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Tiger Woods at the Masters

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SPORT AND SOCIETY FOR H-ARETE - TIGER WOODS AT THE MASTERS
APRIL 15, 2019

As all the world knows by now, Tiger Woods won the Masters yesterday. Without a doubt, it was one of the most remarkable achievements in recent sport history, completing a long climb back from the bottom following the collapse of his marriage, his body, and, indeed, his life.

In the middle of last week, I was listening to an interview with 1995 PGA Champion Steve Elkington on Jim Rome's podcast. Elkington predicted that "Tiger" was the one to beat at the Masters. He offered an analysis emphasizing that fact that Tiger is playing very well now and that Woods knows how to win at Augusta.

I must say I was not totally convinced, but then on Sunday, Tiger Woods confirmed all that Elkington had said about him, including his concentration and calm, and most important of all, Tiger Woods' mind.

I have written about Tiger Woods multiple times and I must confess I am not sure what more I can say except that I was amazed and elated by the developments on Sunday. However, there remains a part of me that cannot believe it happened. So, I go back to some of my previous comments which seem as appropriate today as they did then.

In August of 2005, Tiger Woods won the World Golf Championship at the Firestone Country Club in Akron, Ohio. After that victory I wrote:

This weekend, as with all weekends, Tiger Woods was a study in concentration, and will. To be able to hold that concentration, shot after shot, hole after hole, week after week is an amazing achievement. Through the high resolution of television pictures it is possible to see the intensity of Woods' approach to each golf shot. You can see it in his eyes, in muscle contractions in his face, and his expressive body language. No one in the audience has the skill and creativity of Tiger Woods, but, at least in theory, anyone can develop a level of concentration approaching that of Woods.

Then, last fall following the Tour Championship in Atlanta I wrote the following:

Considering what the life of Tiger Woods has been over the past several years following the collapse of his marriage and his life, it (Woods' performance) 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.

If you saw the final few holes of the tournament today, you saw adulation without bounds. . . .The roar and wave of humanity the swept across the fairway seemed almost biblical in scope. The Fallen Hero was back and the crowds loved it and loved him.

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 successful 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.

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.

These words were as true now as they were when they were first written.

This past weekend, Tiger Woods showed again his greatness as an athlete, as a golfer, and as a human being who is capable of picking up the shattered pieces of his life and returning to greatness. It is no small achievement, and one that affirms again the power of the human spirit. It is also what keeps us coming back to sport week after week and year after year.

That this should happen one day prior to the celebration of another athlete, Jackie Robinson, who showed us the power of the human spirit in the last century seems a fortuitous convergence.

Robinson would have celebrated Wood's achievement, just as we celebrate the achievements of Jackie Robinson.

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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