

FRANKLY SPEAKING

THE LAST TIME THE BRITISH OPEN WAS PLAYED AT TURNBERRY IN 1994 FRANK NOBILLO FINISHED TIED FOR 11TH. IT WAS THE START OF A PURPLE PATCH IN NOBILLO'S CAREER, A CAREER THAT WAS CUT SHORT BY INJURY JUST AS HE WAS HITTING HIS STRAPS.

BY ROBERT TIGHE

THE BRITISH OPEN RETURNS TO Turnberry in Scotland this month for the first time since 1994 and Frank Nobile hopes to be there in his role as commentator for The Golf Channel. It will be Nobile's third trip to Turnberry. He finished tied for 59th in his first appearance in 1986 and then in 1994, the same year that Greg Turner led the Open after the first round, Nobile finished tied for 11th.

"I thought you had the wrong player there for a minute," he says when I ask him about his memories of the 1994 Open. "That is one of the few tournaments I remember very little about. Maybe it was the weather or the fact that I was going through a divorce at the time but it is a bit of a blur to be honest."

"I remember playing a practice round in a gale and I couldn't believe how hard it was," says Nobile from his home in Orlando, Florida. "It is a very exposed

golf course and you have to play a lot of tee shots from some very weird angles. It is one of the trickiest courses on the Open circuit and the list of champions there is very impressive."

Impressive is an understatement. Tom Watson in 1977, Greg Norman in 1986 and Nick Price in 1994 have all won at Turnberry and all of them have been ranked the number one golfer in the world. When I spoke to Nobile in May, a couple of weeks after the Players Championship, I asked him how he thought the current world number one would fare at Turnberry.

"If the Open was being played tomorrow I wouldn't put Tiger in the top two or three but if he comes back into form then it is the sort of course that he could do really well on. Turnberry has normally gone to form players."

Woods has struggled to find his form after reconstructive surgery on his left knee last year but Nobile says that

Tiger's mini slump shouldn't come as a surprise.

"John McEnroe took a year off tennis once because he was bored with the game and he said he got a huge shock when he came back because not only did he take a break for a year but everybody spent that year getting better. Tiger took nine months off and he is trying to get used to the routine of playing again. In that time the other players have got better and more importantly they haven't been beaten up by the media. Since Tiger has come back he has shown a few flaws and the media focus is on what is wrong with Tiger."

In Tiger's absence, a pack of young cubs have emerged as pretenders to his throne, including Danny Lee. What does Nobile make of all the fuss over Lee?

"He has got tremendous talent. His work ethic is good. There is a very hard side to Danny Lee which is actually a compliment, not a criticism. Jack Nicklaus almost won a US Open at the age of 20, so who knows what Danny could do."

While Lee looks to have an exciting career ahead of him, it has been another difficult season for Michael

FRANK NOBILO	
PRO GOLFER TURNED ANALYST	
BORN:	May 14, 1960
TURNED PRO:	1979
RETIRED:	2003
PROFESSIONAL WINS:	14
PGA Tour:	1
European Tour:	5
Asian Tour:	2
PGA Tour of Australasia:	1
Other:	5

Campbell, who has been struggling with injury and struggling to make cuts.

"Michael's career has always ebbed and flowed," says Nobile. "There is a guy who has always had talent, no two ways about that. He beat the best player in the world to win the US Open but after you win a major there are a lot of expectations to live up to and maybe it is not as easy to climb the mountain a second time. The motivation may not be quite as strong but only Michael can only answer that question."

Campbell, of course, became the first New Zealander to win the US Open in 2005 but 10 years earlier, Nobile had his chances in the same major. In 1994, at Oakmont, he went into the final round just two shots behind the leader and eventual winner, Ernie Els. He finished tied for 10th in 1995 and the following year he was tied for the lead with five holes to go.

"Around that time I started to believe that I belonged on the biggest stage and I could compete against the best players. I was too analytical in my 20s and didn't have much confidence but in 1996 there were only two players who had better stroke averages than me, Greg Norman and Nick Faldo, the two best players in the world. I felt I was ready to win a major championship but it didn't happen."

In 1997, Nobile was diagnosed with inflammatory arthritis in his wrists, elbows and shoulders. A couple of months later he won his first PGA Tour title but for the next few years he was plagued with injury and misfortune.

"I thought there was going to be a resolution to my health issues," he says. "I never thought it was going to be a

NOBILO CELEBRATES WITH PLAYING PARTNER GREG TURNER AFTER WINNING THEIR MORNING FOURSOMES OF THE PRESIDENTS CUP AGAINST THE U.S. TEAM PAIR OF JUSTINE LEONARD AND DAVIS LOVE III

REUTERS (© NOBILO, DALY)



PLAYERS TO KEEP AN EYE ON

TIGER WOODS

Stevie Williams' boss is always a contender just because he is who he is. He might be swinging like a rusty gate but you can never write him off thanks to dogged determination and a ruthless competitive streak that makes him the resident gunfighter in world golf.

SERGIO GARCIA

Now that he hasn't got to worry about issues of the heart because his long time love Morgan-Leigh Norman (daughter of Greg) hit him out of bounds the Spaniard can pour all his energies into his golf. He's flattered only to shed the tag "best golfer never to have won a major" he'll have to kick start his career. This is the best place to do that.

STEVE STRICKER

A born-again contender who has thrown away the pretenders tag that hung around his neck. "Mr Consistency" is suited to these conditions especially with his short course (from 150 metres out) game. He's in commanding form and can play the knock-down shots required if the wind starts blowing. Watch him.

DARK HORSE

JOHN DALY

As a former champion, John Daly is allowed to front up here. Whether he will be anyone's guess. He has shed around 20kgs (thanks to a stomach staple - ouch) and wants to make a mark in his golfing twilight. He still puffs away like a steam train thanks to his nicotine addiction but has the sort of magnetic personality fans love. He'll either miss the cut by plenty or have a crack. Failing that watch Ian Poulter. He's due.

"I'm ecstatic about that. I was part of the winning team in 1998 and it was one of the highlights of my career. There is a lot of selfishness in the world of professional sport but the Presidents Cup generates a huge amount of money for charity (more than \$US13 million to date) and the players play purely for the love of competing."



bottomless pit and that was going to be the end. I thought there were better times ahead."

For Nobile, 1998 was an annus miserabilis for Nobile. With his immune system ravaged by the drugs he was on to treat his arthritis, a common cold landed him in hospital in Los Angeles with a temperature of 105 degrees. Then in July, a week after he got married for the second time, he was back in hospital after he was hit in the side of the head by a golf ball on the driving range at his home course of Lake Nona in Florida.

"I was in a cart heading towards the range and I saw someone hitting so I stopped and waited for him. It looked like he was finished so I kept driving but he was just getting another club out of his bag. I couldn't see him because of a dip in the cart path and he hit a snap hook with his driver that travelled 80 yards before it hit me. It didn't knock me out but it nearly penetrated my skull. I couldn't remember my name, number or anything. The guy who hit me was a urologist and he put ice on it and took me to hospital."



Nobile needed 30 stitches and when he came around the snap hooker was nowhere to be seen. Nobile admits he was probably naïve to expect him to

hang around, given the fear of litigation in the US, but to add insult to injury the urologist has been taking the piss since.

"He went around making a joke of it," says Nobile. "I was presented with a hard hat from the cart boys. I thought he was extremely insensitive and I have very little respect for him."

A few weeks after he was hit by the golf ball he dropped his razor in the shower and gashed his toe and that evening he

chipped a tooth eating a pork dinner. The one bright spot in 1998 (apart from his marriage) was the part he played in the Presidents Cup win by the

Rest of the World over the US. Earlier this year Nobile was named as Greg Norman's assistant captain for the 2009 Presidents Cup in San Francisco in October.

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Nobile would love to be still out there competing but he was forced to retire from the game in 2002. By that stage he was getting up at 5am to stretch before seeing a physiotherapist for an hour. That was before he even got to the range. As well as struggling with arthritis he had three herniated discs in his back.

"I basically had bone on bone and I couldn't handle the pain anymore."

He started working with The Golf Channel in 2004 and that same year he was cycling around Lake Nona - the same place he was hit by the golf six years earlier - when a woman went through a Stop sign and obliterated his bike.

"I literally demolished the front of her car, I bounced off her windscreen and went over the top. I had to get my left knee operated on and a plate put in my right hand but I was very lucky."

Lucky? With all that's happened to him?

"I consider myself very fortunate to have played golf for a living. I had the greatest job in the world. I probably didn't realise it at the time but you are paid to walk, paid to exercise and paid to practice. It is a great way to earn a living. There isn't a day that goes by that I don't wish I could still play. Yeah I had a few things that didn't go my way and there are things I'd like to do differently but I think I've been lucky. I've hit the bottom of a swimming pool and not broken my neck. I've been hit in the head by a golf ball, I've been hit by a car twice and I've survived it all so I think I am a very lucky guy." ☺

BRITISH OPEN

July 16-19

Turnberry, Scotland

