

## Ladies & Gentlemen

By: Nathan Crace Date: April 21, 2008

Have you heard who the number one golfer in the world is? That's right, it's Tiger Woods. If you didn't know that, put down the magazine you are holding (or the mouse if you are reading this online) and slowly walk away. You have no business playing golf. But seriously, he has had a lock on the top spot since regaining it from Vijay Singh on June 12, 2005 and has been number one a record 491 weeks (at last count). The second-longest run? Greg Norman at 331 total weeks. Annika Sorenstam gets a raw deal here because the official Rolex rankings for women's golf didn't begin until February of 2006 while the Sony rankings for men has been around since 1986. She held onto the top spot for a record 60 weeks, but surrendered it on April 23, 2007 to Lorena Ochoa who has held it for the past 52 consecutive weeks (as of this writing) and doesn't look like she's ready to relinquish it anytime soon. No telling how long Hogan, Nelson, Snead, Palmer, etc. could have held onto such a designation. But that's a topic for another column.

The point is not that Tiger is number one. The point here is that he may—and I do say “may”—not be the best player in the world *right now*. Some of you think I'm crazy, some of you (the ones who won't play a Nike ball or wear a Nike shirt because Tiger is on their payroll) are encouraged by this statement, some of you may think both, and yet another segment could care less. Again, that last segment may want to put down the magazine and walk away....after you read all of the advertiser's spots first!

My point is that Tiger clearly dominates the game and because he is so athletically gifted, he would naturally be a favorite over Ochoa (or Sorenstam in her pre-injury prime). Which tees the ladies would play from in such a match would of course become a point of contention for pundits on both sides. Side “A” would say that Woods wins only because the ladies had to play from the back tees while on the other end of the proverbial spectrum, Side “B” would say that if Ochoa or Sorenstam were to win, it was only because they did *not* have to play from the same tees. So the point—while it may be moot to some and nearly impossible to prove—does demand further contemplation.

Granted, Ochoa's domination of her sport only just began relatively recently as Sorenstam began to wane slightly. But just as many said of Woods in the early years of his career that it would take time to prove himself worthy of designation in the record books, Ochoa has to provide longevity to her career and continue to buttress it with not only wins, but also major championships. However, Ochoa's play as of late is reminiscent of Woods' domination in 1999-2000 when he lapped the field at the US Open and completed the “Tiger Slam.”

Ochoa is now beginning to spark second thoughts in the minds of her competitors. As of this writing, she has just polished off the Ginn Championship (her fourth win in a row and fifth of the year so far) for her 22<sup>nd</sup> LPGA Tour win. She has won five of the six tournaments in which she has played (batting .833) and finished T8 at four strokes back in the other! Ochoa also holds the LPGA record for the first to win \$4 million in a single season and fastest to win \$10 million in a career. While she only has one major (last year's Women's British Open), she has only recently caught fire since her 2003 rookie year. The one glaring blemish I see is her playoff record where she is only 1 and 5 through last year. Perhaps Tiger has the advantage here because of his extensive match play experience, but Ochoa has begun to eliminate that issue from the equation by routing the field and leaving no sudden death playoff situations to arise.

Add this to the discussion: the LPGA is decidedly more International these days than is the PGA Tour. Half of us cannot correctly pronounce most of the names on the first two pages of an LPGA leaderboard, while the PGA Tour is typically full of American and Anglo-Saxon names. Not that there's anything wrong with that, but I can't be the only person who thinks that at least of couple of the “World Golf Championship” events the guys play should actually be played *in other parts of the world*. You would have a hard time finding anyone more pro-American than I am, but the question of testing one's self against the best players in the world is a valid one when one plays a majority of his events against U.S. players on U.S. soil. Sure there are a number of International players on the U.S. Tour and many contend each week, but out of 18 events this year as of this writing, only 6 international players have won (including two South Africans: Els at the Honda Classic and Immelman at The Masters). Speaking of South Africans, Gary Player used to make a point of traveling the world looking to test himself against the greatest players in the world. Of course, many would respond that the PGA Tour is already THE best place to prove yourself and home to THE best players in the world anyway....at least until the Ryder Cup rolls around.

Nathan Crace is a golf course architect and member of the Golf Writers Assoc. of America 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 his archives, log on to [www.lipouts.com](http://www.lipouts.com) and let him know or email him at [nathan@watermarkgolf.com](mailto:nathan@watermarkgolf.com). Copyright 2008.