

DEFENSE OF TIGER'S SAFEWAY WITHDRAWAL

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My position about Twitter is that if someone raises a valid question about something I've written I'll make one effort to explain myself. If that doesn't satisfy the reader, I'm out. There is no way to have a rational conversation in 140-character sound bites. And there is nothing to be gained from a Twitter war.

But I will make an effort to amplify a position if there is significant push back on social media. This column has to do with a tweet I sent when Tiger Woods withdrew from the Safeway Open three days after entering what would have been his first PGA Tour event in more than a year.

My Tweet read: "Can't understand those criticizing Tiger for his WD at Safeway. Only he understands how he feels. Gotta respect that."

There were those who questioned the timing, like @Derrick_Payne who said: "I can. You committed to the event officially on Friday then pull out Monday. Not fair to event organizers or ticket buying public. Weak"

Or @WFNZGolfGuy who asks: "One BIG question that I think he owes sponsors, and fans who purchased tickets tho...what happened between Friday and today?"

The basic argument from all these folks is how could Tiger's game have changed so drastically from Friday to Monday to make him decide not to compete. And isn't he being unfair to the fans who purchased tickets thinking he was going to play.

First off, let's talk about fairness. You must officially enter a PGA Tour event by 5 p.m. the Friday before. It is not unusual for a player to enter even if

they have doubts about their ability to compete. Woods was following procedure. If he were anyone else no one would care.

And by dropping out on Monday rather than later in the week, Tiger made it easier for someone else to replace him in the field. As for being unfair to fans, I'm guessing this decision hurt Tiger more than we will ever know. He is an intense competitor and to have his mind set on returning and then be forced to change must have been difficult.

Woods issued a statement Monday that read, in part: "After a lot of soul searching and honest reflection, I know that I am not yet ready to play on the PGA TOUR or compete in Turkey. My health is good, and I feel strong, but my game is vulnerable and not where it needs to be."

That is a remarkably honest assessment, especially for Tiger, who holds his cards close to the vest on all matters public and private. It says what happened between Friday and Monday. It says to me the reversal is based not on his health or the state of his game but on the state of his confidence level. Those are words that need to be respected and admired.

Those who implied this was a manipulative move by Woods to enter and then withdraw have no rational foundation on which to place that argument. What did Tiger gain from this? Nothing at all. If anything, it was a humbling experience.

@marklevinetae asks: "don't you think it sets a very bad example for the millions of young fans who look up to him?"

Quite the opposite, I think it is a great example of making a difficult decision in the face of intense public pressure to play. Woods said he felt his golf was "vulnerable." Being able to make such a painful insight publicly is a great role model for young people. We have too many examples of public people unwilling to admit their shortcomings.

@ForeGolfersNet says: "I feel for the [#SafewayOpen](#) crew. They just returned to irrelevance"

I feel for them as well but the tournament is far from irrelevant. It has Phil Mickelson, among others, and is the first event of the 2016-17 season. That's a lot to hang your hat on. I'd also like to think Tiger will make it up to them somewhere down the road.

@Fletch1Benjamin asks: "Would you agree Tiger has no where to play in order to get into tourney shape without the world watching. That is the true shame."

That's the nature of being a professional athlete – you do what you do in front of other people. That's the added pressure of being a pro. Do you want him to come back and play in front of no fans and no television? That's called practice. My guess is that part of what's going on here is that Tiger hits it great in practice but does not yet have the confidence he can carry that game into competition. Any of us who have ever tried to compete know that feeling and how helplessly frightening it is.

As for those who used the platform of my Twitter feed to call Tiger vile and vulgar names, I won't give you the added exposure by repeating your thoughtless comments here. Let's just say I see nothing unethical about Tiger changing his mind. I see courage. And I see a man struggling with some very difficult decisions.

Among those decisions is the one raised by @ColinCallander who said: "Might be the last time though. Surely, nobody expects him back now."

I think he wants to make one last run at being relevant. But I think he has come back from injury too quickly in the past and is following a wiser course of recovery this time. I also think he knows he has embarrassed himself with his play in recent years and doesn't want to go through that again.

Tiger has given us a lot of thrills over the last 20-plus years. Now is the time for those who've enjoyed his genius to give back to him. Let him make this next return – possible his last return – on his time schedule, when his body and, more importantly, his mind, are ready for it.