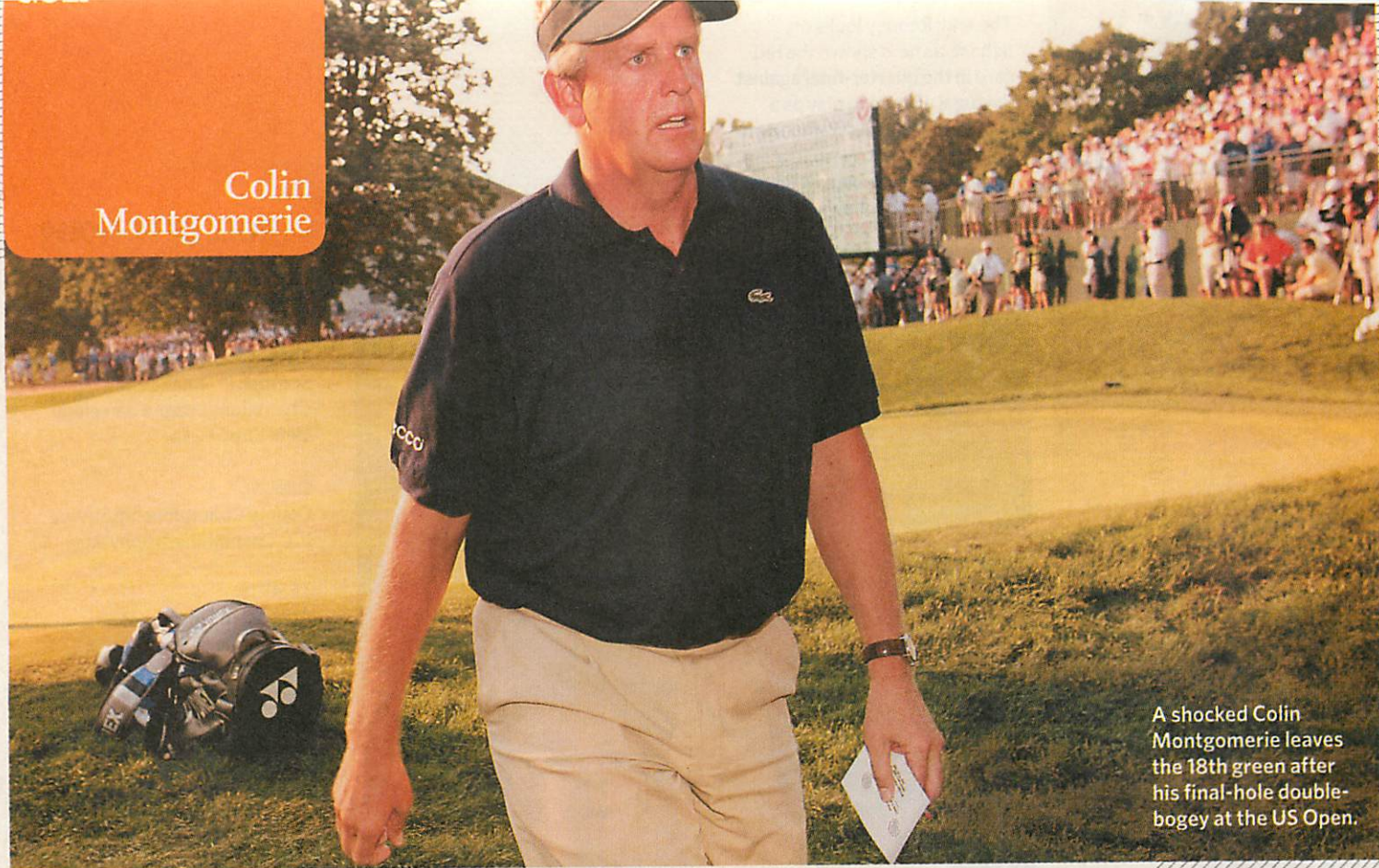


Colin  
Montgomerie



A shocked Colin Montgomerie leaves the 18th green after his final-hole double-bogey at the US Open.

# That sinking feeling

Yet again Monty's nerve failed at the last in a major, but for **David Owen** those heartbreaks prove the Scot is human. Tiger Woods can seem superhuman – but not always, recalls **Sebastian Faulks** (right)

**C**olin Montgomerie sank a long birdie putt on the 71st hole of the 2006 US Open at Winged Foot, giving him a one-stroke lead with one hole to play, and it was time to shoo small children away from the TV. He then hit a gorgeous drive, long and up the centre of the fairway, and old women began to wail. Tragedy was unspooling on the television screen and the instinct of the sensitive viewer was to turn away. Too much was riding on his next shot for Montgomerie to pull it off.

Monty had come close to winning majors before and he had come close to winning American tour events, but both of those achievements had eluded him, making him, easily, the best golfer in the world who had never won anything that American golf fans care about, aside from his brilliant Ryder Cup matches. Now, from a

perfect lie, 170 yards from a flag that perfectly favoured his favourite left-to-right shot, he had a chance to exorcise his demons with a stroke. Inevitably – inevitably – he hit it fat. His ball landed 20 yards short of the hole and 10 yards to the right of the fairway, and it buried itself in grass that might as well have been furze. No one knows what happened next, because no one could bear to watch. According to the newspapers, he made a double-bogey and finished in a three-way tie for second, his third runner-up finish in the US Open, his fifth in a major.

Shortly before the tournament, the devil appeared to Australian Geoff Ogilvy, the eventual champion, and said: 'You'll win if Tiger Woods misses the cut, and David Duval is in contention after 36 holes, and Phil Mickelson makes a mental error that your mother would have avoided, and Colin Montgomerie coughs it up on

the final hole.' And Ogilvy thought: 'Monty choke at the US Open? Maybe I've got a chance.'

To tease Montgomerie for carrying his burdens so far, only to drop them on the threshold, is inexcusable, of course. Yet Montgomerie somehow brings out the bully, not only in bullies but also in otherwise decent people – or, at least, in otherwise decent Americans, who call him Mrs Doubtfire and Tuna, and sometimes shout unkind things at him when he's playing golf. Somehow, he asks for it, maybe by seeming to care too much about the things that people shout.

If only Monty had flubbed his final drive. That would have crushed his hopes and taken the pressure off – the bad shot would already have been on the table – and then, while everyone was running to see what Mickelson was up to, he could have

hit a brilliant recovery shot to six feet and made the putt, winning by a couple. Just Monty's luck to play the brilliant shot first, when it could only tighten the noose.

Sports fans assume that winners win because they have 'character'; actually, something like the opposite is true. Being the best in the world requires, among other things, impenetrable narcissism and an ability to smother the weaknesses that make humans human: sympathy, compassion, generosity, the throat-tightening fear that you might chunk your seven-iron on the 72nd hole of the US Open with a chance to win.

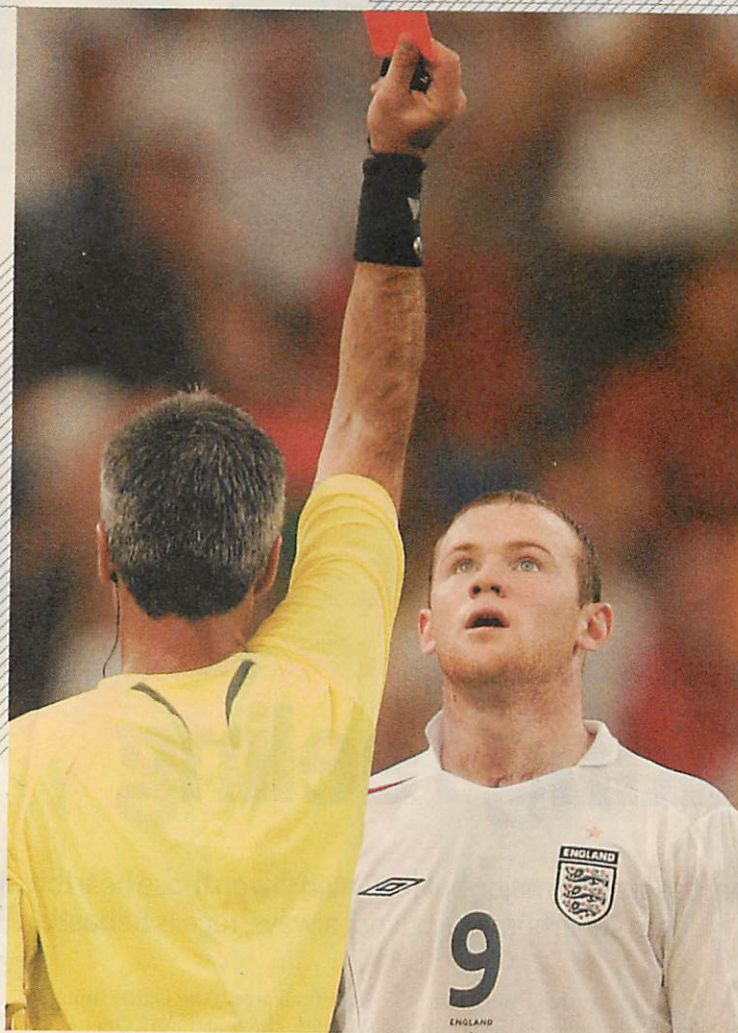
Be nice to Monty. He's like us.

*David Owen is a staff writer on the New Yorker*





The end: Rooney looks on, aghast, as he is shown the red card in the quarter-final against Portugal. Forced to play as a lone striker, he has stamped on Ricardo Carvalho in frustration. England's inevitable exit on penalties soon follows.



## ROLL OF HONOUR

### FOOTBALL

**Premiership** Chelsea  
**FA Cup** Liverpool  
**Carling Cup** Manchester United  
**Scottish Premier** Celtic  
**Champions League** Barcelona  
**Uefa Cup** Sevilla

### CRICKET

**County Championship** Sussex  
**ICC Champions Trophy** Australia

### TENNIS

**Australian Open**  
 Men: Roger Federer  
 Women: Amelie Mauresmo  
**French Open**  
 Men: Rafael Nadal  
 Women: Justine Henin-Hardenne  
**Wimbledon**  
 Men: Roger Federer  
 Women: Amelie Mauresmo  
**US Open**  
 Men: Roger Federer  
 Women: Maria Sharapova

### GOLF

**Ryder Cup** Europe  
**The Masters** Phil Mickelson  
**US Open** Geoff Ogilvy  
**The Open** Tiger Woods  
**USPGA** Tiger Woods

### RUGBY UNION

**Six Nations** France  
**Tri-Nations** New Zealand  
**Premiership** Sale Sharks  
**Heineken Cup** Munster

### RUGBY LEAGUE

**Super League** St Helens  
**Challenge Cup** St Helens

### FORMULA ONE

**Driver** Fernando Alonso  
**Constructor** Renault

### HORSE RACING

**Cheltenham Gold Cup** War Of Attrition (Conor O'Dwyer)  
**Grand National**  
 Numbersixvalverde (Slippers Madden)  
**The Derby** Sir Percy (Martin Dwyer)

### SNOOKER

**World Championship**  
 Graeme Dott



## 1 June

Prince William gets the scoop as Rooney confides in the future king that he will be fit. Two days later Rooney is on the front page of the *Sun* (kicking a ball!) and on the inside climbing into his £200,000 Aston Martin. Things are looking good.



## 7 June

Though no official confirmation has been given after a final scan back in Manchester, the big grin on Rooney's face as he returns to Germany is a giveaway: he will be fit to play in the World Cup. 'The big man is back in town,' he tells team-mates.



## 15 June

The moment arrives. Like a gladiator entering the Colosseum, Rooney's arrival as a second-half substitute for Michael Owen against Trinidad & Tobago sends England fans into a state of delirium. Everything seems possible again.

