we not talk about a "Next Tiger" till someone gets to about 10 Majors and wins about 50 Tour events (Tiger has 82)?

Rahm has enough on his plate already trying to emulate Seve, although the young man admits that Tiger is his ultimate hero.

After beating Tiger in the singles at last year's Ryder Cup, Rahm cried, and later said "Making the putt to beat Tiger Woods, my all-time hero ... man, it was hard."

And it's not going to get any easier for young Mr Rahm.

So my New Year's wish for the hugely talented Spaniard is that he makes that breakthrough to win his first Major in 2020.

And hopefully, after that, for his own sake, no one calls him the Next Tiger.



Rolex Testimonee Rahm with his DP World Tour and Race To Dubai trophies.

photos: Rolex

## BY THE NUMBERS: TIGER WOODS

TOUR VICTORIES

82

MAJOR WINS

15

CONSECUTIVE PGA TOUR WINS

7 (2006-07)

PGA WINS IN ONE YEAR

9 (2000)

CONSECUTIVE EVENTS WITHOUT MISSING THE CUT

142

MOST VICTORIES IN A SINGLE PGA EVENT

8

(ARNOLD PALMER INVITATIONAL & WGC-BRIDGESTONE INVITATIONAL)

MOST CONSECUTIVE SEASONS FINISHING IN TOP 10 ON OFFICIAL MONEY LIST

13 (1997-2009)

CAREER EARNINGS

US\$120,459,468

AGE AT FIRST MAJOR WIN IN 1997

21 YEARS, 3 MONTHS, 14 DAYS

AGE AT 15TH MAJOR WIN IN 2019

43