



Tiger Woods of the USA celebrates making the winning birdie putt at the 18th hole during the final round of the 2008 Arnold Palmer Invitational.

David Cannon/Getty Images

How low can they go?

By: **Andrea Furst**

The start of the 2008 professional golf calendar has been extremely eventful on each and every pro tour. In particular, the two current world number one ranked players are making a habit of providing both golf enthusiasts and their touring professional colleagues alike with the thrills that come with being witness to an era during which the game's benchmarks are being raised to unprecedented levels by two amazing performers.

The HSBC Women's Champions saw Lorena defeat the field by a career best 11 shots and Tiger's putt, 'the' putt, to clench the Bay Hill, only demonstrates the high skill level of these two leaders of the pack. Given what performance levels have been on display to date, one cannot help but think that we are yet to see more of Lorena's and Tiger's brilliance on display in the coming months.

However, these two are not the only two players extending themselves...others are attempting to follow...

There are other interesting stories around the world on the tour - Mark Brown,

the New Zealand golfer who is currently leading the Order of Merit on the Asian Tour after winning back to back titles - the SAIL Open and the Johnnie Walker Classic, both in India. Brown had an unsuccessful start to his professional career as a highly hopeful amateur and decided to have a break soon after his first year on tour when he said his game and mind were not up to the mark. After returning to the game in 2007 and this year's results clearly indicate that he has knuckled down and committed to a holistic game approach.

Butch Harmon laid down the law by criticising John Daly harshly and terminated their partnership in the media regarding Daly's work ethic as unacceptable and thus increasing the doubt surrounding whether he could ever be the player he has shown us in the past again given how much the field has resigned to the fact that successful players relying solely on talent may well be a dying breed.

It seems that everywhere we turn the pros and those working with the pros are pushing to take this game to the next level. The golfing world has embraced the fact that it takes more than a sensational swing to play this game.

The reports surround Lorena's victory in Singapore indicated that she was pushing to get to 24 under and was excited at the prospect of attaining that goal despite being so far in front. We see Tiger lap up the pressure cooker situations requiring magic like execution over and over again creating questions of whether he will lose again.

Annika and her coach Pia Nilsson have established a golf brand called Vision54 with one of the underlying beliefs that it is possible to birdie every hole, clearly indicating that the game has further room to move in the downwards direction.

It is becoming increasingly clear that our role models are trying to take this game's scores lower and display more finely tuned skills through the precision and dedication to the pursuit of perfection...As spectators we are left with feeling in awe!

Players are working harder than ever at all aspect of their game to ensure that they play the game to the best of their ability week in and week out. Watching players at the top end gives us the opportunity to observe their entire games in action and through watching it can teach even weekend warriors more about a game that can provide more highs and lows than most.

Through this overriding commitment

to work at all aspects of the game, it is clear that to improve a players' playing ability requires attention to detail that perhaps in the past was not so carefully considered. We are now seeing club and recreational golfers taking into consideration some of these other aspects, particularly mental skills training; to help understand first and foremost what it is that assists the greats of the game to continue to raise the bar, and as a result attempting to integrate some of these skills into their own game.

Obviously when it is your full-time profession, players have more chance of taking the steps towards improving the necessary parts of their game however I still maintain it is about accumulating hours of evidence whereby you are thinking, feeling, and doing the things that create the chance of optimising your game. Your body and brain needs evidence and support that it can achieve certain tasks

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Lorena Ochoa of Mexico during the final round of the HSBC Women's Champions at the Tanah Merah Country Club.

on the course while competing therefore use both practice and competition to be the time and place for your evidence to start accruing.

I can put in no better than how Tiger explained that putt;

"I kept telling myself, 'I've done this before. I did it against Phil, and this time it's a little bit deeper into the green and the putt has a little bit more break and it has a little more grain. I've done it before, and I can do it again,'" Woods said.

It is no surprise that the ability to sink that putt was assisted by past experiences and thus the ability to win is fuelled by previous experiences of winning. Once players have the runs on the board it is then ensuring that they know how they did it to take further opportunities to win when they are presented. Winning for some is like consistently making contact with the

ball off the tee for others. Whatever your skill level give your entire game the chance to revel in the joys of being able to pull something off because you have got the evidence in your mind and body that you have done it before.

It is through this basic mentality that we can be reasonably certain we have not seen the best of Tiger and Lorena... They, like some of their rivals, are continually working hard due this notion of if we do it once we increase our chances of doing it again, particularly if we know how we did it. Players and those assisting players know more about their game than ever before and the question of how low can they go is one which presses the players and their entourages each and every practising and competition day to continue to change the game even further. Watch this space.