

I had a column all typed up, finished, ready to be published. And then I scrapped the whole thing a day before deadline.

Why? Because Tiger Woods won his first tournament since 2009.

Is Tiger back? I don't know. Is Tiger back in conversation around the water cooler? Definitely.

I play pick-up basketball with a regular crew on Sunday mornings. When I show up, I say "hey," to everyone, then I start warming up, wondering how my knees will feel after two hours of running.

This particular Sunday when I arrived, the guys were all talking about Tiger. I heard one of my friends on the court say, "I bet it'd be good for Seth's business, too." I took my mind off my knees to give a quick "huh?" My friend, who also works in the golf industry, repeated that he thought a Tiger win could help business for both of us. To which I agreed.

I started shooting three-pointers (every big man openly wants to be a shooting guard) as the conversation continued. It went from Tiger and his chances that day... to who has played already this year... to where they played... and with whom... before ending on a debate over who the best golfer we collectively knew was. (No argument was made for Seth Jones.)

And by then it was time to shoot for teams.

Some people scoff at Tiger's impact on the sport. They argue that golf was here long before Tiger, and it'll be here long after Tiger. And that's true. But look at the bottom of page 4 of this issue, at the number of courses that have closed since 2005. Almost 400 courses! And consider that for a time, Tiger Woods was the most popular athlete on the planet. Having the most popular athlete of any sport be an American golfer was a huge benefit to this nation's golf industry. It increased golf's visibility every weekend.

At last year's *Golfdom* Summit, we conducted a survey with all the attendees. One of the questions was, "What kind of a year do you think Tiger Woods will have in 2012?" I think Mark Burchfield, superintendent at the

## A Good Start for Tiger and Golf

BY SETH JONES



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Victoria Club in Riverside, Calif., hit the nail on the head when he answered, "I'd like to see him have a great year. We need Tiger Woods for golf. The best years that I can remember in the industry is when he was doing great. Our industry needs that. We've all gone through a lot in the last few years... I think it's been somewhat to do with the exposure of golf, and Tiger is a part of that."

Consider this — my regular hoops game takes place a mere seven miles from Kansas University. The Sunday that this conversation was taking place was the same day that the Jayhawks were to play an Elite Eight game against North Carolina, which is coached by KU's old coach, Roy Williams.

Ten out of ten guys on that court either went to KU or lived in Lawrence, Kan. And yet the conversation wasn't about the Jayhawks' chances against the Tar Heels. It was about Tiger's chances to win that day... and it was about golf.

Sure enough my knees felt terrible by the end of the run. A few Aleve afterwards took away the ache. As I sat and rehydrated during the KU game, I kept flipping over to NBC to check on Tiger. I was thrilled to see he won.

So far this year a lot of the country has experienced unusually warm weather, luring golfers out of hibernation early. Those of us who attended the Golf Industry Show enjoyed one of the very best shows in years — I know for me personally, it was my best GIS ever. And now Tiger is catching the eyes of the sporting public again, and for a good reason.

It's a good start to 2012 for Tiger. It's also a good start for golf in general. Let's hope both keep up.

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