

Tiger Woods

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SPORT AND SOCIETY FOR H-ARETE - TIGER WOODS
SEPTEMBER 23, 2018

Tiger Woods won the Tour Championship in Atlanta today. If you are like me you may want to read that one more time before moving on.

I thought that although his comeback was impressive, and that he was playing some very Tiger-like golf in short spurts over the past year, he would not be able to complete "the process," as he calls it, and win a PGA tournament. Today he won his 80th tournament and is now only two behind Sam Snead in career tour victories. I am still not sure I believe this.

By itself this is an achievement of considerable proportions. Considering what the life of Tiger Woods has been over the past several years following the collapse of his marriage and his life, it defies expectations. To watch Tiger Woods initially deal with the breakup of his marriage was somewhere on the range of painful to pathetic. To watch him deal with his physical collapse was painful and excruciatingly so.

Humiliation is never easy to contend with, and public humiliation multiplies the degree of difficulty geometrically. The emotional toll is heavy and to recover from that and return to the public arena is more than simply a challenge. It requires a degree of will and determination well beyond the norms of human behavior.

In the voyeuristic world of celebrity, the general public seems to take particular joy in watching the great ones fall. The only thing that is more pleasing is to watch the great ones get back up and reassert their greatness. Redemption is a very appealing story. All is then forgiven and the adulation that follows knows no bounds.

If you saw the final few holes of the tournament today, you saw adulation without bounds. The crowds following Tiger and Rory McIlroy on the 18th fairway were massive and rowdy at least by golf standards. The roar and wave of humanity swept across the fairway seemed almost biblical in scope. The Fallen Hero was back and the crowds loved it and loved him.

When asked later what he thought about as he led the crowd down the 18th, he said that he hoped they would not start running because he can no longer run. The fact of the matter is that prior to his last surgery he could barely walk or stand. Anyone who has had back surgery, and there are massive numbers of Americans who have, knows the levels of pain and the physical toll back problems take on the entire body, not to mention how it weakens the will.

Back surgery is at best problematic and for most it is a last desperate choice of treatment. For nearly half who make that choice the outcome is less than success and often abject failure. A first failure makes the success of a second surgery even less likely. The same with the third, and so on. For Tiger Woods his first three surgeries brought only failure.

The fourth, described as a fusion, required over a year of physical therapy and countless hours of rehab. But this time the result was something like success. He was able to walk, then able to swing a golf club, then start to put his game back together within the physical limits imposed by the aftermath of surgery.

That he could play golf again was amazing. That he could play it at a championship level remarkable. That he could play it nearly at the same level as the earlier version of Tiger Woods was nothing short of miraculous.

As someone who had successful back surgery in my early thirties, I have watched Tiger Woods over these past few years and marveled how much he was willing to endure. At no time did I think he would arrive back at the top of the professional golf tour. Now he has. Physically, mentally, and emotionally he has achieved something remarkable, and something that to me seems like one of the greatest achievements in sport that I have seen in my lifetime, or read about in historical accounts.

I found myself today in front of the television in a state of disbelief, anticipation, and hope. For me it was one of those great moments we all long for in sport, one of those great revelations of the human spirit that sport can give us. These are the things that keep us coming back to sport no matter all those negatives that could easily drive us away.

Finally, I was moved by Tiger Woods victory today because of who he is and what he became as he moved through his life from early childhood to fame and glory. The recent biography, *Tiger Woods*, by Jeff Benedict and Armen Keteyian, painted a portrait of someone isolated and trapped in a bubble by his parents who created both the golfer and the warped personality. It is a sad story of what can only be described as child abuse. He grew up to be a lonely man with few social skills, a distorted view of those around him, and a man without a moral compass.

What I saw today was the old Tiger Woods of determination and grit, and a new Tiger Woods who seemed to appreciate the moment and understand what he had achieved with the help of many of those around him. He also seemed to have acquired an appreciation of his fans that he seldom if ever showed in the past.

In short it is a great day for golf, a great day for Tiger Woods, and a great day for anyone who appreciates the exhilaration that sport offers at a number of levels.

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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