

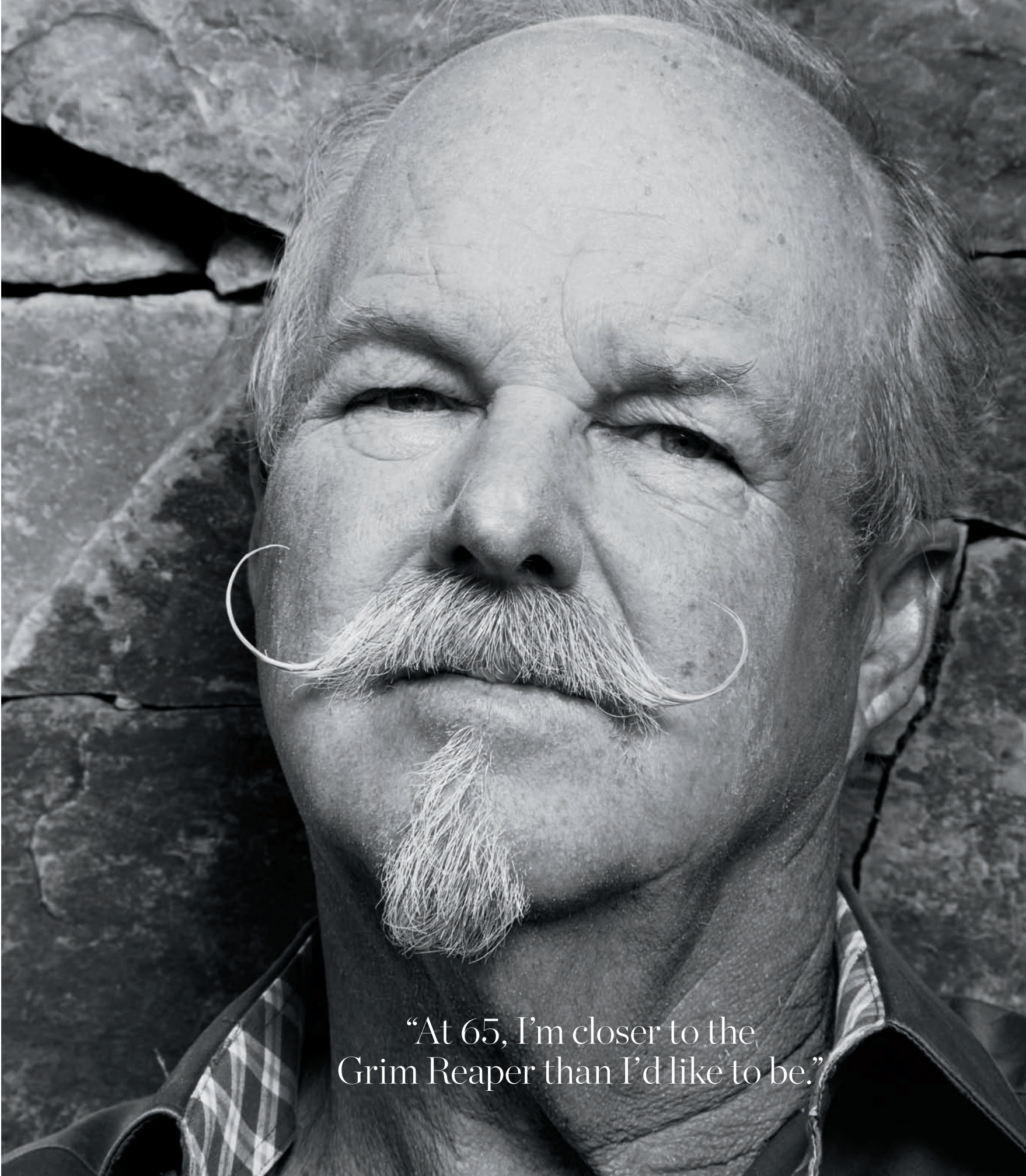
But Seriously...

Gary McCord fears success. He gets lonely on the road. He can't bear to watch himself on TV. And, oh yeah, he almost died a few years ago. In a soul-baring interview, the CBS Sports golf analyst gives his fun-loving, wisecracking ways a rest, opening up about his struggles as a Tour pro, why he can't take a compliment, and how a kidney stone nearly killed him.

Interview by Cameron Morfit Portrait by Robyn Twomey

CONVERSATION WITH GARY McCord easily flows into laughter. Heck, you don't even need the man himself; his 1997 book, *Just a Range Ball in a Box of Titleists*, is full of yuks. (Sample punch line: "I hear the parrot finally died of emphysema.") Still, McCord, 65, has endured his share of sobering moments lately. His friend and CBS colleague Peter Kostis is battling colon cancer. CBS golf icons Pat Summerall and Ken Venturi died last year. Frank Chirkinian, who, as the gruff patriarch of the network's golf coverage, recruited McCord 28 years ago, passed away in 2011. And McCord himself almost died before that. In 2007, he contracted pericarditis, wherein a virus attacked his heart. It

got so bad, he says, that when he'd lie down, it felt like an E-Z-GO was parked on his chest. He wound up taking 21 ibuprofen a day and learned to sleep standing. Around the same time, surgery to remove a kidney stone resulted in a ruptured artery, requiring McCord to undergo a blood transfusion. He has made a full recovery on both fronts. Today, when you visit McCord at his home near Vail, Colo., he and his wife, Diane, might lead you on a hike. The great mustachioed one, walking stick in hand, shoots out front, even in the thin air at 8,000 feet. He's fit. His mind is active. He tracks mountain lions, talks to squirrels, and explains the need for synthetic bark-beetle pheromone. (Don't ask.) *Golf Magazine* sat down with McCord to talk about his health scares, Tiger's "prison cell," and the greatest parking-lot brawl in Tour history.



"At 65, I'm closer to the Grim Reaper than I'd like to be."

You haven't spoken much about your heart condition, but it was serious enough that your buddy David Feherty wrote a mock obituary for you in this magazine in 2007. How bad did things get?

We all have viruses in our body. This virus just happened to one day say, "The hell with it. I'm going to attack your heart." It mimicked congenital heart failure. Your pericardial sac swells and starts hitting all your other organs, and it starts leaking in your lungs. When I first saw a doctor, I was in Florida shooting a commercial. I spent 13 hours in one of those little drugstore medical center things. They shoved a camera all the way up there and did all this stuff. It wasn't fun. So I got done, went back home—okay, boom, you've got pericarditis. I tried to do a couple of telecasts and I couldn't even get up the steps to the tower.

As you were recovering, you developed a kidney stone that nearly killed you. What went wrong?

I was in my house in Arizona and I was getting ready to go to Atlanta. My wife wasn't there, and my back was so bad I couldn't get out of bed. I actually pissed my pants in bed because I literally could not move. It was like paralysis. I'm like, "What the hell?" I threw myself off the bed, landed on the floor—that didn't feel good—crawled to the telephone, called a buddy to pick me up. We all thought, *Well, it's a back problem—take this, take that.*

The docs said, "Okay, Gary, this is what we're going to do. We're going to put a stent in, we're going to take the stone out, because it won't come out on its own." I go in for this 45-minute deal and wake up three hours later just pummeled with stuff in me. The doctor comes in, big guy. I go, "What happened?" He goes, "You bled out. An artery burst in your kidney. We had to go to your wife—we did a full blood transfusion, got the artery closed, stopped it. You woke up, you tried to hit me. You started with your right hand from the bottom of the floor down there and it came at me, and I barely ducked. You wanted to go home. We got another doctor and two nurses and strapped you down because you were bleeding out. We sewed it up, got that done, we got it out, everything is fine."

That must have been terrifying.

Yeah, I'm closer to the Grim Reaper than I'd like to be at 65.

Have you considered retiring, or at least slowing down?

I'm having a ball doing what I'm doing. I don't want to go anywhere.

How many weeks a year are you on the road?

When I was on the senior tour I was playing 15 to 18 events, plus 17 to 20 events for CBS, and 50 corporate outings. My craziest year, I'm guessing I was gone 35 to 38 weeks. It came to a head in Hawaii. I lost in a playoff to Hale Irwin. This was 2002. I had to fly out the next day, and I couldn't get out of bed. I said to my wife, "I don't know what's happening. I don't know what I got." She said, "I do. When was the last time you were home?" "I don't know." She says, "Seventeen weeks." I said, "What? Okay, that's enough of that." That's when I kind of quit out there [on the Champions Tour]. I mean, I was thinking, I'm going to kill myself.

Do you get lonely traveling?

Yeah, on airplanes, going places, doing things where I don't know anybody—and I've been doing this for 40 years. You're going to go to baggage claim and somebody's going to tap you on the shoulder and go, "Are you Gary?" That's probably why I wear this mustache. "Yeah, I'm Gary." "Come with me. We're going to take you to this hotel. You're going to get up at seven. You're going to do this, this and this." And then you go to the next town and do it again.

What are you most insecure about?

You'd have to ask my friends. It's hard for me to answer. I'm not real insecure.

"I'd like to have had people say, 'Hey, Gary, nice win!' But I was always explaining why I missed the cut. I was probably afraid of succeeding."

Why would we ask your friends about your insecurities? How would they know?

There's nothing off the top of my head that I'm real insecure about. I've got enough money—

You've said that you don't watch yourself on television. Why not?

I think I'm an idiot.

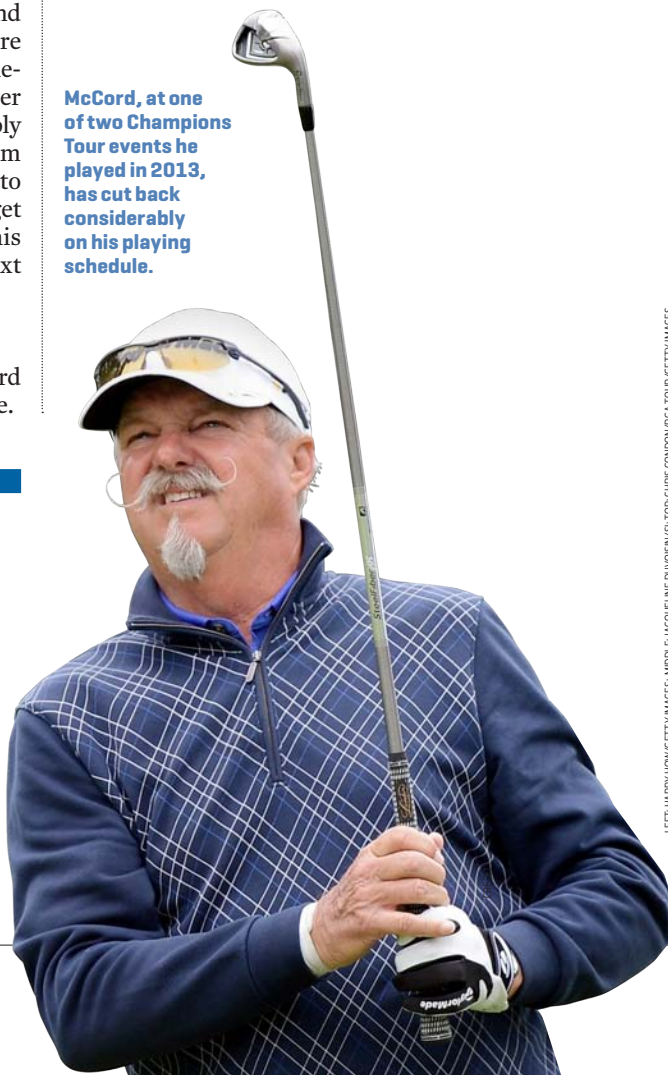
That sounds like an insecurity.

[Laughs] I look at it and go, "Wow. I could have done that so much better. Why did I do that?"

Did you develop your sense of humor to deal with your feelings of failure?

Well, yeah, if I was going to be psychoanalyzed or given electroshock treatments, I'd say the only way to deal with it was to laugh at it. I'd have liked to have gone home and had people say, "Hey, Gary, nice win!" "Thanks, I really beat the crap out of those guys!" But I was always explaining why I missed the cut.

McCord, at one of two Champions Tour events he played in 2013, has cut back considerably on his playing schedule.



You got through Q-School twice. You shot an opening 65 at Cypress Point to take the first-round lead at the 1973 Crosby, which convinced Lawrence Welk you had enough game to be worth sponsoring. You did have game. What got in the way?

If I were to diagnose me I was probably afraid of succeeding.

What's scary about success?

I don't know. People give me compliments, and I can't take it. I immediately change the subject.

Why?

I don't know why I can't accept it. I don't like to be congratulated on anything.

So you're more comfortable seeing yourself as defective—an old, beat-up range ball, like the title of your book?

Yeah. If I stepped outside myself and was the jury, that's how I'd view myself. I don't like to view myself directly. I've never watched myself on television. I would never do that—ever. That would scare the hell out of me.

So you're uncomfortable with the fact that you were better at golf than 99.99 percent of the people who have ever tried the game?

I don't care about the big picture. My microcosm is my geospace, where I live, and I was at the bottom as a Tour pro—the bottom-feeders would come down to get me.

Don't you think that's a way to guarantee you'll be miserable?

Probably, yeah. There's no question.

There's always somebody more successful or better looking or with more money or who takes fewer strokes.

Yeah, but do they have a mustache like this? No. [Laughs]

You played baseball as a kid. Were you a star?

Yeah, I was all that, which every kid was. Every kid was good at sports when he was young.

Did your parents say, "Now, Gary, don't you get a big head?"

No. I don't know at what point I became an idiot like this. I was always quiet. I wasn't real good in school because I

WINLESS WONDERS

With zero victories in 389 PGA Tour starts, Gary McCord banked a "mere" \$662,359 during his career. Here are five modern-day McCords who have made out slightly better:

Player	Age	Starts	Earnings
◀ Briny Baird	41	366	\$13,183,237
Brian Davis	39	283	\$11,872,745
Jeff Overton	30	218	\$11,101,657
Brett Quigley	44	403	\$11,048,433
Charlie Wi	41	209	\$9,646,852



McCord was lured to the booth by legendary CBS producer Frank Chirkinian (right).

really didn't care. I wanted to play sports. I didn't care what it was. I liked the competition.

You never won on Tour but you've been out there forever and played with just about everybody. Who could really play that the public doesn't know about?

There was a guy when I was growing up named Paul Bondeson. He had a great swing. Whoa, could he play. I mean, he was so much better than Nicklaus and Trevino and all those guys, but he was just a waste of talent. He never did anything with it. He was in one of the great fights in the history of the Tour. He was about 6' 2", 230, and he and his roommate, Sam Harvey, another huge guy, got into it—according to reports the fight started in the hotel room, went outside to the parking lot, and then went back inside into the dining room. Mac O'Grady had a great swing. John Adams was a great player but he just couldn't get out of his own way.

How do you lead the Tour in driving and greens in regulation and lose your card? "Lurch," we called him.

Do you still do magic?

Not much. I can do all the close-up stuff. I forgot the patter. I forgot the bull---t that goes with it. A bunch of these kids have no clue that I do that stuff, card tricks and coins and stuff.

You were known as "Magic" McCord. How did you get started?

It was a great handle for me. It was real simple. I'm guessing it was '79 or '80, around January, the Phoenix Open. My wife had gotten me two one-dollar magic tricks. And I learned 'em and I went to the first tournament and went, "Hey, guys, look at this." "Hey, how'd you do that?" I mean, it's a dollar trick! Well, there's a rainout on Sunday, and Frank Chirkinian of CBS comes to me and says, "Hey, I hear you do magic tricks." "Well, um, uh, um, yeah." He goes, "We're going to set up a studio down in the locker room. Can you sit there and do a couple of 'em?" "Well, um, uh, yeah." So I go down there and Tom Weiskopf is there, Tom Watson is there. I've got two tricks that cost a dollar apiece. I have no clue what I'm doing, but I do the tricks, and they go, "Oh, look at that!" And we're done. So the next day there's an article in the paper about it, and people start calling me up. What I didn't know was that CBS had the Super Bowl that year, and my little magic show in the locker room was the lead-in to the Super Bowl. All of a sudden I'm a magician!

So you had to learn some tricks, fast.

It was a bona fide emergency. I make →

some phone calls and find out that the guy who writes the publication for the IBM, the International Brotherhood of Magicians, lives in Escondido [Calif.]. I live in Escondido. What are the chances? His name was Michael Rogers. I said, "I'd like to learn." I knew nothing.

Was that the beginning of your reinventing yourself as an entertainer?

The Tour was changing and corporate America was coming in and doing outings. I couldn't get in the outings for how I played, but I could sure do it as "Magic McCord" who had a 45-minute show. You get out there and try to market yourself. I couldn't make money with my clubs.

Frank Chirkinian was a larger-than-life figure at CBS. What advice did he give you on the art of broadcasting?

He said, "See that TV screen? If you ever tell me what's on that screen, live, I'm going to fire you. Now get out of here." I'm going, "What the hell was that all about?" I struggled with it for a couple of weeks. I was scared to go back to him. I finally figured it out, that if you as a viewer get something that slaps you upside the head out of left center field, you go: "Well, that's interesting." So my whole thing with Frank was to try to venture outside the box so he could rein me in.

You're so happy-go-lucky on TV that we have to ask: What pisses you off?

If I stand on the tee and hit one in the crap, that pisses me off, because I'm old and I have to be straight, and I've worked hard to get the ball in the fairway at my age. Tollbooths piss me off. Waiting in line pisses me off.

Rumor has it you're a very good swing instructor. Could you have been a guru?

I invested a lot of time in the knowledge of the swing, but I didn't like the narcissism that went with that job. And I didn't like the idea of, if a guy's swinging well, everything's great, and if things are going wrong, his wife, kids, cat and dog are mad at me. I didn't want to go out to the golf course and have everybody want lessons. I've seen that with Peter Kostis.

Did he do most of the teaching at your and Peter's golf school in Scottsdale?

Yes. I looked up who was the most ex-



McCord (right) and David Feherty bring a comedic touch to the CBS telecasts.

pensive instructor at the time, and in 1996 it was either [David] Leadbetter or Butch [Harmon] at \$500 an hour. So I advertised my services at \$600 an hour just to make sure nobody called, and nobody did.

Who's the best TV analyst on the ground?

This is influenced by the fact that I got him into the business—David Feherty. You just don't know where he's going to be coming from. He knows the game, he has fun with it, and he can do great interviews. [Roger] Maltbie, Kostis—they're also great.

"Some guys have a big prison and some guys have a tiny prison. Tiger is in a real tiny cell. You feel sorry for him. He wants to be one of the guys."

Who's the ballsiest announcer?

Johnny [Miller] is probably the most apolitical. That's nothing against Sir Nick [Faldo], but Johnny is their whole telecast. He's involved in every shot.

What's the most disappointed you've been on the course?

One year I had a buddy of mine on the bag at Harbour Town, and I was going along pretty good, and I hit it in the condos on the 18th hole to miss the cut by one. I sat on the steps to the clubhouse for four hours and replayed that shot.

What's your take on the state of golf, big picture?

Golf is in a tenuous situation with the current socioeconomic climate. I'm at the end of the baby boomers. We supported all these clubs, and now there's nobody to tap us on the shoulder and take over our memberships because the game is too expensive, takes too long, and is too hard. People can't invest so much energy into something that's not giving them much in return. So how do you fill these clubs that are being depleted? That's a problem.

Speaking of problems, do you think Tiger is happy?

If you look at any situation where guys become superstars in any field, they all eventually end up in their own prison, their own hellhole, and they peer out through the bars. You have to give up a lot to be that good at something. Some guys have a big prison and some guys have a tiny prison. He's in a real tiny cell. You feel sorry for him. He wants to be one of the guys.

Is Tiger going to catch or surpass Jack Nicklaus's 18 major wins?

Tiger is the best I've ever seen play this game, but those other guys have gotten better, and they know his confidence level is not what it was. And once you start to lose your confidence in this game, look out. Five years ago if I were to take all my money to a window at Vegas, either the 18-and-over window, or the under-18 window, I'd have put it all in the 18-and-over window. Now I'd just stare at them.

Either way, he'll never qualify for your old vanity license plate: NO WINS.

Right—I built my whole career on it. ■