

the tournament, a *Seattle Times* profile ran under the headline “Europe’s Tiger Woods Ready for Masters.” Garcia didn’t disappoint: He finished as low amateur.

Garcia turned pro after the Masters and soon showed why he’ll be the closest thing to Palmer we’ll see this century. When Woods hung on to win the PGA Championship by a stroke over Garcia last August, it was El Niño the fans were raving about. The kid lost, but it was *his* name they were chanting around the 18th green on Sunday: “SER-GI-O! SER-GI-O!”

Not since the heyday of Palmer has losing so effectively been turned into a winning proposition. After the tournament, Woods had the disposition of a middle manager with a migraine, while Sergio hammed it up. “I guess they love me,” said Garcia happily.

What they loved first was the Stare. The Stare happened after he holed a birdie putt on 13 just as Woods arrived at the 13th tee after bogeying the 12th. When the ball slammed into the hole, Garcia gazed back toward Woods on the tee with defiance. It was golf’s version of “You might get there, but you’ll have to go through me to do it.” (After the round, Woods said, “[Garcia] has a tremendous amount of fight. You can just see it in the way he walks around the golf course. He really wants to play well, and he’s going to do it at any cost.”)

A few holes after the Stare, Garcia hit the shot that got him on *Leno*—an eyes-wide-shut 6-iron when his ball was kissing a tree alongside the 16th fairway. The ball came out clean, and then in an effort to see if it made the green (it did), he sprinted up the fairway and did a flying scissors kick that was the most acrobatic move this side of the triple lindy. It wasn’t simply a leap—it was a catharsis. It was Jim Craig draped in the American flag, Brandi Chastain ripping off her shirt, Kirk Gibson doing his home-run limp around the bases, “Black Jack” Pershing’s legendary declaration, “Lafayette,

we are here.” No, wait. It was better. It was Ballesteros standing on the 18th green at the Old Course in the 1984 British Open and shaking his fist after holing the winning putt, his face beaming with rapture. It was friggin’ celestial—and unbridled El Niño.

**That tournament** secured a spot for Garcia in the pantheon of young Tour titans (Woods, Els, Leonard, Mickelson, Duval) who are unofficially entrusted with the future of the pro game. It also established a rivalry with Woods worthy of a much-hyped mano-a-mano match: Tiger

and Sergio will square off August 28 in the Battle of Bighorn, the sequel to last year’s Showdown at Sherwood, which pitted Woods against Duval.

But just as the effusive and boundlessly energetic Roberto Benigni charmed everyone and then disappeared after collecting his Oscar for *Life Is Beautiful*, the effusive and boundlessly energetic Garcia basically left the building after placing second at last year’s PGA. Pointed questions have subsequently arisen about whether his swing—which features a funky whipping move with his hands during the downswing—is too in-

