

Living beyond everyone else's reach is Tiger Woods's way. On tour, he dominates; off the course, he disappears into his own private world. In his first extensive interview in years, Woods allows himself to be who he really is. By David Owen



inside



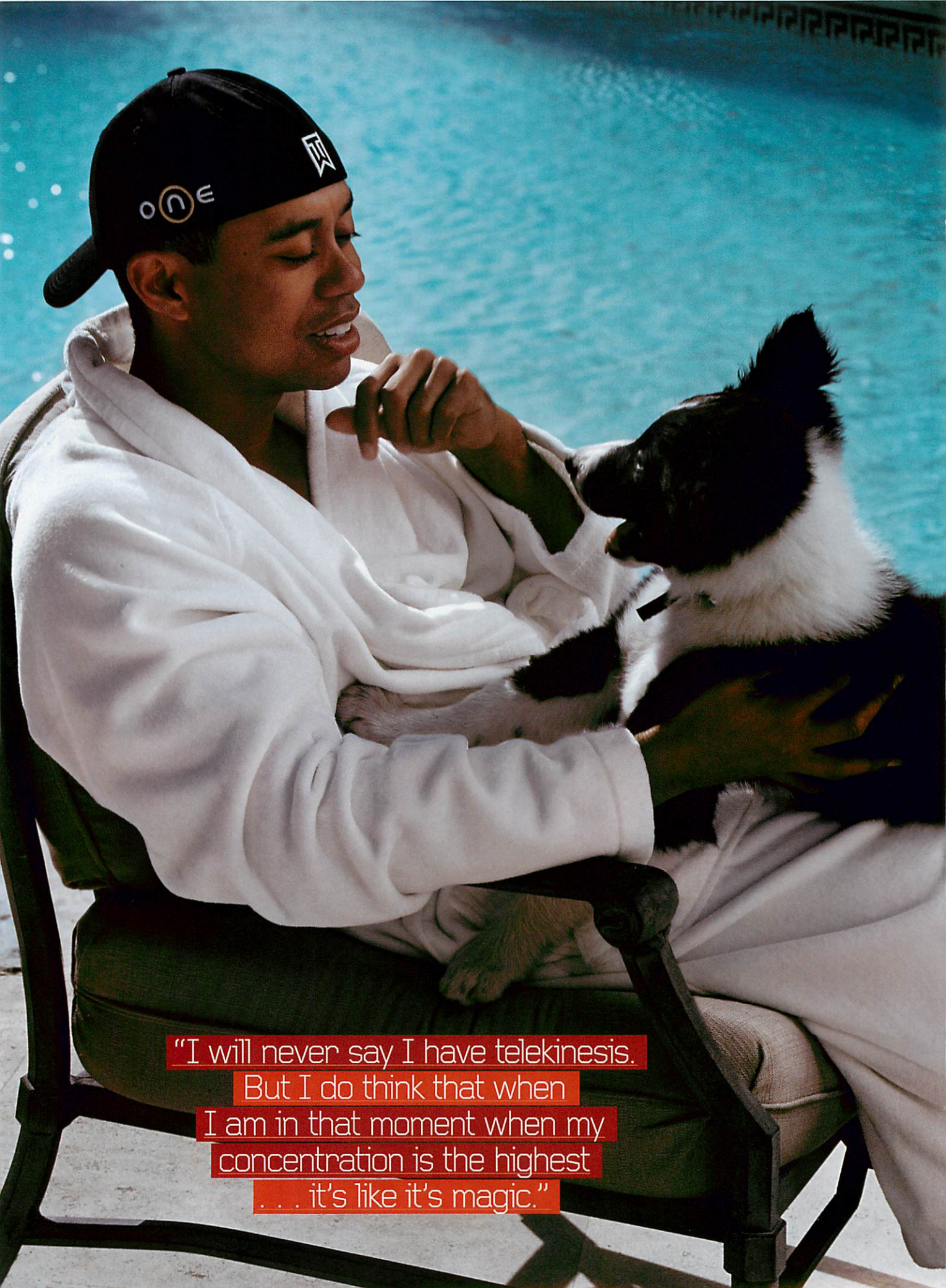
## TOP SPEED

Woods takes the helm of a jet ski near his home in Windermere, Florida. Prada gray wool suit (\$2,370) and poplin shirt (\$355); (888) 977-1900, for stores. Brooks Brothers tie. TAG Heuer Link Automatic GMT watch.

# the lair

Photographed by Annie Leibovitz






"I will never say I have telekinesis.

But I do think that when  
I am in that moment when my  
concentration is the highest  
... it's like it's magic."





**T**HE CANADIAN GOLFER MIKE WEIR, who won the 2003 Masters and is one of the 50 or so best players in the world, was in Los Angeles recently, playing a round at Riviera Country Club with Tiger Woods. On the first hole, he hit a spectator with his drive—"Sent him right down," Weir said later—and on the second hole he made a quadruple bogey. On the third, he hit a weak drive, and Woods said, not quite under his breath, "Snipe!" When Weir reached the ninth tee, he was eleven over par, a dreadful performance. Woods said, "You see your score there, Weirsy—42 for eight holes? Guys who are pros at this game shoot that for eighteen."

The game wasn't golf, exactly. Weir was playing "Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2006," a video game. He had never tried it before, even though it includes a Mike Weir character, so he was being coached by Woods and several other veteran gamers. They were standing near a television monitor on a soundstage at Sony Pictures Studios, in Culver City, where they had come to shoot motion-capture footage for next year's edition.

Weir held out the controller and said, "Let's see you do it." Woods, playing as Weir, hit a crisp iron shot, then said, "Get up! Get up!" The real Weir was impressed: "You can tell it's going to be short, huh?" Woods knew Weir's electronic swing almost as well as he knows his own real one: The ball did, indeed, land short of the green. Weir said, "Tiger doesn't have any kids, so he has time to play these games." Woods misread the green, made a bogey,

and said, "It's all right. I'm not like Weirsy, over there. I'll take my five and get out of here."

In real life, Weir has a distinctive waggle, or practice semi-swing, and his video-game avatar does a decent imitation. Woods said, "Look, they've got Weirsy's setup, too—doing the thing with his shirt." Woods made a couple of quick adjustments to his shirtfront, and everyone laughed. He has always been a close observer of his rivals, any one of whom might suddenly step between him and destiny on a Sunday afternoon. He also has an acute awareness of, and control over, his own body, an elevated physical aptitude, which not only helps him play golf better than anyone else but also makes him a skillful mimic. In fact, Woods has always learned by imitation: He took his first swing after observing his father from his high chair, and his golf game today is a sort of *Norton Anthology* of the defining capabilities of the best players in history. When he learned to ski, a little over a year ago, he did it not by taking lessons but by studying his wife, Elin—who is from Sweden and grew up on skis—and various friends from high school and college. He followed them down increasingly difficult slopes, turned when they turned, and observed them from behind until he could feel the rhythm for himself.

Weir took back the controller, and Woods was summoned to another part of the soundstage so that two technicians from Electronic Arts, the game's publisher, could affix 88 BB-size motion-capture reflectors, called markers, to his face, neck, and upper chest. He took off his maroon Nike golf shirt and selected a gray sleeveless T-shirt from a wardrobe rack. Woods has an impressive physique, which

#### A LEG UP

Woods and his Border collie puppy, Taz, a Christmas present the golfer and his wife gave to themselves. Armani/Casa Pilar beach bathrobe, \$198; Armani/Casa, NYC, (212) 334-1271. Nike cap.



he began to carve a dozen years ago, when he was a freshman at Stanford. He usually wears a knit cap in the gym, mainly to hold his iPod headphones in place, and when he runs he listens to his Nano, on which he has a slightly mellower program. His resting heart rate is 52 or 53 when he's in tournament condition, somewhat higher when he's not. He can lower his pulse consciously, and can hold his breath underwater for four minutes—two tricks that he learned for free diving, a new passion.

As Woods put on the sleeveless T-shirt, he noticed another on the rack, an extremely small one, perhaps meant for a petite woman, and had an idea: It would be funny, he decided, to trick Weir into wearing the tiny shirt, get a photographer to surreptitiously take a picture of him in it, give a print to a child in the gallery at some future tournament, and have the child (with Woods watching) ask Weir to autograph it.

Woods looked over his shoulder to make sure that Weir wasn't nearby and said to the technicians, "You guys have to help me out on this. Tell him that it has to be as tight as possible—almost so it hurts."

One of the technicians suggested, "The nipple markers move better when it's tight?"

Woods beamed. "Exactly!"

Almost a full decade has passed since awkward, still-skinny 20-year-old Tiger Woods announced that he had decided to drop out of college and turn pro. What happened next feels like myth—and Woods's best playing years may be ahead of him. When Ben Hogan was Woods's age, he wasn't even Ben Hogan yet, since he didn't win the first of his nine major titles until 1948, when he was five years older than Woods is now.

From childhood, Woods has focused on the career of Jack Nicklaus; nine seasons out, he is well ahead of plan. Nicklaus had won seven majors by the time he turned 30; Woods, who turned 30 this past December, had won ten. And Woods had more PGA Tour victories overall, 46 versus Nicklaus's 30, despite having entered fewer events. The sports psychologist Bob Rotella told me recently that he had begun to wonder whether Woods had set his career goals high enough.

Actually, we don't know what Woods's true aspirations are. "Besting Nicklaus" may only be a metaphor—Woods's way of making his private motivation comprehensible to fans. We probably understand more about his approach to competitive golf than we do about any other great player's in history, but that doesn't mean he tells us everything. For all his willingness to describe his experience on tour, Woods at the apex of his powers has always been, and will always be, beyond our reach.

Woods has a reputation for remorselessly dismissing employees and colleagues who are less than fully committed to Team Tiger. This reputation is, by all accounts, deserved—among those who have stepped aside are his original agent, Hughes Norton; his original caddie, Fluff Cowan; and his longtime swing coach Butch Harmon—but its source is intense determination, not megalomania. Woods is deferential and cheerful in his business dealings, and he arrives on time, follows instructions, and doesn't complain. At the video-game shoot one of his professional commitments was to spend a half-hour chatting with Edward Barry-Walsh, a seventeen-year-old English boy (and four-handicap) who, as

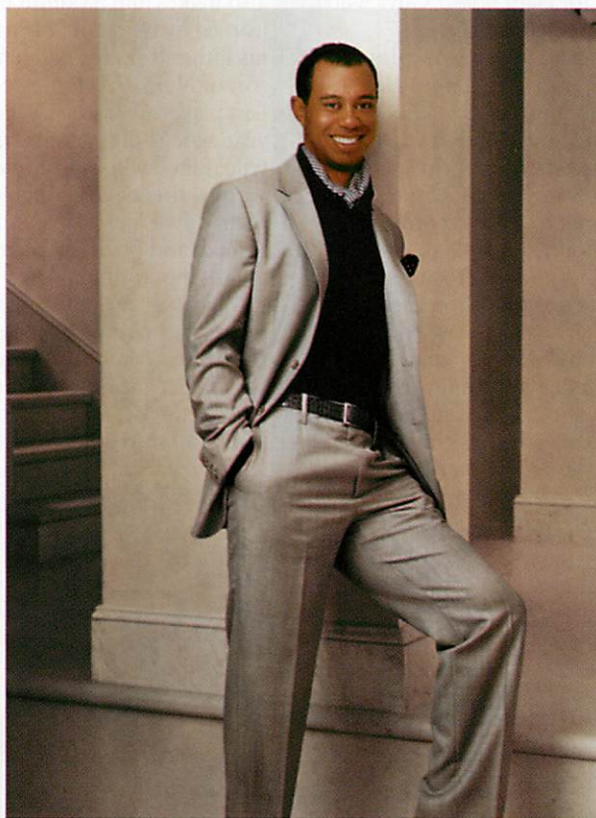
a result of winning a contest sponsored by Electronic Arts, was going to be included as a character in "Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2007." Woods sat next to him on a couch, thoughtfully answered a long list of questions, posed for photographs with him and his parents, discussed the proper technique for hitting lob shots over living-room furniture, looked ahead to the day when Barry-Walsh would be "out there kicking my butt," and gave no indication whatsoever that he was keeping track of the time. When their conversation was over, Barry-Walsh told me that the experience had far exceeded his expectations, and marveled, "He's just such a down-to-earth bloke."

Later, as motion-capture markers were being glued to his eyelids, Woods amiably conversed about his eyesight, which was horrendous before 1999, when he underwent Lasik surgery (following his agent, who

played a medical role similar to that of a royal food taster). Before the surgery, Woods's doctor couldn't use a standard eye chart even to approximate the severity of his myopia, and instead employed a method that ophthalmologists call the Count Fingers test: Woods could tell how many fingers the doctor was holding up only if the fingers were within a foot of his face. This extreme nearsightedness gave him an unusual view of his Lasik surgery. "When they sliced my

flap and laid it open," he told me, "I could see the hole, like a manhole cover. That's something that's true for only a very few people, who are supernearsighted." After the procedure, the doctor casually asked him what time it was. "I glanced up at the clock and told him, and then, like, a split second later, I freaked out, because I had never seen a clock before—ever—not even the one next to the bed. Now my vision is 20/15."

Woods has already made so much money that he could drop all his business obligations and not notice

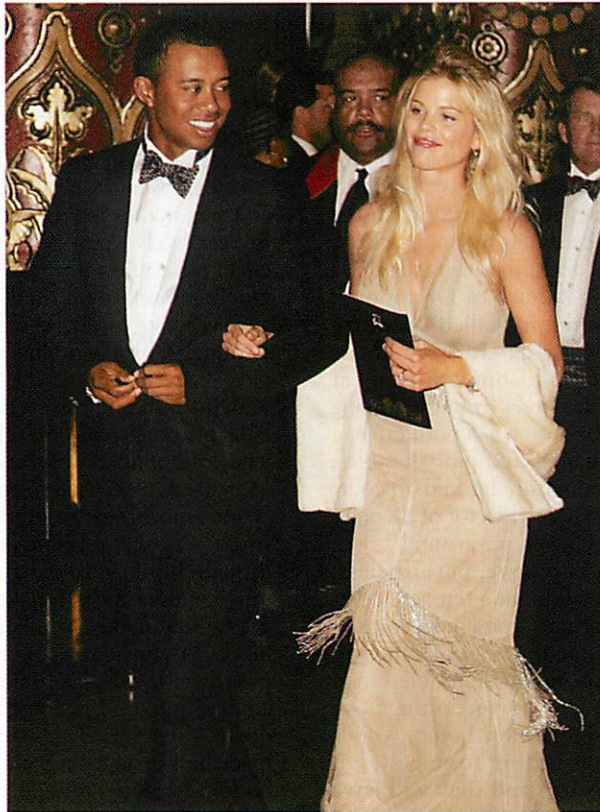


## STANDING ALONE

Some think Woods's goal to surpass Nicklaus isn't high enough for the amount of talent he has. Dolce & Gabbana wool suit, \$1,250; [877] 70-DGUSA. Brioni sweater, \$425; brioni.com. Gucci ascot. Charvet pocket square. Cole Haan Collection belt.



the difference, financially, so when he takes on a non-golf commitment it's because he wants to be involved. He enjoys competing in the marketplace almost as much as he enjoys competing on a golf course—he wasn't just doodling in his notebook during his economics lectures at Stanford—and he likes the fact that business challenges are intellectual and creative, rather than physical. A representative from Electronic Arts told me that Woods closely follows the sales of his video game (which is the number-one golf game in the world). Recently, I mentioned to him that I had sometimes wondered why the popularity of Nicklaus and Palmer had never seemed to translate into sales of golf clubs with their names on them—only one of my regular golf buddies has ever owned a piece of Nicklaus-branded golf equipment, and it was a bag—and Woods said, “Throughout golf history, signature hard goods haven't done very well. There's a stigma, maybe because people think, This is what he plays, so I can't play it. We struggled with that on the Nike side, when I first played the Nike golf ball. The only category that has done remotely well, historically, is signature wedges, for some reason.” (So much for the idea that he does nothing but hit range balls.) Woods has been deeply involved in his Nike sportswear line, which is called the Tiger Woods Collection and which he hopes to expand significantly in coming years. He takes part in everything from product design to marketing, and he pushed for a coming extension beyond golf shoes and apparel. The line is currently a small player in a crowded field, but, as you might expect, he has serious ambitions.



## TWOSOME

Woods and his wife, Elin, at a dinner for the 35th Ryder Cup Matches, September 2004. He considers his marriage one of his life's greatest achievements.

**W**oods's motion-capture session—which involved a long list of golf-specific facial expressions and spoken phrases, and lasted almost two hours—was directed by Robert Luketic, a Hollywood veteran. When it was over, Luketic said, “Man, that was good. I want to talk about a big Hollywood role. Your agent's got the contract and the script.”

Woods said, “No, I want a green coat, not that other thing.”

“You want a what?”

“A green coat. It's what you get when you win the Masters.”

Luketic shook his head. “I've met everybody in Holly-

wood,” he said, “and I've been more intimidated meeting you than anyone else. I didn't sleep all night last night.”

“Because you were out all night,” Woods said, smiling.

Luketic said, “Tiger Woods is so Zen. You just watch this man who's in control, and I'm, like—I'm a mess, I'm a director, I'm shouting and going crazy.”

“We do that, too,” Woods said. “We just do it internally. It's like playing poker.”

“Well, it's been a pleasure and an honor.”

“Now can I go to the bathroom?”

Edward Barry-Walsh, during his conversation on the couch with Woods, asked “What's the biggest thing you've had to sacrifice for your golf?” and Woods said, “Anonymity.” One reason he loves diving is that “the fish don't know who I am” (a condition that may change, given his enthusiasm for underwater hunting, or “slinging steel,” as he calls it). He named his yacht *Privacy*—and in 2004 he sued the company that built it, Christensen Shipyards, for violating a confidentiality agreement by providing photographs and other details to the press.

Woods's fans have calmed down quite a bit since the early days, and, to the extent that his highly abnormal situation permits it, he tries to live a normal life. He and Elin go to movies, eat in restaurants, and shop at the grocery store, and Elin is taking night classes at Rollins College. (She told me that she is planning to major in psychology.) Woods still keeps up with childhood friends, whom he refers to as “my boys”; this past year, having noticed that most of them were thickening around the middle, he decided that each of them should give up one unhealthy thing—fries, Cokes, ice cream—until the Masters. (Woods himself gave up Starbucks decaf hazelnut lattes.) He still receives extra security at golf tournaments, but he doesn't have a bodyguard or an entourage, and he does all his own driving and pumps his own gas.

Of course, if you are Tiger Woods there are limits to normality. His densely scheduled calendar has four seasons: Masters, U.S. Open, British Open, and PGA Championship. I once traveled for a week with a group of itinerant circus performers, who seldom spent three nights in the same place and measured time geographically. The past, for them, wasn't “last week,” it was “two towns ago.” Woods, similarly, measures time in tournaments. “Elin and I met at British Open of 2001. We started going out at Target World, and she moved in at Bay Hill of '02.” They were married, in Barbados, two days after Amex of '04. When they met, Elin, who is four years younger, was working as



a nanny for the Swedish golfer Jesper Parnevik, so she had seen the life of a PGA Tour player through eyes unclouded by romance, and therefore had some idea of what she was getting into. (She also knows about crowd control; her mother, who is a Swedish government official, has a bodyguard.) Tiger told me that he views their marriage as one of the proudest achievements of his life; it is now the foundation of his happiness. He and Elin, like all newlyweds, are still learning about each other's inner lives. Recently, Elin overheard her husband's workout music program playing through a boom box, and she looked up in mild horror and said, "Tiger has New Kids on the Block on his iPod?"

**T**his past Christmas, Tiger and Elin acquired a puppy—traditionally, a young couple's practice swing for a baby. The puppy is a Border collie, named Taz, short for Tasmanian Devil, and Tiger is as preoccupied as a new father. He has a picture of Taz on his cell phone, refers to himself as "Daddy," and took time out to roll around on the floor of his office when he was already running late. He and Elin are raising Taz in Windermere, a suburb of Orlando, in a gated golf community called Isleworth Country Club. Their house—Florida stucco, red tile roof—is relatively modest in comparison with many at Isleworth, and is directly across the street from the driving range. The men's grill in the clubhouse has a pool table, a Ping-Pong table, various video games and pinball tables, an indoor putting green, and a miniature basketball court with a regulation-height hoop. "There are a lot of divorces at Isleworth," Woods said as he showed me around.

He was joking—but he and Elin have, nevertheless, decided to move. In January, they bought a ten-acre compound on Jupiter Island, off Florida's east coast, for \$38 million, a small price, perhaps, for the man whom *Golf Digest* predicts will become sports' first billion-dollar man in 2010. The property is a semi-teardown, so the move won't take place immediately. In their new home, Woods told me, he will be a few minutes farther from golf, but he and Elin will have more privacy, and they will have frontage on both the Atlantic Ocean and the Intracoastal Waterway, a major appeal for both of them.

The thought of Woods having easier access to spearfishing makes his agent as nervous as the parent of a new driver, but Woods himself is unconcerned. "You can't live your life that way," he said, when I asked him whether he didn't worry about sustaining a golf-threatening injury, either swimming

without scuba tanks 100 feet underwater or following his wife down a double black diamond ski slope. And he doesn't live that way. (He also drives a little bit too fast, in my middle-aged opinion.)

Almost all of us, when we think about Tiger Woods—or any other genius, in whatever field—are susceptible to what might be thought of as the Everyman Fallacy: the tendency to interpret the great in terms of our own experience. If we ourselves were worth several hundred million dollars, were married to a beautiful Swedish former model, and owned our own airplane and our own yacht, we wouldn't be very interested in working on bunker shots anymore, so we figure that Woods's ardor for competition must be cooling, too. Repeatedly, TV commentators, sportswriters, golf fans, and other professional golfers have expressed doubts about his ability to maintain his focus; repeatedly, Woods has proven everybody wrong. The lesson is probably that if Tiger Woods thought the way the rest of us do he wouldn't be Tiger Woods, so we might as well stop trying to figure him out.

If there is a graspable key to Woods, it may be this: Everything makes him better. When he was eight, he learned to beat twelve-year-olds by turning his weakness into an edge: He couldn't hit the ball as far as they could, so he taught himself to outthink them. When he got a little older and was long and wild off the tee, he made inaccuracy an advantage, by assembling what has become the most complete recovery game in the history of golf. (As a boy, playing with his father in the evenings, Woods would throw three balls into the trees on each hole, setting himself the challenge of holing all three in cumulative even par or better.) Married players used to complain that bachelorhood gave Woods more time to practice, and they were right: Being single was one of his advantages. Now that he's married, though, his edge is being married, and when he and Elin have children he will make fatherhood an advantage, too. Everything makes him better. His parents were crucial to his development as a golfer—his father, who is in extremely poor health, was his first teacher and his favorite playing companion, and his mother encouraged his competitive desire—but every major step he made toward independence made him stronger as a player. His mind is like one of those bottom-weighted roly-poly toys that right themselves if you tip them over. Last year, he asked Electronic Arts to reshoot his swing for next year's edition of his video game because he had changed his technique. He wanted to keep the game up to date, he said, but he also wanted to compare the new motion-capture data with the old: He believed that studying his video game could make him better.

All this goes several levels (*continued on page 206*)





A man in a gray suit is captured in a dynamic, mid-air pose as if running or leaping over a concrete ledge. He is wearing a light-colored, textured suit jacket and matching trousers, a white shirt, and a dark tie with diagonal stripes. A pink pocket square is visible in his jacket. He is wearing dark brown oxford shoes. The background consists of a lush green lawn and dense foliage under bright, natural light. The overall mood is one of energy and determination.

## TIGER BY THE TAIL

Woods may have a reputation for being ruthless with the competition, but he is surprisingly easygoing in person. Hermès gray Prince of Wales suit, \$3,400; (800) 441-4488. Prada white shirt, \$355; Prada boutiques. Brooks Brothers tie. Pantherella socks. Cole Haan brown oxfords. Details, see In This Issue.

Sittings Editor:  
Alexandra Kotur.  
Fashion Editor:  
Tonne Goodman.

"I am willing to fall, but I am going to get back up. I may take a step back, but in the end I'm going to take a giant leap forward."



## INSIDE THE LAIR

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beyond positive thinking. At the 2005 Masters, Woods led by two strokes with two holes to play. He then made two consecutive bogeys, something he never does, and ended up in a playoff with Chris DiMarco. I told him that on those two holes he had looked kind of shaky, and he said, "I totally was." But then, he said, he had composed himself. The year before, Augusta National had introduced a new sudden-death playoff format, in which tied players would first replay the eighteenth hole, after being returned to the tee in golf carts. "The cart ride was great," Woods told me, "because it gave me time. I was telling myself, You had a chance to win the Masters and you didn't do it, but you know what the beauty of this thing is? You've got another shot."

Most golfers, at that point, would have been fretting about lost opportunities—I just threw away a green jacket! And on national TV!—but Woods, by the time he reached the tee, had reinterpreted his mini-collapse as a blessing: Instead of just one chance to win the Masters that year, he had been given two, and how cool was that? "I kept saying to myself, It wasn't like you were two back. If you had been in Chris's position and gone bogey-bogey, you never would have had this opportunity, so let's just see if we can get this thing done." Golf fans are sometimes taken aback by Woods's intensity on a golf course, as when he curses himself after hitting a shot barely distinguishable from perfection, but such moments are actually few and brief, and over the course of an entire tournament no player is better at managing his emotions. (Woods's concentration often seems to be made of the same stuff as the liquid-metal cyborg in *Terminator 2*: If you break it, it re-forms.) At the Masters, he hit his approach shot to fifteen feet, sank the putt for birdie, and won the tournament.

One of Woods's many staggering talents is his ability to hit the shot that matters, at the moment it matters the most. He's done it so often that there can't have been many people watching who didn't simply assume that he was going to sink that fifteen-footer. (This may be the one situation in which you and I are able to think the way he does: Like him, we have no doubt that his ball is going to go in.) People sometimes say he has the ability to will the ball into the hole.

"I guess the best way to describe it," he said, "is that it's the only thing

that's going to happen. The ball has absolutely no options: It will go in. I wish I could feel that way all the time, but it only happens, I think, when my concentration is at its absolute peak, and usually that's toward the end of the tournament, when everything is on the line, all my adrenaline is pumping, I'm in the flow of the tournament, and everything is riding on a certain shot. I have what I would describe as a black-out moment, where I don't remember, later, actually performing it. Like the putt I made at the 2000 PGA to get into a playoff with Bob May. I remember lining it up. I remember walking into the putt. I remember seeing the ball about six inches short of the hole, breaking in to the left edge—and that's all I remember."

Woods has practiced every element of his game so thoroughly that he seems to be able, in pressure situations, to switch off the conscious parts of his brain, and execute the shot without interference from his anxieties. "I will never say that I have telekinesis," he said. "But I do think that when I am in that moment when my concentration is the highest, when it's at its peak, I see things more clearly, and things happen slower. And I think they happen easier. When that moment happens, it's like it's magic. I wish I could be down the stretch in a major championship every week, because it's the calmest I ever feel."

Other great athletes share something like this ability. Think of Michael Jordan in the final seconds of a playoff game, or Wayne Gretzky with a Stanley Cup on the line, or Roger Federer in a tight match. Woods knows all three, and I asked him if he had ever discussed this subject with them. "Sometimes," he said. "Not like this, though. Usually it's, Hey, man, that was awesome what you did." He laughed. "But you don't really need to go in depth with those guys. You have this really weird sense that they know that you know, and you know that they know, and it's kind of—mmm, it's just a great feeling, because you can't describe it to anyone else. But we don't have to describe it to each other, because we all have an understanding."

Twice during his professional career, Woods has given his fans palpitations by deciding that the best golf swing in the world was no longer good enough for him and undertaking a renovation. In each case, the changes led to a lengthy period during which he won no tournaments at all, as he worked to make the new motions automatic. I

asked him why he hadn't been scared to tamper with success.

"I have a big-picture outlook," he said. "I am willing to fall, and I understand that it's OK to fall, but I am going to get back up. I may take a step back, but in the end I am going to take a giant leap forward."

It may actually be this—indifference to failure, rather than obsession with success—that distinguishes great athletes from good ones. Tiger Woods, like Roger Federer, can make the shot that matters because he knows, long before he tries it, that he can live with the miss.

"You have to come to grips with it, truly deep down," Woods said. "If you don't, if you second-guess yourself, you are not going to have the success that you want. You may have to put up with a lot of questioning from others, who don't quite understand—but, quite frankly, they don't have to understand, because it all comes from within. That's what it is for me, anyway: a belief that, in the end, I will be a better player." □

## STUFFED ANIMALS

(continued from page 197)

American foie gras farms. In July 2005, delegates presented their arguments on both the original resolution and a compromise version, apparently approved by an animal-rights representative. One opponent of tube-feeding who had made the farm visit conceded that the birds were not in distress or pain, that, although obese, they could still walk, and that they were better cared for than most chickens raised for food. But he still concluded that this was "not a good use of these animals." When a vote was taken, both ban resolutions were overwhelmingly defeated. Some delegates were influenced by the argument that if the organization disapproved tube-feeding, who knew what might follow? Why, next year they might condemn the confinement of veal calves, or the batteries of small, mechanized cages in which egg-laying hens are kept for their entire adulthood. Not a bad idea.

Well, there it is. The scientific evidence is pretty much unanimous in not condemning foie gras, but the evidence is still limited. So, though it seems unnecessary to stop eating foie gras altogether, the data is not unambiguous enough to encourage unbridled gorging. For now, the most sensible policy is to eat just a little of this sublime and ancient delicacy. Which is what most of us are doing already. □