

Writing Introductions

Americans were transfixed. Tiger Woods somehow limped around the 7,643-yard Torrey Pines Golf Course in the 2008 U.S. Open, with a torn anterior cruciate ligament and a double-stress fracture to his left tibia, grimacing after shots and gnashing his teeth when his legs buckled in mid-swing. At one point, he used his clubs as crutches to climb out of a sand trap.

Yet, Woods was in the lead for most of the third and fourth rounds, pleasing NBC's executives since ratings had increased through the day. Millions were mesmerized by Woods' torturous journey across the San Diego course. The pain proved nearly unbearable during the final nine holes when Tiger lost a three-stroke lead entering the final hole to Rocco Mediate, a veteran golfer who had never won a major tournament. But Woods rallied on the final few holes, moving back to within one stroke. Woods launched his second shot on the 527-yard, par-5 No. 18 to the edge of the green, leaving him a 45-foot putt for eagle and the tournament title. Par would force a tie and an eighteen-hole playoff the following day with Mediate – a bonanza for the United States Golf Association, the Professional Golfers Association, and the TV network.

Fans surrounding the 18th hole green screamed ecstatically as Woods rolled his putt just past the hole. When Woods sank the four-foot birdie to force the playoff, nobody cheered more loudly than United States Golf Association president James Vernon. Tiger's performance would help the USGA earn an extra \$40 million in TV revenues during the five-day event.

PGA commissioner Tim Finchem was also excited. TV ratings, he knew, always spike when Woods has a chance to win. But this kind of a drama, where the world's top-ranked golfer is fighting to survive an injury for a major championship? Epic. The ratings proved him correct. Nearly eight million people watched the U.S. Open, making it the

third highest rated Open in history. Tiger's three-stroke victory at Bethpage, N.Y., six years earlier remains the most highly watched U.S. Open, attracting a whopping 10.75 rating in 2002. The eighteen-hole playoff between Woods and Mediate would be the most-watched cable golf event of all time with 4.8 million viewers – at least, until viewers flocked to watch Tiger return from his exile in the 2010 Master (“2008”). Finchem and Vernon were ecstatic, knowing the ratings would please network executives who would soon bid on new TV contracts. Nobody elevated golf's profile like Tiger Woods.

Nike CEO Phil Knight was equally thrilled. He knew golfers would want the same Nike Method 003 putter Tiger had used, imagining they also would drop 65-foot eagle putts. Tiger's Nike Victory Red Tour driver and Nike Victory Red Blade irons would also be hot items among the roughly 25 million golfers in the United States. The Nike One Tour golf balls would move quickly off the shelves, too. More importantly, casual fans would snap up black Nike swoosh caps and red Nike dry-fit shirts, happy just to identify with the world's best golfer and the most identifiable athlete, a man who was on the verge of becoming the first person to earn one billion dollars from sports, thanks to sponsorships deals with Gillette, Buick, AT&T, Accenture, EA Sports and Rolex.

Many players have contributed to golf's growth through the decades – Walter Hagen, Byron Nelson, Arnie Palmer, Jack Nicklaus, Tom Watson. But none have impacted golf's bottom line like Tiger Woods, something not fully appreciated until after Tiger hobbled off Torrey Pines and out of sight for most of the 2008 season.