



Last Word by Jimmy Roberts of NBC Sports

Silver Streak

“Payne Stewart finally found life’s swing thought but never really had much of a chance to put it into play.”

Twenty-five years. How could I possibly be old enough to look back that far and not have it involve a high school teacher or some juvenile prank? Maybe a funny story about learning to drive or shave? But when I start to think about where in life I was when *The Met Golfer* was first published, it occurs to me I was actually at a pretty fortunate juncture: I was starting to cover golf.

Just two summers before, in 1981, I had witnessed a taciturn Australian win the U.S. Open at Merion. David Graham hit 13 fairways and 16 greens in the final round. How was I to know that this type of stuff just didn’t happen too often? How was I to know the amazing things I would eventually see? But it’s not the big things I remember most.

When Tiger Woods won that Masters in 1997 – going 22 under par over his last 63 holes – the image I can’t shake is the gathering of older black waiters and club employees who gathered on Sunday morning near the first tee to watch him march into history. One man said to me: “I didn’t think I’d ever see this day come.”

A year later, Mark O’Meara came from nowhere and had the season of a lifetime at age 41. He won The Masters and then, at Birkdale, would win the British Open. Walking with him during a practice round in England, I remarked that the greens looked slow. “You think so?” he said and he handed me his putter. “Let’s see what you can do.” In front of a few thousand people, I had the thrill and the fright of a lifetime. I missed a 15-footer.

Small moments. I remember talking with Payne Stewart in a quiet locker room at Pinehurst after he won the 1999 U.S. Open. He said he was looking forward to being a better

person this time around than he had been after his previous major championship successes. That’s what I thought about when he died just four months later: A great golfer who’d finally found life’s swing thought but never really had much of a chance to put it into play.

I think back on one of the best people I ever met in this game ... and he wasn’t a professional golfer. Bruce Edwards was a great caddie, but more than that, a kind and extraordinary man. I remember being at Pebble Beach in 1982; the happiness as he and Tom Watson circled each other in spontaneous elation on the 17th green. Twenty years later, I remember visiting with him at his house in Florida; the horrible sadness of watching him die of ALS.

And then there is Arnold Palmer. Interviewing him at his last U.S. Open at Oakmont in 1994 and his last British Open in 1995 at St. Andrews are memories of a lifetime, but it wasn’t until a couple of summers ago at the Senior PGA Championship at Laurel Valley that I had the “Arnie” moment that sticks with me most. The King is a compulsive “pack rat.” He never throws anything golf-related away (if you had his life, wouldn’t you want to hold on to every little bit of it?). He took us to a red corrugated steel barn near the back of his Latrobe property where his assistant, Corey, had catalogued and organized the memorabilia of Palmer’s career. Everything you can possibly imagine: bags, scorecards, awards, pictures, rain suits, products he’d endorsed, and clubs – more than 10,000 of them – all together in one awe-inspiring place.

I think back on that afternoon in western Pennsylvania and it confirms for me this: the smallest moments are the ones I’ll always remember most. ■