

THE SHOT OF A LIFETIME

By Tony Regina

TIGER WOODS pushes two consecutive tee shots into the trees at The Cliffs at High Carolina, his first-ever designed course. He then asks the gallery if anyone could avenge his struggles by striking one down the middle of the fairway.

Mark Benevento, Jr. of Greate Bay CC eagerly raises his hand. Woods calls him up to the tee-box. Shock surges through both Benevento and his father Mark, who is among the gallery. The elder Benevento can't believe that his son is about to take a driver from Woods and tee off in front of golf's greatest icon.

"I kept saying, 'Wow, wow.' I was just caught in the moment," Benevento, co-owner of Greate Bay CC, said.

"I was surprised that I was going to go up," Mark, Jr., of Somers Point, N.J., added.

That moment quickly turned into the thrill of a lifetime for the Beneventos. Mark, Jr. calmly took a practice swing, approached the ball and striped it down the middle of the fairway. He slid the driver down and stared at his ball as it soared 200 yards, gracefully swinging his back leg like an Olympic ice skater who just completed a dazzling routine.

The gallery cheered. Woods applauded, pointed to the tee-box and requested that Mark, Jr. hit another ball. Although he admits that he felt a "little nervous," Mark, Jr. again drove it straight down the fairway, and again, applause reverberat-



Tiger Woods, Mark Benevento, Jr. and Mark Benevento, Sr.

ed throughout The Cliffs at High Carolina.

"It was cool," a humble Mark, Jr. said.

"I can't tell you how proud I am that Mark raised his hand," Benevento added. "He's enjoying every minute of it."

Woods' course at The Cliffs at High Carolina in Asheville, N.C. is currently under development. The Beneventos, along with Greate Bay CC co-owner Pat Croce and his son Michael, received an invitation to participate in a two-day event at the course. So on Oct. 4, the four arrived at The Cliffs and played one of the courses. They also met with Cliffs founder Jim Anthony. The following day, the Greate Bay CC group participated in a "Tiger tour" of Woods' course.

"My impression was it was the closest thing to heaven," Benevento said. "When you're on top

of some of the mountains, you're actually on top of the clouds. It's breathtaking."

During the tour, those in attendance gathered at the yet-to-be completed No. 10, where Woods hit a few ceremonial tee shots. In true Tiger fashion, he pured his first drive straight down the middle of the fairway. But Woods struggled on his next two and sought assistance from the audience. That's when Mark, Jr. stepped in to experience a golfer's reverie, one that keeps him, as well as his seventh grade classmates at St. Joseph Regional Catholic School in Somers Point, smiling.

"They thought it was pretty cool," Mark, Jr. said.

Such excitement has spread at Greate Bay CC and the community as well.

"Every place we go, they say to me, 'Are you Mark's dad?'" Benevento said. "It's really nice. A lot of people have seen the video. It was a wonderful experience. We were so blessed, lucky and fortunate."

A video of Mark, Jr. teeing-off with Woods and a gallery watching at The Cliffs at High Carolina can be viewed at www.greatebay.com. The 12-year-old will continue to play golf, now with a legend's praise to look back on.

"He realizes it was a once in a lifetime opportunity," Benevento said. "The stars were aligned that day."

JUNIOR SPORTSMAN OF THE YEAR

He may slice a drive 200 yards into the trees. He may push a four-footer for birdie six feet past the cup.

But afterwards, **Greg Jarmas** of Philadelphia Publincs GA quietly approaches his ball and prepares for his next shot. Such a calm and collective demeanor comes as no surprise from the 2009 Junior Sportsmanship Award winner.

"It's obviously a big honor," Jarmas, of Wynnewood, Pa., said. "It's something I didn't expect. There are so many good players and good kids in the junior tournaments. It feels good to be picked out of them."

"Greg's dedication to the game, his adherence to its' rules and his continued support of the Association make him an obvious selection as 2009 Junior Sportsman of the Year," Chris Roselle, the Golf Association of Philadelphia's Tournament Director, said.

Though he always wants to win any tournament that he participates in, Jarmas believes it's critical to carry a calm approach, regardless of the outcome on any given hole.

"I'm really serious about playing well, but at the same time, it's as important to conduct yourself in a good manner," he said.

Jarmas, 18, built his attitude toward the game based on values he learned from his parents at an early age.

"I would give all of the credit to them definitely," he said.

On the golf course, Jarmas, who finished third in the Christman Cup, constantly adheres to the advice that authorities typically give to civilians in emergency situations.

"I just try to keep calm," he said.

"Keeping calm on the course helps me play better. It's important to move onto the next shot. It's 100 percent mental."

To further develop both his physical and mental approach to the game, Jarmas hopes to attend the Hank Haney International Junior Golf Academy Hilton Head Island in South Carolina next year. He is currently a senior at Lower Merion High School.

