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What next for Tiger Woods? Celebrity breakups often extra bumpy

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Neither Tiger Woods nor Elin Nordegren have filed for divorce.

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Elin Nordegren, then Tiger Woods' fiancée, looks on as Woods puts on the third green during the Byron Nelson Championship, in Irving, Texas. The Woods sex scandal has struck a particularly raw nerve in Sweden, where Nordegren's transition from being a nanny for golfer Jesper Parnevik to the wife of one of the world's most famous athletes was long seen as a fairy-tale romance.

By Rene Stutzman, Anika Myers Palm

Orlando Sentinel

Your husband is rich, famous and can't keep his hands off cocktail waitresses. You decide to divorce him. What's your next step?

Hire a good lawyer. Yours likely will be a complicated breakup.

If Elin Nordegren Woods indeed does decide to divorce 33-year-old golf legend Tiger Woods, she could be in for a long, bumpy ride.

High-profile couples face all the gut-wrenching decisions that confront other divorcing couples — kids, visitation, how to divide property and debts — according to Central Florida family lawyers and attorneys who have handled celebrity divorces in Florida.

The rich and famous also have their own particular set of problems.

How do you keep reporters from pawing through your financial records? Is that prenuptial agreement valid, or should it be challenged?

Then there is the sheer bulk of the property to be divided. Tiger Woods is one of the richest men in the history of professional sports. Forbes magazine estimates his net worth at \$600 million and his annual income at \$100 million.

California vs. Florida

As of Friday, neither Elin nor Tiger Woods had filed for divorce in Orange County, where both were registered to vote in 2008 and where they share ownership of a 6,800-square-foot home in Isleworth worth \$2.4 million, according to local court and property records.

It was not clear, however, where their divorce paperwork might pop up. Although they live in Isleworth and Tiger, through a trust, owns a second home there, Tiger bought an exclusive Jupiter Island compound in Martin County. It was valued at \$38 million when it was purchased in 2006, records show.

Tiger is from California. Elin is from Sweden but became a U.S. citizen when she married Woods.

Elin most likely would fare better with a California divorce than a Florida one, attorneys say.

California is a "community property" state, meaning all income produced during a marriage must be split 50-50, Stanford University family-law professor Richard Banks told the Los Angeles Times.

Under Florida law, "you have to divide the assets equitably, but that doesn't necessarily mean equally," he said. "In fact, the greater the pot of money, the less likely a court is to split it evenly."

In Florida, the spouse who earned the family's income "generally gets to keep it," although the other spouse's lifestyle during the marriage comes into play, Banks said.

Efforts to reach Woods' agent, Mark Steinberg, were unsuccessful Friday.

A wreck and a crash

Divorce became a topic for Woods after a recent whirlwind of events. A national tabloid broke a story that the golfer had had an extramarital affair with a New York club hostess.

Then at 2:35 a.m. Nov. 27, Woods drove a Cadillac Escalade into a hedgerow, over a fire hydrant and into his neighbor's tree in Isleworth.

Two rear windows were smashed out, police said, and Woods was in and out of consciousness before he was taken to a hospital in Ocoee to be treated for facial cuts. He was bleeding in his mouth, according to a police report.

Later it was learned that Elin told deputies that her husband had been drinking earlier in the day — and that he had prescriptions for Vicodin, a painkiller, and Ambien, an insomnia drug.

And then came a flood of reports of more women in the golfer's life, including one from a waitress at a Perkins restaurant near Windermere.

The prenup

If there is dividing to do in the Woods family, much of it may already be done. Tiger and Elin are thought to have signed a prenuptial agreement before their 2004 wedding in Barbados.

Will it stand? Elin Woods is rumored to be renegotiating.

"In 90 percent of prenuptial cases, [either the husband or wife tries] to get out of the agreement," said Raymond Rafool, a Miami attorney who handled the divorce of Terry Bollea, better known as professional wrestler Hulk Hogan.

If Elin Woods can prove she didn't sign a prenup voluntarily — or that her husband withheld key financial information — it can be tossed, Longwood divorce specialist Norman Levin said.

Valid or not, there's still money to be fought over, said Martin "Guy" Haines III, a Palm Beach County lawyer who represented golfer Greg Norman in his \$100 million South Florida divorce last year.

That's because of the Woods children: daughter Sam, 2, and son Charlie, 10 months. Prenuptial agreements are nonbinding when it comes to child-related issues, Haines said.

"I think the Woods children have a very significant lifestyle claim," Haines said.

More important than child-support checks, the couple's chief concern should be their children's overall well-being, attorneys said.

Most divorced parents in Florida wind up with shared parenting. That means that unless they want a judge to make decisions for them, they'll have to agree on where the children live, what schools they attend, who their doctors are and when and with whom the children vacation.

"They're going to have a continuing relationship as far as parenting their children," said Nancy Weber, an Orlando family attorney, and they should start working now to minimize acrimony.

A bit of privacy

You can't keep a divorce secret, said Terry Young, a partner at Lowndes Drosdick Doster Kantor & Reed P.A. in Orlando. That's because divorce is a public matter. It requires the filing of a lawsuit, and it cannot be finalized without a judge's approval.

That's not so stay all your personal business is available for public fodder. It's possible to keep almost all the details confidential, attorneys say.

If couples are able to cooperate, they can negotiate a settlement in private, Haines said. If not, details can spill into open court as a judge hears evidence and decides what is equitable.

In the event of a divorce by Elin and Tiger Woods, there is a great deal to be fought over and negotiated.

"The issues are the same" as with other divorcing couples, Weber said, "just more zeros."

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