

We're Number One!*By: Nathan Crace Date: November 19, 2003*

Deadlines can be a real pain at times. I've got e-mail from publishers and editors wanting my column for the last issue of December and I promised myself I would not write about the PGA Tour's Player of the Year Award. Desperate times call for desperate measures and promises are made to be broken. So now that those two clichés are out of the way, I thought I would dust off the old crystal ball, give it a quick spit shine, and try to dissect the facts, not the emotions. Please remember, I do not encourage investing on the basis of any advice I render in this publication. Here goes:

Depending on where you read it, the media would have us believe there are four or five leading candidates for the award: Tiger Woods, Vijay Singh, Mike Weir, Jim Furyk and Davis Love, III. In reality, it really boils down to Woods and Singh. Sure Weir has the Masters and other wins and I wouldn't hold it against him if he gripes when he gets overlooked, but Singh has the money title and Woods has yet another Vardon Trophy—by almost a quarter of a stroke over Singh. Love is third on the money list, but some may have forgotten the quality of his wins because they came so early in the year. For that matter, what about Kenny Perry? He was the hottest golfer on the planet for a stretch this summer. Furyk finished fourth on the money list with a solid year that may have featured the most consistent play of anyone who only won twice. Of course one of those wins was the US Open. So for the sake of argument and time, we shall contrast and compare Singh and Woods, numbers one and two on the final money list, respectively. Let's dig a little deeper shall we?

To many, the obvious choice would seem to be Tiger Woods. He has grown as accustomed to the Player of the Year award as Michael Jackson has to police raids at the Neverland Ranch. In case you don't remember, in the Year of the Slump, Tiger only managed five wins in far fewer starts than Singh. That's unfortunate, especially considering that poor Tiger couldn't even manage a Major this year—but then again, neither did Singh. In fact, Singh had a good shot at the British on Sunday but disappeared on the final day and stumbled to a closing 79 at the PGA. But don't be too quick to discount Singh's fortitude head-to-head with Tiger in the big four, because a scorecard on the Masters, US Open, British, and PGA for the two reads as follows: Singh (T-6, T-20, T-2, T-34) and Woods (T-15, T-20, T-4, T-39). Singh actually finished better than Woods in all except a tie for 20th at the US Open. So maybe Majors are not such a good litmus test this year.

So show me the money! Singh says the money list is an indication of how good someone plays throughout the year, week in and week out. Of course, he holds the money title so he should say that. Woods disagrees, saying that's it's not just about the money. Of course, he does not hold the money title so he should say that. At any rate, Singh is number one and Woods number two by a scant \$900,494. So let's say, for just a moment, that money does matter. Then what money matters more? Total money or money per event? Woods played just 18 events compared to Singh's 27—that's 50% more! From that perspective, Woods won \$370,745 for each event he played in (not that he won) compared to just \$280,515 for Singh. This in turn brings up the topic of winning percentage. Woods won 5 of 18 events he entered for 28% while Singh won 4 of 27 for 15%. Woods almost doubled him in this statistic.

When the day comes, my money is on Woods. When you look at their head-to-head competition and the wins versus Woods' Vardon Trophy and Singh's money title, it appears to be a virtual tie. And when Woods has already won four straight, a tie should not be good enough to take his fifth straight from him. Maybe someday, the Tour will decide to make Player of the Year more scientific and less emotional and utilize a points system like other sports instead of the players' votes. Of course that would take all of the fun out of it. Lucky for Singh the press doesn't vote on it. If it were up to me, I would give it to Tom Watson. If it's not about the money and it's all about the heart, it was Watson's year. Of course, that's why the Payne Stewart Award should be more coveted than Player of the Year.

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 2003.