

Orlando Sentinel

O'Meara basks in Isleworth's Cup win

In a Tavistock Cup roster full of stars, Tiger Woods is the man. But Mark O'Meara is the daddy.

"He's kind of like a father figure to some of us," Isleworth's Charles Howell said. "He's just so helpful and approachable and full of knowledge."

This swanky Tavistock event is O'Meara's baby, the type of two-day tournament that praises the class-act golfer among classy foods and jackets and cigars.

Isn't that what really validates this event? It's certainly not about competitive golf, though perhaps guys still wanted to win.

It's really about the champagne that blasted O'Meara on Tuesday after his Isleworth squad pounded Lake Nona 19 1/2 to 11 1/2 in the two-day event at Isleworth. O'Meara was the first and only guy to taste the bubbly without consent, prompting a smile only big, lovable daddies can give.

"I am kind of like the dad now," said O'Meara, now 51 and on the Champions Tour. "I know everyone knows about my relationship with Tiger, and we're very good friends, but I care about all these guys. And I care about this event."

Don't be surprised if O'Meara soon becomes Orlando's most important male golfer, at least from an ambassador's standpoint. Woods

certainly holds that title, but he's busy buying homes in Jupiter and the Hamptons and elsewhere.

As Woods' presence fades in Orlando and Arnold Palmer approaches 80 years old, O'Meara would relish the role.

Plenty of other players have had better careers. Even O'Meara admits he was a "good player, not a great player," which is refreshing in a sport in which some players are unrealistic about their legacies.

O'Meara finished his PGA Tour career with 16 wins and two majors, the Masters and the British Open, both in 1998.

Like Palmer, O'Meara is outspoken about the code of the game, the way a player handles himself on the course.

"The game is bigger than any one player," O'Meara said. "Even as great as Tiger Woods is, he understands it. I hope players understand how fortunate they are to be out here. To me, it's all about hitting the ball pin high, having a good short game, having really good speed on greens and conducting yourself well."

O'Meara's legacy reaches galaxies beyond his swing. The most important thing O'Meara could have done is befriend Woods, who lost Monday for the first time since September at the CA Championship in Miami.



Mark O'Meara, captain of Isleworth's Tavistock Cup team, chips onto the 5th green. "The sense of competitiveness never really leaves you," he says.

O'Meara is especially a proud papa when he thinks about what Woods has done lately and how he might have influenced the madness.

"I certainly think I'm a big brother to Tiger," O'Meara said. "He picked my brain on a lot of issues. I was a good player, wasn't a great player. But I played with a lot of great players."

"Tiger's a smart, smart guy. What we're witnessing right now, having him involved with this sport, only happens every 100 or 200 years in every sport."

But O'Meara isn't satisfied simply with imparting wisdom on today's Tour players.

His passion for golf still parallels his passion for helping people, O'Meara said.

Life on the Champions Tour has a low-key feel, with players years removed from the everyday grind of the PGA Tour.

But O'Meara said he will grind until he notches his first Champions victory.

"You still get [ticked] off when you're not winning," said O'Meara, who's got four second-place Champions finishes. "The sense of competitiveness never really leaves you."

If O'Meara never toasts a victory glass on Champions, certainly others will toast in his direction.



Team Isleworth members (from left) Stuart Appleby, Robert Allenby, Captain Mark O'Meara, John Cook and Tiger Woods are presented with the Lewis Trophy after beating Lake Nona to capture the Tavistock Cup.

Tavistock Cup | *The Buzz*



Ian Poulter of Team Lake Nona sprays J.B. Holmes of Team Isleworth with champagne at the conclusion of the Tavistock Cup at Isleworth Golf & Country Club.

HOLMES TAKES HOME BIG PRIZES

Much of Isleworth's \$2.1 million purse for defeating Lake Nona 19 1/2 -11 1/2 Tuesday in the Tavistock Cup goes to charity, but Isleworth's J.B. Holmes won two presents that are all his.

A black Cadillac Escalade and \$500,000 cash.

"My wife's already claimed the car," said Holmes, a star that, at least for a week, overshadowed Tiger Woods. "I have the keys, but not for long."

Holmes won the Escalade for shooting it closest to the pin through the two days. Holmes put it 1 foot, 9 inches from the 15th hole Monday.

Holmes also won the \$500,000 Payne Stewart Salver Award for the lowest round Tuesday with a 4-under 68, finishing one shot ahead of Lake Nona's Ian Poulter despite three-putting on the 18th.

Woods, who shot 2 under to tie Isleworth captain Mark O'Meara for third, had won the Salver the previous three years.

That fact made Holmes take a deep breath when he realized what he had done.

To add to the stellar performance, Holmes earned an extra \$10,000 for having the longest

drive of the week at 329 yards.

"Probably the best two days I've had, ever," Holmes said. "Lot of fun this week."

HOWELL IN STUDY MODE

Charles Howell played with O'Meara on Monday and Woods on Tuesday, two prime chances to dissect the brains of champions.

With the Masters in less than three weeks, Howell said he's looking to peak at the right time.

The challenge is understanding how and where to do it.

"It's kind of about finding your recipe," said Howell, who finished 1 under Tuesday.

"Every guy is different, and obviously Tiger's way of doing things works pretty well."

Players such as Woods, Masters defending champion Zach Johnson or Phil Mickelson might visit Augusta, Ga., early to get a feel for the course.

Vijay Singh just hits golf balls all week to find a rhythm.

Howell, an Augusta native, is not opting for the early visit to the course he grew up admiring.

"If I did that, I'd just be thinking about it all week," Howell said.

"I'm going to play at the [Shell Houston Open] the week before. I think my swing is close."

HOLE OF THE WEEK

No. 11 at Isleworth -- It's only natural we give you an Isleworth hole because a non-member or guest might never enter this place.

This course is 7,700-plus yards of monstrosity, but one of the toughest holes is the shortest.

The par-3 11th is 194 yards, but the green is a sliver among about 182 yards of water.

On Monday, one of the four players from Woods' group made the green off the tee, and Woods wasn't one of them.



Hole No. 11 on Isleworth's 18-hole championship golf course designed by Arnold Palmer and Ed Seay, with enhancements by Steve Smyers.

By Jeremy Fowler

GOLF EDITOR

MARCH 26, 2008