

An amazing Open, and an obscenity in Arlington

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SPORT AND SOCIETY FOR H-ARETE
An amazing Open, and an obscenity in Arlington
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If you watched The Open from Turnberry this weekend there were two surprises: Tiger Woods didn't make the cut and Tom Watson nearly won the tournament. It became obvious that Tiger wasn't playing his A-game when in the middle of his second round he played himself out of the tournament. Woods was one under par after seven holes and then went bogey, bogey, double bogey, par, bogey, double bogey. He was hitting shots that any weekend duffer could relate to as he topped the ball, mishit the ball several times, and explored all of the varieties of the rough. It was quite amazing.

It was not nearly half as amazing as what Tom Watson was doing. Watson was one stroke off the lead after the first round, tied for the lead at the end of the second round, led by one at the end of the third round, and was tied at the end of 72 holes. He finished six strokes back after a four-hole playoff with Stewart Cink.

What was remarkable of course was that Tom Watson at the age of 59, only two months from his 60th birthday was in the hunt at all, let alone leading or tied for the lead through four rounds of golf. Watson had a complete hip replacement less than a year ago, which to me seemed amazing.

I watched a bit on Friday and then quite a lot on Saturday and Sunday. What was most remarkable was watching Watson consistently driving the ball down the middle and seldom hitting a bad shot. His putting was steady and at times spectacular.

In the end he did not win, a victim of age, the thing that made the entire weekend so remarkable in the first place. Age showed in two ways. The first was fatigue and it certainly was fatigue that led to the errant shots in the playoff holes. The second function of age was discussed with Jack Nicklaus by telephone earlier during Sunday's final round telecast. Jack talked about the fact that under pressure the thing that took its toll as he got older was a loss of feel in the hands. Jack said that he often felt in pressure situations that he had fat hands, particularly when putting. My guess is that this is exactly what struck Watson on the 18th hole Sunday with those last two putts which would have given him the win.

The fact that Watson did not take home the coveted Claret Jug for a sixth time was at one level tragic. There are those who said he had choked. I would say his age just caught up to him. Whichever it was should not obscure the fact that this dramatic story was one of those wonders from the world of sport which appear seemingly out of no nowhere when least expected.

On the less edifying side of sport we are about to be treated to the opening of yet another architectural obscenity in the form of an overpriced overdone monument to misplaced societal priorities, avarice, and decadence. This could be a description of Citi Field or the new Yankee Stadium in New York which opened in the spring and were greeted by an absence of fans in their overpriced seats. But no, this is a level of excess that will set a new benchmark for the always excessive National Football League. How appropriate is it that this latest entry in the decadence sweepstakes is to be found in Texas, and better still, in Dallas, the home of J. R. Ewing?

You may recall J.R. as the leading practitioner of Texas overspending and overconsumption who taught us how the life of Texas cowboys had changed since oil money became a reality. In the late 20th century J.R. came to life in the form of one Jerry Jones, a bona fide oil and gas man, who purchased the Dallas Cowboys so that he could exercise his ego on national television. In recent years he has been doing his best to subvert the revenue sharing policies of the NFL and to undo the football success of the Dallas Cowboys. He has succeeded on both fronts.

Now Jerry is writing a new chapter in the history of the NFL, the history of Texas, and indeed in the history of Jerry Jones. Come September the Dallas Cowboys will have another new home not in Dallas. Cowboys Stadium is the new billion dollar bauble (\$1.12B) of Mr. Jones' possessions. Jerry says he could have built it for less but at \$850M the stadium would lack the "wow factor," and what's a few hundred million dollars when the "wow factor" is out there for the getting. No doubt Jerry was referring to the Italian marble floors, the pricey art collection, the dual gigantic video screens (72' x 160') that will carry the internal telecast, or the retractable glass end zone doors that will slide gently away.

These seem "wow" enough for most tastes but in fact there is much more. Words fail. Everyone needs to make their way to the on-line tour of the facility where your tour guide is none other than the modest Mr. Jones, hisownself. You will be treated to

amazing pictures and state of the art animation, all overdubbed with the voice of Jerry Jones. It is a voice that sounds very much like that of a humble servant of the deity offering a tour of a great cathedral. And in a way that is exactly what it is.

The 325 luxury suites go for anywhere from \$100,000 to \$500,000, the club seats range in cost from \$16,000 to \$150,000 and there are 15,000 of these available. These, of course, are seat licenses. Tickets to games are extra. Regular tickets range from \$59 to \$340, and there are a large number of standing room tickets that will sell at \$29, producing a sort of "groundling effect." Jones is counting on the "groundlings" to produce a crowd of 100,000 for the first game in the new palace of the people.

The stadium is located in the city of Arlington due in part to the city coughing up some \$325M of tax revenue to underwrite this civic monument. This means that the team has played in three cities in its history, Dallas, Irving, and now Arlington. Whose next?

One can only stand in awe at this staggering achievement of incredible ego. As the American economy struggles, as state and local governments face bankruptcy, and local school boards struggle to keep schools open with adequate supplies and enough teachers, one man, with the taste of J. R. Ewing and a vision unmatched since the building of the Pyramids, shines through these difficult times with minimal inconvenience and stunning insensitivity.

It really is about priorities, no matter how you cut it football fans.

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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