

Sports Thursday

Murtagh guides Duke of Marmalade home

Royal Ascot: Page 27



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GOLF NEWS

While Tiger's away the rest of us can make hay



Colin Byrne, caddie to Retief Goosen, hopes Woods will not be absent for too long, but he is determined to make the most of it

I BROUGHT the June gloom of San Diego back to Dublin with me after the US Open and realised that their version of gloom was pretty tame by Irish standards. I

was procrastinating on the first tee as it started to drizzle. When I looked back over the city dark clouds rolled across the darkening skyline and descended upon Bull

Island. My golf was cancelled, I go out in a deluge only if I am being paid for it, not for fun.

I jumped into the car and spent the rest of the afternoon in low gear shunting around the city trying to catch up on a few things.

It was getting gloomier on the static, drenched streets of the city as I listened to the end of Europe as we know it with the No vote post-mortem on the talk-radio shows.

But one person's misfortune can have an uncanny knack of lifting another one's spirits.

Breaking news - Tiger Woods, the world's most dominant player (and if those competing for the

same trophies each week are honest, the most difficult to overcome on the back nine of the final round of any event), is not going to play for the rest of the season.

Yippee, we are all playing for a higher position in every event he was scheduled to play for. The FedEx \$10 million winner's bonus is up for the taking again, more world ranking points, the Open Championship, the PGA, the world events and anything else he was to compete in for the rest of the year have all taken on a new complexion.

Tiger limped around Torrey Pines last week to capture his 14th

major, obviously under physical strain but typically under no mental pressure from either the course or his opponents.

There was a feeling that perhaps in the grand scheme of things the Chosen One was being handicapped with a dodgy knee in order to introduce some equilibrium to the seemingly unbalanced scales when it comes to beating him in a major.

His driver had become both a crutch and a burden as he tacked his way around the demanding 108th US Open venue, often leaning on the offending club.

The wider he hit his driver on Saturday last the better his

position seemed to be. He made an outrageous eagle off a tee shot on the par-five 13th that was wide enough to get the mob's attention in the adjacent beer tents.

Then in true, I suspect, supernatural fashion, he converted a ridiculously fast downhill putt that had more bend on it than an anaconda. Only he could do it. The more we witness this truly unique genius the less it surprises us.

Whatever we may all think about the great one's fortune when he hits an errant tee shot, you cannot question his commitment or execution when it comes to taking advantage of the

rub of the green. He is the living example of golf not being a game of perfect. Although he strives for it in practice, when playing he is inherently aware of the practicalities of keeping a score together. This is what separates him from the rest of the very talented field: his strength of mind and a short game to match.

Of course my initial reaction to Tiger's bad news is not really one of glee, although there is no doubt some players may change their schedule as a result. It is a tragedy for Tiger in his prime to be sidelined with such a career-threatening injury when there is so much brilliance left in

him. Golfers traditionally do not reach their prime till their mid-30s. As we have seen in the past, tournaments without him are proving to be less attractive to an increasingly Tiger-hungry golfing crowd.

Despite the news lifting my spirits temporarily as I crawled through the capital's road impasse, of course we do not want him gone for too long.

I am sure he will use his free time wisely and we all had better take advantage of his absence, because when he returns I have no doubt he will be back with a vengeance and we will all be playing for second place again.

Injury rules Woods out for rest of the year

LAWRENCE DONEGAN

TIGER WOODS, who won a famous US Open victory at Torrey Pines this week despite carrying a knee injury, will not play again this year. The world number one has confirmed the worst fears of those who said he risked more serious injury to his left knee by coming back too early from surgery and has cast doubt on his golfing future.

Woods will now miss next month's British Open at Birkdale, September's Ryder Cup, and the PGA Championship in Detroit in August.

The earliest he is expected to play again is at next January's Buick Invitational, at Torrey Pines, and his next major will be the 2009 Masters.

In a statement Woods said: "I know much was made of my knee throughout the last week, and it was important to me that I disclose my condition publicly at an appropriate time. I wanted to be very respectful of the USPGA and their incredibly hard work, and make sure the focus was on the US Open.

"Now it is clear that the right thing to do is to listen to my doctors, follow through with this surgery, and focus on rehabilitating my knee."

Woods's absence will come as a devastating blow for the Ryder Cup. The biennial event's organisers were depending on his presence to add lustre to the contest between Europe and the United States. Woods has never been a full fan of the event, nor enjoyed much success at it, but he would have been the star attraction.

The absence of the winner of 14 majors will be felt at the British Open at Birkdale, where he finished third in 1998, the last time the tournament was held at the Merseyside course. The Californian would have started the week as a prohibitive favourite to increase his tally as a three-times winner of the Claret Jug.

Woods will also miss a number of PGA tour events, including the lucrative end-of-season FedEx Cup series. Money, however, will be the least of his concerns. Far more worrying will be his long-

term future, especially his prospects of overhauling Jack Nicklaus's record of 18 major championships. At the age of 32, and clearly at the peak of his powers, Woods was expected to surpass his boyhood hero within the next few years, but that is no longer certain.

Woods underwent surgery on his troublesome left knee for a third time after the Masters in April and, after a brief rehabilitation, walked 18 holes for the first time at the US Open. But for his astonishing record at Torrey Pines - he had won there six times in nine attempts on the PGA tour - and his certainty that he could continue his winning streak at a major, it is highly unlikely he would have made the trip.

The gamble paid off, at least in the short term. Not only did he add to his total of major wins, he did so in thrilling fashion, holing countless putts in pressure situations before beating Rocco Mediate in a play-off. "It was the greatest [of my major victories], especially because of everything that has been going on this week," he said.

He was clearly in pain at Torrey Pines and was seen wincing throughout the tournament. Typically, Woods refused to discuss his problem at length, conceding only that the knee was "sore" and the pain had worsened as the week had progressed. Asked if he had injured himself further, Woods would only say "maybe".

Clearly, consultations with his doctors over the past couple of days have removed any such equivocation. It is not clear what medical steps Woods will take - a full statement is expected later today - although there were indications in the US last night that he that he won the season's second major championship with a ruptured anterior cruciate ligament in his left knee and a double stress fracture in his lower leg.

John Daly, in Germany preparing for the International Open, said yesterday: "It is a blow to all the fans who follow him, the sponsors - the money wouldn't be where it is if it wasn't for him. A lot of people don't realise if it wasn't for Tiger we wouldn't be playing for what we are now."

● Guardian Service



Tiger Woods holds on to his left knee after teeing off on the second hole during the fourth round of the US Open championship at Torrey Pines. Woods will miss the rest of the season because the knee injury will require more surgery. - (Photograph: Charlie Riedel/AP)

Casey: 'There were noises coming from Tiger's knee'

ENGLAND'S Paul Casey yesterday threw further light on the nature of Tiger Woods's injury when he said that he spoke to Robert Karlsson's caddie, Gareth Lord, the day after the Swede partnered Woods at Torrey Pines.

"He said there were actually noises coming from Tiger's knee and clearly he was suffering,"

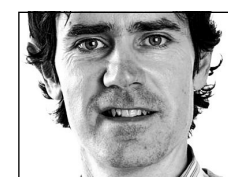
Casey said. "Noises from the knee doesn't sound particularly good to me. He said there was a moment, I think on the 18th, where he stepped up to hit his tee shot and backed off because of weird noises. They all chuckled and he said, 'I shouldn't hit this one too hard.' "He got it in play and made eagle. Amazing."

Meanwhile, the South African Retief Goosen said yesterday he had been joking when he suggested Woods had faked the extent of his knee pain at the US Open. Goosen was reported as saying, "Nobody knows if he (Woods) was just showing off." When asked if he thought Woods might have been faking the extent of his knee pain, he

replied, "I think he was." However, Goosen said yesterday before playing in the International Open pro-am he had not been serious.

"I was joking, really. I mean, how do I know? I never spoke to the guy. He's got a sore knee, yes, and at the end of the day it's a great achievement by Tiger, winning his 14th major."

Complex scenario but full recovery is likely



IAN O'RIORDAN

Reports

DR RAY MORAN had just completed one of his daily anterior cruciate ligament (ACL) surgeries yesterday evening when he heard the news about Tiger Woods. Straight away he realised not only was it the highest-profile injury in golf history but also that the entire sporting world would be wondering if Woods would return after reconstructive surgery as great a player as before.

Moran is medical director of the Sports Surgery Clinic in Santry and performs over 300 cruciate-ligament surgeries a year. He believes Woods won't lose any prowess on the course. There is a small chance of some long-term side-effects, but also the chance he'll come back even better.

"It's an exceedingly rare injury in golf," says Moran, "but what we don't know is how exactly Tiger got it. He has had problems with that left knee going back to 2002. So there was some background problem, which he had been managing but has now come to the fore. And there could be an acute injury in the background as well that we don't know of."

"But we could all see the very dramatic manner in which he was buckling during the US Open at the weekend. That looked like an instability problem. If that is the case, and there's nothing else going on, the ligament reconstruction should work very well for him."

Several elite Irish sportsmen, including Roy Keane, Niall Quinn and more recently Henry Shefflin, have undergone ACL surgery and made a full recovery. The injury is however, more associated with contact or impact sports, and Moran says there are some uncertainties as to the exact nature of

Woods's injury. "He almost certainly didn't damage it as a result of a golfing episode," says Moran. "But then the one thing about Tiger Woods is the ferocity of his turn, which he applies to his knee, and the speed at which he follows through, which probably has no equivalent in professional golf."

"So whether he injured it in golf or another episode, it's more likely to be manifested with him playing golf, because of the way he rotates into his left knee and throws all his weight on that, mainly on his drives. "It's a complex scenario, but if we take it at face value, and it is predominantly a ligament problem, he should do very well. I can't envisage the guy not getting back to full activity. They seem confident enough it is ligament pre-dominant, but you never know."

Moran explains ACL surgery, while not a major operation, is highly specialised. It only takes about an hour, but it's not a repair process, rather a reconstruction, and therefore requires the transfer of tissue. The most common technique is to take a strip of ligament from the knee patellar tendon or lower hamstring and graft it into the knee joint (an autograft); alternatively, ligament from a cadaver can be used (an allograft).

"One of the issues with Tiger is that he's had two surgeries already for cartilage, on the outside of his knee, and that could be a bit of a lingering problem for him. There could be some wear and tear which has been going on for a while. And quite often the ligament isn't the whole story."

"But the success rate is that 90 per cent return to full activity. Usually the ones that don't are those that don't get around to doing the surgery, or aren't able to do it. But it's a predictably successful operation in the majority of cases, once the rehab is right, and that won't be an issue for Tiger."

Woods is still looking at rehab of between six and ninth months: "You can get players back in six months, but there's no real pressure on him to get back earlier. He'll be thinking the US Masters next April, I presume. He won't be rushing back for the Ryder Cup."

RUGBY NEWS

McGahan is handed the task of leading Munster forward

JOHNNY WATTERSON

TONY MCGAHAN yesterday continued the successful relationship Munster have cultivated with Australian coaches over the years. The Munster backs coach for the past three seasons became the second Aussie to take over from Declan Kidney after Alan Gaffney also took over from Kidney in 2002.

McGahan has been confirmed as director of coaching following Kidney's elevation to the Ireland job following the resignation of Eddie O'Sullivan earlier this year.

The appointment has been ratified by the IRFU and McGahan will take up the appointment on July 1st when he returns from holidays in Sydney. "I am delighted to be chosen as

the next Munster director of coaching," he said.

"It is a privilege and a great honour to be asked to lead one of the top clubs and biggest brand names in world rugby. Having been involved with Munster for the past three seasons I fully realise what the expectations of all Munster supporters are. With a solid group of senior players at my disposal plus an exciting batch of young players coming through, a talented management group and strong administration, I hope to continue and fulfill those expectations in the short and long term."

McGahan is seen as a model selection for the European champions as his promotion represents an almost seamless change of command from Kidney. For a reput-

edly tight-knit group like the Munster squad, his familiarity with the players, the ethos and systems also means there will be the least possible disruption all round during the transition.

McGahan is also intimate with the work of fellow Australian and forwards coach Jim Williams, who departed to take up a position with the Australian national side after the Heineken Cup final. Yesterday Munster CEO Garrett Fitzgerald confirmed Williams's place will not be filled until McGahan returns to Ireland to take up his appointment.

The presumption is the new head coach will decide himself which forwards coach best fits the Munster ideal. Married, with twin boys, the

35-year-old arrived to Munster in 2006 as a replacement for Graham Steadman, who left the province when he was appointed by the IRFU to the position of Irish defence coach as part of O'Sullivan's team.

Before that McGahan coached for a season in Japan with professional outfit IBM.

Like Kidney, McGahan is a schoolteacher by profession but unlike the Cork man, he played both rugby union and rugby league. His league career spanned periods with Queensland under-19s, the Australian Universities and the Brisbane Broncos.

In 2003 he was coaching union with the Queensland Schoolboys and Eastern District premier grade before being elevated to

assistant coach of the Australian A team. A year later he took up the job of assistant coach to Queensland A and was coaching co-ordinator for the Australian Under-19 team at the 2004 World Cup.

"I am looking forward to the challenges ahead, both in Magners League and Heineken Cup competitions," he added. "I have enjoyed my time working under Declan Kidney and would like to wish him all the very best in his role with the national side."

Unusually for a coach who has been with a side for less than three full seasons, McGahan has been fortunate enough to be part of a squad that has twice won the Heineken Cup during his tenure. Munster were successful in 2006 shortly after he arrived in

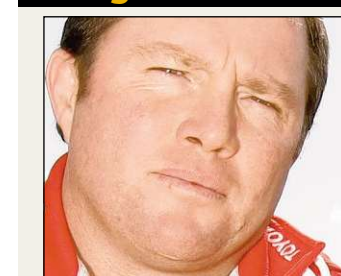
the second half of the season and then again this year, when it was known Kidney would be leaving his post after the final against Toulouse in Cardiff.

While he faces the onerous task of trying to follow in Kidney's successful footsteps, he also has the experience of being centrally involved in the processes of what makes a European Cup-winning side.

Despite the dour nature of the final in the Millennium Stadium, this season Munster also moved from being a forward-dominated side to one where the running back line was one of the most potent in the competition.

"I am very pleased that the process to fill the position has been finalised and done so in such

At a glance Track record



Age: 35
Status: Married
Children: Twin boys
Coaching: IBM Japan; Australia A assistant; Queensland A assistant
Playing: Queensland Schoolboys and Eastern District (Union); Queensland U19 and Brisbane Broncos (League)

an expedient manner," added Fitzgerald.

"Tony McGahan has been involved with us for the past number of years, a period that saw him play an integral part in our Heineken Cup success and consist-

ency in the Magners League. In that time he has displayed all the qualities that we believe are required to keep Munster to the forefront and we wish him well in the challenging times that lie ahead."