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Dan Naumovich: It's just golf, right?

STATE JOURNAL-REGISTER

Posted Jul 20, 2008 @ 12:00 AM

Like many of you, I was shocked to hear that Tiger Woods would miss the rest of the season due to a knee injury. Who knew you could get hurt playing golf?

Well, apparently you can; John Daly once injured himself when someone took his picture mid-swing. What's amazing to me is how Tiger's injury sent the sports world into such a tizzy. It's just golf, right?

I have nothing against the game. As a lawn sport, it is every bit the equal of croquet and badminton. It seems a pleasant enough way for people of good character to while away a summer's afternoon out on the green. But this once pastoral pastime is no longer just a recreation; for many, it's become a guys' thing.

As is the case with most guys' things, golf has been transformed into a hard-charging pursuit that fuels man's thirst for competition and receives the highest level of round-the-clock coverage and bombastic commentary that ESPN can offer. While once its purveyors associated in golfing societies, today they gather in sports bars where beer-swilling galoots yell "get in the hole" at the flat screen after every televised swing.

This genteel sport has somehow attracted the blood-thirst of Type-A people who have convinced themselves that it's but a short nine iron from the courses at St. Andrew's to the battlefields of "Braveheart." Men in neatly pressed slacks are considered fierce competitors. Meticulously manicured courses are described as wicked, brutal and unforgiving. Putters are given incendiary names such as Ignite and Backdraft, I suppose so that you can feel the flames of competitive fire while gently tapping at a wee, dimpled ball.

A sportswriter for a national magazine once issued a warning to the field not to raise the ire of Tiger Woods during tournament play. Now, any sports fan could tell you what would happen if an opponent riled up the likes of Bob Gibson, Bill Laimbeer or Bill Romanowski — he'd get a fastball to the chin, an elbow to the thorax, or a loogie through the face mask. But since golf is such a mannerly sport and its byzantine rules seem to prohibit even the issuance of a sidelong glance, I'm left to wonder: How exactly does Tiger strike fear into his opponents? How does one go about being menacing while chipping?

I first realized that golf had become an irrational male obsession, joining hot rods and power tools, when the same sportswriter broke the male species down into two distinct categories: Phil guys and Tiger guys. I'm enough of a guy to know that he was referring to Phil Mickelson, Tiger's sometime rival, not Dr. Phil. But I'm hoping, for my masculinity's sake, that there is a third way here because I'm as disinterested in golf as I am in Carrie Bradshaw's Manolo Blahniks (whatever those are).

I understand that the game is not without appeal. A round of golf on a beautiful course offers an escape from the rigors of daily life. It's a chance to forget about the stress and frustration brought about by work, money and relationships, and instead deal with the stress and frustration over not being able to consistently hit a decent tee shot.

But I will say this about links denizens, at least here locally — a more altruistic group you will not find. During the warmer months, it seems that barely a week will pass without some group taking to the radio airwaves to promote their annual charitable golf outing. I'm assuming the popularity of such events is because golfers can be relied upon to open their hearts, and their wallets, to causes such as Camp Care-A-Lot or the Lincoln Land Down Syndrome Society.

So here's to the golfers. Just calm down and try to be careful out there.

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