



Irons Forged By 'Hands of God'

Katsuhiko Miura is a master club maker

BY MIKE DOJC



Many golfers haven't heard of Miura, but mainstream anonymity suits this high-end club maker just fine. The company's central business tenet is that if they continue to build exquisite precision hitting instruments, golfers will come to them. This "Field of Dreams" ideology has served them well. Jose Maria Olazabal and Retief Goosen gripped Miura irons during major championship victories, as did Raymond Floyd during a Senior PGA Championship win. And back when Tiger was playing Titleist, Miura-san received the request to refine the muscle-backed beauties to maximize Woods' ball striking bliss.

Celebrities from all spheres of the fame spectrum migrate towards Miura. A framed personal thank you letter from Bill Clinton sits in golf equipment artisan Katsuhiko Miura's office in Himeji - where he has been hand-forging clubs for over 50 years. The city is renowned for pounding steel into katanas - the swords samurai warriors twirled around centuries ago and what Ryan Reynolds went blade crazy with while portraying "Deadpool."

"I would bring a set of clubs home to North America and have friends hit the club and inevitably they had an epiphany: 'How can I have played golf for 20 years and all of a sudden swing a club and feel something different,'" says Bill Holowaty, Miura Golf's vice-president of North American operations from the company's Vancouver headquarters.

The coveted irons range from \$200-275 each depending on shaft choice, but for golf



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gear heads the price premium pays dividends with every stroke. When playing a Miura for the first time, golfers often rave about the buttery feel of the clubs on contact. This vibration-free tactile sensation, the result of a meticulous 14-step process, is why the Japanese media have described Mr. Miura as possessing the “Hands of God.”

“The spin forging technique connects the hosel to the head by a piece of proprietary equipment that is just short of awe inspiring. Not simply by the way it happens, but here is a man who was able to find a flaw in the forging process, and this was the way he was going to be able to condense the grain structure in the head without having to compromise anything,” explains Holowaty.

“If you go into the factory on any one day you may find Mrs. Miura in the finishing room taping off clubs pre-sandblast and you realize this is truly a family business. Everything that goes out of that factory has the Miura DNA on it, and they would never want to produce anything that wasn’t the absolute best it could be.”

Canuck Connection

Hiroiyuki Miura was the first Japanese-born player to be drafted by an NHL team. The Montreal Canadiens used their final pick to select him 260th overall in the 1992 entry draft. Curious if there was more to this than a sports Jeopardy question waiting to happen, I asked Holowaty if there was any connection to the company’s master club maker.

“Miura is a really popular name in Japan,” shrugs off Holowaty but admits that if there was a familial connection then that would be pretty cool. After all it was Holowaty’s relationship with a Japanese hockey legend that brought him to Miura Golf.

Holowaty, a UBC Hall of Famer amassed 215 points during his hockey career on campus, third on the all-time Thunderbirds scoring list. He had eschewed an invite to the Winnipeg Jets training camp to play university hockey and would have no regrets about the decision. He skated with Team Canada at the



Blackwedge



Tournament blade



Utility club



2009 Limited Blade

1985 Spengler Cup and went to Japan to play pro hockey with Seibu. There, Holowaty struck a friendship with player/coach Herb Wakabayashi, a future principal in the company.

Hailing from Chatham, ON, Wakabayashi is Japan’s Mr. Hockey. After starring for Boston University, he went on to represent the land of the rising sun at the ’72, ’76, and the ’80 Olympics in Lake Placid, where he was Japan’s flag bearer in the opening ceremonies.

Following Holowaty’s pro Japanese hockey career, he and Wakabayashi ran



Katsuhiro Miura

summer hockey schools in Japan for 15 years. As is the case with many hockey studs, their second passion happened to be golf, and when one of their students invited them to Himeji City, Japan’s club making capital, Holowaty met Katsuhiro Miura.

A private company, Miura does not disclose financials but according to Holowaty the company continues to grow every year.

“In this economy that gives us a great deal of hope. You won’t find Miura clubs in warehouse sales or discount bins and we believe that is something to be proud of.”

As for the future, Katsuhiro Miura will continue to refine his process in the endless pursuit of perfection.

“I always believed and thankfully my sons have embraced the belief that when you are thinking of making a new model, don’t look at other manufacturers clubs and do not look at pictures in golf magazines,” he tells us via email.

“We must remember that each golfer is an individual, thus manufacturing the ‘perfect’ set of irons has to take into account the imperfections we all possess.”

While mainline club makers continue to fixate over advances in the manufacturing process, Miura maintains that while technology has its place, what is paramount is that human beings will be playing with the clubs, not automatons with identical preferences and playing personalities.

“My feeling is that choosing a golf club will, one day, reflect a step back in time. You will pick up a variety of clubs and hit with them. When you find the one that feels the best for you, it will be the one you will want. If you trust your feel, the data will confirm your choice.”