

Belligerence 2011

Dawg Wins Third Belligerence Title

Back in 1979, I had the unique privilege of strolling the 18th hole at Oakmont Country Club in total solitude one November evening at sunset. Even though it was a full six years since Johnny Miller's record 63 in the final round of the 1973 U.S Open, you could still feel the presence, the aura of a most certain triumph that hung over the still night air like some kind of invisible magic cloud. I stood on a small piece of land that will forever be associated with one singular extraordinary moment in time. It is a strong memory, and I will not soon forget it.

So, when it came time for that hallowed tournament at Scully Golf Course on a typical hot west Tennessee summer day this past June, I was reminded of that chilly evening now some 30 – plus years in the past. I wanted to get there long before anyone else. I wanted to see if a hunch I had was indeed true. It was, and more. When I arrived, the course was desolate enough. As I stepped down to the 6th tee and looked out over the quiet of the land, it was there. That same feeling came back to me. It was much the same as it was at Oakmont, only many times stronger. I thought this must be what one feels if he or she were to stand in the quiet fields at Antietam and hear the silent cries of more than 20,000 souls, crying over the tremendous carnage of the bloodiest one - day battle ever fought on American soil. Those fields were forever changed, as were the rolling hills of Scully. It spoke clearly to me – men have died here. Maybe not in the flesh, but definitely in spirit. Maybe not permanently, but surely a portion of their competitive spirit had been devoured by a competitive force so great, the wake of this force is likely to last several lifetimes, if not centuries. For that carnage had taken place on this very spot exactly one year ago, and the very character of the air was as if it had happened yesterday. I couldn't help but think if the hundreds of golfers that had played here in the past 12 months felt it. Surely they had.

One by one, the players began to arrive. They signed in, selected their cart partners and participated in the ceremonial toast on the first tee. Jokes were made, shots were hit, and holes were played. All under the cloak of intimidation spread out by the giant of a man who had shattered the field and stunned the world of golf one-year prior. Certainly there would be a new champion this year – a repeat victory is almost impossible in Jackson and despite the fact that it actually has been achieved on one occasion, it is very unlikely it will ever happen again. Under this fog of death and uncertainty, it became clear that the winner would have to be a very capable and fundamentally sound player – a player who could let long hours of practice and muscle memory take over in the element of choking, gut wrenching fear that could very well grip every player who ever dares to play this course.

As the afternoon wore on, it was apparent that the golfer in question would in fact be the Dawg, cruising to his third championship at the Belligerence. No one else ever posed a serious threat that is unless you consider mere presence a threat. At one point, the Magnate inquired as to what exactly it would take to win a back-to-back championship,

and the entire field froze as if they had been struck by the same magic spell. What could he possibly be up to now? Under this sudden wash of uncertainty, the field seemed to crumble a little bit more. This made things even easier for the Dawg. His round was admirable enough, the victory sweet enough, but as the field finished the tournament, everyone involved realized that the premonition of the year prior had definitely come to pass.

This contest, this course, quite possibly the game of golf itself had forever changed. For at the very pinnacle of its existence had been altered – another name had been added to the contemporary Mount Rushmore of this noble and historic sport. A name among names that only requires the first. Arnold. Jack. Tiger. Magnate.