

Words Paul Prendergast, Photos Getty Images

'HAPPY 60TH GREG'

For a generation or more of Australian and International golf fans, the news that trailblazing, swashbuckling, larger than life, former world No. 1 Greg Norman is turning 60 will be cause for some celebration and reflection on a mighty career in golf, life and business.

Even though his playing days are largely behind him, the Shark's exploits in winning 90 times professionally including two majors and spending 331 weeks as No. 1 in the world has inspired the next generation more than arguably any other player in his country's history. Heading the list of those inspired by the Shark has been Adam Scott, who emulated his hero by attaining the world number one ranking in 2014.

'Where did the time go?' will also be a natural reaction of many. Those heady days where we spent gut wrenching mornings on the edge of our seats watching Norman's bid for major after major, or running roughshod over his rivals when he returned home on a trophy grab each summer, doesn't seem that long ago.

Today, Norman's legacy transcends those playing memories, influencing our choice of the golf courses we now play, the clothes we wear, the wine we drink, through his many business interests.

The 'Great White Shark' and his various enterprises roll on and on - let's also not forget he's added an advisory coaching role with the Chinese National Golf Team for the Rio Olympics to his 'to do' list - and in 2015, we'll see Norman take on yet another new frontier as a lead analyst for Fox Sports at the U.S. Open at Chambers Bay near Seattle.

Norman planned to celebrate his February 10 birthday with 'a quiet, private get-together with my family and some of my dearest friends', although his Communications Manager joked that her boss' soirée would still no doubt be more lavish than her own birthday celebrations two days later.

I asked Norman tongue in cheek what hurts more: the well documented brush with a chainsaw last September or turning 60, to which he responded: "Neither!"

While he was silent on plans to appear competitively any time soon, the recovery from the accident and the resultant surgery to his left hand is progressing well.

"I still have some numbness and should have full feeling back in my hand and wrist within the next 3-5 months," he said "I have played (since) and will continue to play, even with this minor distraction!"

The balance Norman has in his life between family and business right now, coupled with becoming a grandfather after daughter Morgan-Leigh gave birth to a son in August, sees the Shark rising every morning a contented man and brimming with typical enthusiasm for the future. "As a result of curtailing my golfing schedule over the past few years, I have additional time that allows me to have more downtime for myself and my family."

"I am an extremely proud Grandfather and I am also lucky that my lifestyle/age/fitness will allow me to expose him to a myriad of experiences and opportunities that I have been fortunate enough to be exposed to, as he grows and develops his own interests."

"My normal business schedule has not changed and will not, as I truly believe that my company, Great White Shark Enterprises, and my partners have a huge opportunity for expansion and growth in many of the divisions that lie within."

"I have said this on numerous occasions, GWSE has only reached 20% of its capabilities and potential and our 12-year horizon and beyond is very strong. My brand recognition continues to grow on a global scale due to the diversification of my divisions. This is itself is a huge asset to all associated with GWSE and myself."

His spectacular creation among the sand dunes on Vietnam's east coast, The Bluffs at Ho Tram is currently earning rave reviews world-wide (a magnificent gem and one of those courses that is a "must-play." - Norman said of the location and layout) and he's made several trips home to Australia of late to oversee projects and court various opportunities for Greg Norman Golf Course Design.

One of those visits was to King Island off the remote north-west coast of Tasmania, which is shaping as the next exciting golf destination on the Australian landscape. ▣

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Greg Norman waits on the during the Humana Challenge in Partnership With the Clinton Foundation on the Nicklaus Private Course at PGA West on January 20, 2012 in La Quinta, California.



Greg Norman acknowledges the crowd during the second round of the Constellation SENIOR PLAYERS Championship at Fox Chapel Golf Club on June 29, 2012 in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.



"We are lucky that we made the right adjustments during the down cycle since 2008 by tapping into my 35-40 years of global travel and experience." Norman said of his design business. "We continue to build on the trust of many developers and owners, including our established Government relationships, as well as many of our long-standing partners that we have built courses for in the past."

"We have also expanded our platform of services including landplanning, interior design (Fundamental Fin) and architectural design, and these additional services have been received extremely well due to the "one-stop-shop" we offer. Allowing the owner/developer to deal with one entity rather than a multitude of sub-contractors or other companies is groundbreaking in this industry."

"No one else has achieved this all-encompassing space like GNGCD/GWSE."

Apparel, course design, turf grass, wine, beef, restaurants, eyewear and sports marketing are among the ventures GWSE have been successful engaged in for decades and seemingly, the last great unconquered challenge ahead of Norman on a personal and professional level, other than politics perhaps, is television.

The opportunity to tackle that gap on the resume lies ahead as Norman embarks on a commentary career with FOX Sports, starting with the U.S. Open at Chambers Bay this June. Fox have won the rights to broadcast USGA championships for the next 12 years, replacing NBC who had covered

the U.S. Open since 1995.

Norman will be thrust into the high profile lead analyst role alongside anchor Joe Buck and inevitable comparisons will be drawn between Norman's performance and that of NBC's long-time analyst, Johnny Miller, who had covered the previous 20 Opens from the booth.

Both men are quick to share their opinion on all matters golf so the contrast in styles will make interesting viewing.

"Yes, we have a unique opportunity at Chambers Bay, but our (the Fox team's) main focus is to be an incredible team broadcasting each and every event in a new, refreshing, technologically advanced production with a massive injection of fun." Norman said.

Just as he did when he marched into the gallery at the 1986 U.S. Open at Shinnecock Hills to confront a heckling fan, Norman plans to tackle the task ahead with familiar gusto and self confidence.

"I will approach this opportunity like I have done everything else in life, by being the best that I can be and refusing to let the detractors who have never experienced the things I have deflect me from my goal."

He may be 60 years young but that final statement categorically suggests he's exactly the same Greg Norman we've known since he burst on to the scene as a blonde bomber forty years ago - taking no prisoners and refusing to take a backward step in pursuit of his goals, despite what the sceptics might say.

Happy birthday Greg!! **NZGM**

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