



UNDERCOVER TOUR PRO

BEING PAIRED WITH
TIGER: IT'S A CIRCUS,
GOOD AND BAD

It's a strange experience to be followed by 2,500 people and be completely ignored. The crowd only cares for what he does. Except for maybe 15 big names, this is what you have to accept playing in Tiger's group. Spectators are already pushing ahead as you take your stance, and you know the stampede is going to triple in volume the moment your club strikes the ball. You're part of a moving stadium, and people are playing full contact to get in position to watch his next shot. My wife won't go to the course if I'm paired with him. Though she can watch on TV because I'm guaranteed airtime.

As overwhelming as it can be, Big Cat does everything in his power to protect you. He'll never tap in if you have a three-footer. If he did, he knows the crowd would motor to the next tee, and you'd be left to putt in the wake.

If he's away by a small margin on the green, he'll invite you to play first, even if it means you'll be standing in his through-line on the other side of the cup. By no means does he rush you, but he's very aware how his crowd moves, and he looks for ways to shepherd you.

If he drains a bomb, he'll always wait by the edge of the green rather than head to the next tee. I'm not going to name names, but there are a number of marquee players who don't exhibit that courtesy.

Tiger gets a lot of flak for cursing and slamming his clubs. It's true he's got one of the dirtier mouths out here, but next to winning, there's no better feeling than when he lays out some profanity in praise of your shot. "That was hit ----ing solid," or even something more creative. In fact, when it comes to wording compliments with precise recognition of the calibre of the shot just played, Tiger is the best there is. He chats, and then when it's time for you or him to play, he stops. He's perfect. Sergio claiming that Tiger once pulled a headcover early on purpose to excite the crowd was a ridiculous accusation. If Tiger weren't so highly sensitive about managing noise, things like that would happen a dozen times every round.

Certain big stars will turn up their noses at you. Whether it's gamesmanship or they just want to focus, I don't know, but I've been in pairings where the guy didn't say 10 words to me the entire round. The first time I played with Tiger, I shot a thousand. I was a nobody, hadn't won a tournament yet, and he couldn't have been nicer.

The next time I was paired with Tiger, I shot 68 to his 67. The key to playing well with him is to embrace the positives. My favourite benefit is what we call "Tiger Rough". When you've got 2,500 fans on a hole, the rough gets tamped down for you, and depending on its resiliency, maybe the two groups directly behind you. A lot of fans don't realise how much better Tiger's lies typically are when he's off the fairway. It's not much, but it's enough to matter.

You also have to appreciate the chance to see up close what you lack. Tiger has physical attributes I'll never possess, but there are other things that have made him better than everybody else. His attention to detail with shot strategy, his rhythm, how he walks with confidence, and on and on.

In the handful of rounds I've played with him, I've never had the lower score. I hope I get another chance soon. Who cares if he's over the hill? Be a good story to tell my grandkids.

— with Max Adler.