

vim & VIGOUR

WINTER 2010

ST. JOSEPH'S
HEALTH CARE
FOUNDATION

St. Joseph's
Celebrates the
Season

|||||

HONOURING
A LEGACY OF
LIFE, LOVE
AND BABIES

|||||

Mental Health
Services Closer
to Home

How golfer
MIKE WEIR
overcame injury
and is getting
back in the swing

Out
of the *Rough*

A DAY IN
THE LIFE OF
ST. JOSEPH'S
Page 50



Getting BACK

in the

BY ALLISON THOMAS

Swing

TF YOU WERE ASKED TO NAME THE MOST famous athlete from Sarnia, Ontario, your inclination might be to mentally run down the NHL rosters you've committed to memory—but you'd be headed in the wrong direction. The title belongs to 10-year PGA Tour veteran and Canada's most successful professional golfer, Mike Weir. Weir was born and raised in this waterside hamlet on the southern shores of Lake Huron, and while he dreamed of becoming a hockey player, his slight stature made him better suited for 18 holes than three periods.

Still, an upbringing on the ice served to reinforce Weir's drive to be the best. "I think my grit puts me over the edge sometimes, and that comes from growing up playing hockey, and having two older brothers," Weir said in an interview with *Golf Magazine* on Golf.com. "I was always hanging out with them, and I was always the smallest guy, trying to prove myself."

PHOTOGRAPH BY NIGEL DICKSON

As Mike Weir fights doggedly to remain among golf's elite

Doctors found problems with four of his seven discs, which had led to intense **pain so severe** at one point that his wife had to help tie his shoes.

Although that proof hasn't come easily, it has come. In the past 10 years, this athletic underdog has flown largely under the radar while driving and putting his way to several impressive victories. From his first PGA Tour win in 1999 at the Air Canada Championship to taking the Masters in 2003—as the first Canadian ever to win at Augusta, and the first left-hander to win a major in 40 years—Weir consistently has remained among the top 100 golfers in the world. In 2009, he was recognized for these achievements as a Canadian Golf Hall of Fame inductee.

Into the ROUGH

For all his successes, Weir, 40, has faced obstacles, too. In 2004, he hurt his back at the Canadian Open, and to add irony to injury, the pain came courtesy of a fan.

“He kind of grabbed me around the neck and my right shoulder,” Weir said in the www.golf.com interview. “I was slightly jogging down a

hill, and my momentum was going forward, and he grabbed me by the neck and shoulder area and pulled me back. I could feel it getting worse just standing there.”

Weir understandably lost his focus and missed a five-foot birdie, ultimately losing the event to Vijay Singh. “The thing with the fan broke my concentration more than anything. I learned

to be prepared for anything,” Weir said in the interview.

While an incident with a fan may have precipitated Weir's troubles, golfers in general are well-acquainted with back injuries.

“Back injuries are extremely common for both amateurs and professionals,” says Diana Perez, a sport physiotherapist as well as a board member of and spokeswoman for the Canadian Physiotherapy Association. “It's not surprising, with literally hundreds of thousands of repetitive swings. Your spine and lower back are the most common areas of injury.”

This kind of repetition can cause serious wear and tear, and although a single event may spark an injury, “typically, the damage is not just based on a one-time occurrence,” Perez says. “There's often some degeneration that the individual was not aware of, but can be seen on an X-ray.”

The SLOW ROAD Back

Sadly, Weir's journey back from injury was anything but smooth. Doctors found problems with four of his seven discs, which had led to pain so severe at one point that his wife had to help tie his shoes, he said in a 2005 recap on www.mikeweir.com.

He also said that in looking back he should have taken a few months off to get healthy, but he refused to use his injury as a scapegoat. “I don't like to make excuses for my play. If I'm in a tournament, I like to play hard no matter what the circumstances or how I'm feeling, and for that reason, I never used my injuries as an explanation for my poor results.”



So, what does it really take to come back from injury to this level of play? Perez says it largely depends on how much maintenance was done before the injury occurred.

“Typically, you’re physically prepped to do sport at that level. But if the individual has just been playing and not working out—doing strength training, stretching and cardio—it will be a rougher road,” she says.

For individuals who struggle with a back injury that just won’t heal, surgery may be considered. But Dr. William Stanish, an orthopedic surgeon and a spokesman for the Canadian Orthopaedic Association, cautions against rushing to the operating room.

“People get very impatient. They think that it’s going to take a week or two to heal and very commonly it’s much longer than that. A surgical

procedure for any sports-related injury is the very last resort,” Stanish says.

This conservative approach typically pays off, because, most often, back injuries heal on their own. For example, a ruptured disc will shrink back to its former state with rest and activity modification, Stanish says. But there are times when surgery is necessary.

“If someone has a fragmented disc and it’s putting pressure on a nerve, in this circumstance you’d likely have to go in and take that fragmented disc out,” Stanish says. “But that constitutes a small portion of people that have disc disease in either their neck or lower back.”