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## The PGA: Six Hours of Riveting Golf with Tiger and Bob May

Richard C. Crepeau

University of Central Florida, [richard.crepeau@ucf.edu](mailto:richard.crepeau@ucf.edu)

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At no time in my life could I possibly have imagined that I would sit and watch golf on television for nearly six hours and be able to retain my sanity. I still find it hard to believe that I did just that this past Sunday as the PGA Championship was played to its riveting conclusion.

Not only did I watch the dramatic struggle between Bob May and Tiger Woods, but I watched with five other people, only one of whom is capable of watching golf for more than ten minutes at a time. It turned into a perfect event for a hot and humid lazy Florida Sunday afternoon in August. With its heavy doses of dead time, golf is the penultimate conversational spectator sport, what baseball was before the advent of blaring speaker-systems in modern ballparks.

After a front nine on which Tiger Woods stumbled a bit and Bob May proved he was in for the duration, the back nine turned into a monumental heavyweight fight. Through it all May was unflappable, holding the one stroke he took on the tenth hole until the seventeenth.

The first dramatic turn occurred on the fifteenth hole when Tiger Woods saved par with a nerves-of-steel putt. May missed a birdie opportunity and a chance to extend his lead to two or even three strokes. Then on seventeen Woods pulled even with a birdie. Both golfers were now sitting at seventeen under par for the tournament, and within one stroke of a new PGA tournament scoring record.

By this time the drama and tension were reaching a breaking point. On eighteen May dropped in an 18 footer from the fringe of the green with a putt that looked certain to miss the hole to the right. At the last moment, with the TV commentators already calling it a miss, the ball made a slight turn left and dropped in for the PGA record and the lead. Woods had a difficult five-footer which he made to tie both the record and May. It was on to a three-hole playoff.

By this point it was clear that what had already taken place would be remembered among the legendary tournament finishes of all time. It was also clear that fatigue was beginning to take its measure of the golfers.

On the first extra hole Woods birdied, chasing the putt towards the hole and exhorting and pointing at it as it dropped into the cup. Had Woods birdied out no one would have been surprised. He didn't. In fact there was plenty of drama left as both players struggled to get the last ounce of strength into their swings. On the final hole both Woods and May were all over the fairways and rough, and both made what were perhaps the ugliest pars in the history of championship golf except for the fourth shot by each golfer.

Woods came out of trap with a near perfect shot to within two feet of the pin, while the putt facing May replicated Wood's third stroke on the same 18th hole about an hour earlier. May's putt was in fact an improvement on Wood's earlier effort and came within inches of the hole. Both ended the day and the tournament with tap-ins.

As we watched all of this the "oohs" and "ahs" interrupted an afternoon of conversation and relaxation among old friends. As the afternoon wore on some were pulling for May and the major upset, some for Woods to continue his streak of majors. My wife, Pat, watched more golf on Sunday afternoon than in all of her life. Not just more at one time, but more cumulatively. Nearly all of us watched more golf than we ever thought ourselves capable of doing.

This apparently was true across the country. Television ratings for the CBS coverage increased in every half-hour segment as the day wore on. By the end the ratings were in the "Survivor" range, although there was more reality on this day than is ever seen on reality TV. One out of every three TV sets that were on was tuned to CBS. Audience size for network television coverage is over 100 percent higher for those tournaments in which Tiger is in contention as opposed to those in which he is not.

It should be said beyond the numbers that Tiger Woods is bringing a new audience to the game both in front of the television sets and on the links.

As to the golf numbers, they too are remarkable. Woods now holds the scoring records for all four of the major tournaments, although he shares one with Bob May. Woods became the first man to win three majors in a row since Ben Hogan in the Fifties, and the first to successfully defend a PGA Championship Title since the Thirties. He is now in a position to win all four of the grand slam events in a row, and that has never been done.

One of the most remarkable aspects of Sunday's event is the fact that casual fans and non-fans were drawn into the drama, becoming emotionally involved with the two men as they struggled against one another and against themselves. The essence of sporting competition was on display for all to see and experience, and it was wonderful.

I never dreamed that I would ever describe a golf tournament as a "dramatic and riveting struggle," or that I would watch twenty-one straight holes of golf. The Sunday battle between Bob May and Tiger Woods was a one-on-one event that matched or exceeded any such sporting match-up I have ever seen.

I was emotionally drained after a televised golf tournament, as were all those who watched across the land. I still can't believe it.

On Sport and Society this is Dick Crepeau reminding you that you don't have to be a good sport to be a bad loser.

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