

Tiger's change in priorities

by *Tod Leonard*

Tiger Woods doesn't have to reach very deep into his heart or mind to find the example of how he wants to be as a dad when his wife, Elin, gives birth to their first child this summer.

His late father, Earl, is the only role model he requires.

"He was always there. I don't mean physically. He was always there if I wanted to talk to him about anything and everything," Woods said Wednesday at Torrey Pines.

NICE SHOT - Dan Kirshoefter gets a high-five from pro-am partner Tiger Woods after chipping in from deep rough on the ninth hole Wednesday at Torrey Pines. CNS photo by Jim Baird. "If he brought home a bunch of work and he had to get it done that night, he didn't care. He would stop and talk to me about whatever ... sometimes it would be for hours. And then he'd go back to work and work until 3 or 4 in the morning and get it done. But I was his priority."

His first child will be a high priority for Woods. On that we can be sure.

The first proof of that came when Woods said he would skip a major - most likely the defense of his British Open title in July - if the baby were to arrive around that time.

"If it happens, it happens," Woods said. "If it crosses over, it crosses over. That's the most important thing, not another golf tournament. I just wouldn't go."

Asked if he might use a pager, Woods shook his head emphatically.

"Just don't go," he said. "If she's going to have it during the week of the Open, I just don't go."

Phil Mickelson played in the 1999 U.S. Open at Pinehurst and wore a pager, and Amy Mickelson gave birth to their first child, Amanda, the Monday after the final round.

Last season, Trevor Immelman wasn't so fortunate with his first child. Assured by the doctors that his wife likely wouldn't give birth for a couple of weeks, he went to the British, only to get the call that she had to have a C-section, and he missed the birth.

If Woods does miss the British Open after playing in this year's Masters and U.S. Open, it would end his streak of 42 consecutive majors played. Jack Nicklaus owns the record of playing in 146 straight majors, and Nicklaus had the first of his five children before he won any of his record 18 majors.

"Well, I've got to start with one, don't I?" Woods said.

Woods, 31, won't cite a specific date the baby is due, although he has revealed that it's sometime in July. And though Woods referred to the baby as "he" Wednesday, he said the couple has yet to find out the baby's gender. Woods did say they have a sonogram image that he'd like to hang in his office.

"I know it's my kid because it looked like he was telling me he was number one in my heart," Woods said with a grin, leaving it to the imagination to figure out which digit it was.

When Woods won his record fourth Buick last year en route to an eight-win season, including two majors, his father's aggressive cancer weighed heavily on Woods. Earl Woods died last May, and Tiger said this offseason has been his most relaxing as a pro.

"Two totally different mind-sets," he said. "One is praying and hoping, and the other is just pure excitement and enjoyment."

John Daly, meantime, joked that for years he has wanted Tiger Woods to adopt him, and now that's probably not going to happen.

"If I was his child I wouldn't play golf anymore," Daly said. "I'd be sitting on a boat somewhere spending all of Dad's money."

More seriously, Daly added of fatherhood, "It will change his life. It definitely does. Your responsibilities get more focused on the children than on your game sometimes.

"But Tiger, the way he manages himself and the good people around him, it's not going to affect his game, I promise you."

Tiger's change in priorities by Tod Leonard