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Tiger Woods and Roger Federer

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SPORT AND SOCIETY FOR H-ARETE
Tiger Woods and Roger Federer
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In these first few weeks of college and professional football, upsets seemed to be the rule rather than the exception. There are two sports where upsets these days are as rare as a Cubs' World Series victory. In golf and tennis, it is nearly always Tiger, Tiger, Tiger and Roger, Roger, Roger. These two athletes have established an astounding dominance in their sports as both enter the prime of their careers. They are both on pace to rewrite the record books and end their careers as the greatest players in the history of their sports.

In any given generation, there is no guarantee that the greatest player in the history of the sport will appear. To have two of them appear in the same generation is extremely rare. Those of us who take an active interest in sport should consider ourselves extremely lucky to be able to watch these two remarkable players in our time.

A little over a week ago, Roger Federer won his fourth consecutive U.S. Open Tennis Championship with a victory over Novak Djokovic, the young Serbian player who may be the next serious threat to Federer's dominance. But not quite yet. In the finals, as in the semi-finals against Daveydenko and the quarterfinals against Roddick, Federer won in straight sets. In all three matches his opponents played very well, but Federer played a bit better. Roddick may never have played a better match in his life. At a critical point in each match, and in some cases each set, Federer hit the one impossible shot to put his opponent away.

Federer is a wonder to watch. The speed covering the court is hardly noticeable because he moves with such smooth footwork. Like many of the greats, he makes it all look so easy. Like all of the greats, he can win when he doesn't have his best game. The only thing Federer lacks is charisma.

In the last two years, Federer has won six Grand Slam events, losing only in the French to Nadal. He has now won twelve Grand Slam events, while appearing in only fourteen Grand Slam finals. At age 26 Federer is only two behind Pete Sampras' fourteen Slam championships, and he has passed Bjorn Borg and Rod Laver in career Grand Slam titles. In addition to the four straight U.S. Open titles, he has won five straight Wimbledon Championships,

equaling Borg's record. That was a record that few thought would ever fall. All of this has left him ranked number one in the world for the past 189 weeks.

In the end, like Sampras, he may never win the French Open, but I wouldn't bet against it. The other title he would still like to have is a Gold Medal in the Olympics and he will get his chance at that in Beijing next summer.

As for Tiger Woods, he continues to do things on a golf course that no one else can do. His creative shot making is one of an infinite number of reasons to watch this great player. Golf as a spectator sport bears a close resemblance to paint drying, but when Tiger Woods is involved that resemblance is gone.

Over the past several weeks, as Woods has played in three of the final four tournaments in pursuit of the FedEx Cup, his dominance has been on full display. He won two of those three tournaments and finished second in the other one. He had locked up the FedEx Cup before going on the course Sunday in the final round of the tournament at the East Lake Club in Atlanta.

This tournament saw Woods play the best nine holes he has ever played, shooting a 28 on the front nine on Friday. This achievement was accomplished without a birdie until the fourth hole. He had two pars and a bogie on the first three holes and then on the last six dropped in five birdies and an eagle. He was five strokes behind after that third hole and was leading by the end of the front side. He was never caught the rest of the way.

There were moments when it looked as if the East Lake tournament might turn into a contest. Tiger's lead at the end of five holes on Sunday was only two. Then Tiger hit stride. At the end of nine, his lead was up to four, and at the end of the day he won the tournament by eight strokes. It was Tiger's seventh tournament win of the year and the sixty-first of his career.

Tiger's paycheck for the tournament was \$1.2M and for winning the FedEx Cup he gets \$10M put into a retirement account that will be worth in the neighborhood of \$30M after 14 years. That should help him when he reaches his dotage at age 45.

Tiger says it's not about the money. "You play, and when you play, you play to win, period," he said.

Zach Johnson said that he hopes the PGA doesn't come up with any other new events. "Why give him another thing to try and achieve? He's a very driven man."

Perhaps some year for a change of pace Tiger could play the French Open while Federer plays the Masters. Until then we will have to watch them both do what they do better than it has ever been done. With both Federer and Woods, it is quite simply about the competition, the essence of sport. Who could ask for any more than that?

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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