

Golf tourism

8

Simon and Louise Hudson

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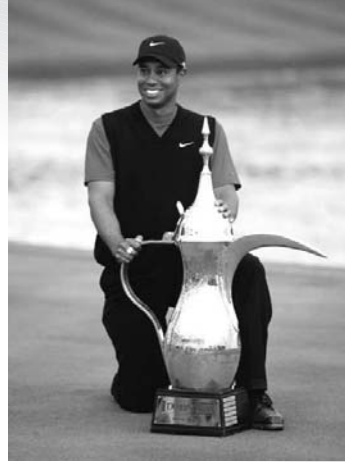
Design and setting by P.K. McBride

8 Golf Events

Spotlight: The draw of Tiger Woods

Tiger Woods after winning the Dubai Desert Classic 2008, courtesy of Tiger Woods Dubai LLC

If anyone doubted the financial and ratings value of Tiger Woods' presence at a tournament, then the slump in viewer numbers and consequent advertising revenue during his forced absence for seven months over 2008/09 proved his unique worth. Ratings fell for TV golf broadcasts and audiences dropped away until his return in February 2009.



Woods had a quicker impact on any sport than any other sporting figure. Following three consecutive US Amateur Golf titles in 1996, he joined the professional PGA Tour. He won his first pro tournament in 1996 just five weeks after joining the tour and won another two weeks later. After being named 1996 PGA Tour Rookie of the Year and *Sports Illustrated's* Sportsman of the Year, he went on to win four events in 1997 and by 1998 was ranked top golfer on the world golf rankings list.

His dramatic success triggered a surge in TV audience numbers. Audiences increased by nearly 14 per cent for weekend golf telecasts in 1997 and CBS recorded increases of nearly 25 per cent. Sunday ratings for CBS's 1997 Masters Tournament were up 55 per cent from the previous year, broadcasting to an estimated 40 million viewers.

The increase in both viewership and mass appeal of golf was exploited immediately by advertisers and sponsors. Both Nike and Titleist signed Woods to endorsement contracts in 1996, followed by American Express and Rolex. He also took an equity position with The Official All-Star Cafe and signed deals with *Golf Digest*, Sportsline and Warner Books. Nike invested the most in Woods and it paid off when sales of golf clothing and footwear doubled in 1997 to an estimated \$120 million. Sales in the first quarter of Woods' connection with the company were up 55 per cent across the company. Researchers have found a direct correlation between Tiger's performance at tournaments and increased profits for Nike.

The 2008 US Open saw record numbers of golf fans – unaware that it would be his last performance of the season due to injury. This was the most watched golf

broadcast in cable TV history to date, beating the 2008 Masters. ESPN and NBC shared coverage of the event and ESPN chalked up a 4.2 rating with over 4 million households tuning in. Results were similar online with ESPN.com recording 5.1 million visits (an increase of 256% from 2007) and 36.7 million page views (up 282%). Woods then missed the rest of the 2008 season due to knee surgery and seven months' recuperation.

During his absence, ratings, viewership, advertising and sponsorship all diminished, emphasizing the correlation between golf's popularity and Tiger's presence. In an article for Multichannel News, sports journalist Larry Barrett anticipated Woods' absence having a significant impact on ratings. 'The Golf Channel has historically seen between and 18% and 30% fall-off in events sans Tiger,' he explained. Woods' return in February 2009 at the WGC-Accenture Match Play Championship in Marana, Arizona, was much heralded by TV networks and media in general. Bookmakers were enthusiastic, too, about his return to the sport – betting increases by 20% when Woods is playing.

When Woods is playing, golf attracts a wider demographic among TV audiences. He was the youngest Masters' champion ever and the first of African or Asian heritage. In 2001 he became the first golfer ever to hold all four major professional championships at the same time – the Masters, PGA Championship, British and US Opens. By 2008 he was top of the career money list as well as being the leader in career victories among active players on the PGA Tour. In an article for Canada's *National Post*, journalist Bruce Arthur compared him to Michael Jordan whose retirement from the NBA in 1998 resulted in a nose-dive in TV ratings. 'In no other sport does one player, one person, so animate his sport,' said Arthur.

In 2009 two Australian states were battling for Woods' presence at their tournaments. The New South Wales government failed to secure his services but he agreed to play in Melbourne for the Australian Masters. Rohan Clarke, writing for *Australian Golf Digest*, said that Woods' fee was believed to be \$3 million but would generate around '\$19 million in economic benefits to Victoria'. He also expected up to 100,000 spectators to be present, including between 10,000 and 20,000 interstate and overseas tourists.

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Chapter extract

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