

## A remarkable weekend

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Richard C. Crepeau

University of Central Florida, richard.crepeau@ucf.edu

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SPORT AND SOCIETY FOR H-ARETE  
A remarkable weekend  
AUGUST 23, 2005

Watching Tiger Woods play golf is one of the great treats available to those who follow sport in the television age. Win, lose, or draw, Woods shows what it takes to operate at the highest levels of professional sport, and offers a role model for anyone who dreams of even minimal success at the lowest levels. At least two elements are essential, physical skill and mental focus. Woods has both in abundance, and it is the mental side of Woods' game that even the casual player of any sport can emulate.

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.

This is what makes it so interesting to watch him play. When this level of concentration is coupled with the skill level and creativity of Woods the results can be magical. There seems to be tension in air on every shot and that just adds to the fascination.

Another attraction on television this weekend, and one that is continuing through the week, is the Little League World Series. As someone who spent five years as a Little League umpire I am always fascinated by the event. In many ways it has the same features that it had nearly a half century ago. There is simply way too much of the parents to be healthy, and too much television which gives these games an air of importance they do not possess. In the end however Little League has its charm with children doing things at a remarkable level of skill and simultaneously performing in entirely unpredictable ways.

It always amazes me that anyone would think it a good idea to drag eleven and twelve year olds across the country or across the globe to perform in a baseball tournament. In the case of

the players from Florida they will be missing the first two weeks of school. This may not seem important, but I would challenge anyone to take their children out of school for two weeks telling authorities they needed to send them to Pennsylvania to visit museums. I am not saying that the Florida players should not be participating in the Little League World Series. I am only arguing that there is a distorted value system working among school and community authorities.

The good thing is that this notion that you should abandon school for athletic competition prepares these young athletes to play at the college level, where competition is always more important than education. It is also where being dragged across the country to play games that are presented on television as life and death affairs is seen as a necessity.

The high point of the Little League World Series broadcast so far has to be Sam Ryan's interview with a player from Pennsylvania who was injured just prior to the tournament. Ryan introduced the interview by commenting on the unfortunate timing of the injury, as this young man had been preparing for this moment for his "entire life." Alas, now he would not get to play.

My immediate thought was just how long was that? Twelve years? Max. Or should the gestation period be factored in?

Saturday night following an exhibition game between Denver and San Francisco, Thomas Herrion, a 23 year old lineman trying to earn a spot with the 49ers, walked off the field, went into the locker room, collapsed and died. On Monday I read that a 27 year old college basketball player, Kenyon Jones, who had starred at the University of San Francisco and had been playing the past four years in Europe, had died at his home in Atlanta.

The New York Times on Monday ran a story about Adam Greenberg a baseball player who worked his way up through the Chicago Cubs organization. In his first at-bat a few weeks ago in Miami, on the first pitch, he was hit in the head. Greenberg at age 24 achieved his dream of playing in the big leagues and nearly had his life snatched away at precisely the same moment. His parents and his sister had flown into Miami for Greenberg's first game, and Dusty Baker gave Greenberg a shot as a pinch hitter for that reason.

It is not clear if Greenberg will ever make it back to the Cubs, or if he will fully recover from his injury. He is still

physically being affected and of course he is dealing with the mental aspect of hitting as well. Some players hit in this fashion never are able to hit effectively again.

So here are three stories of death and near death and two stories of the joy of competition at the highest and not so high levels. All this is in one short weekend. The joys of competition and the fragility of life jammed into a few hot days near the end of August is a reminder of the joy of sport and the transitory nature of both sport and life.

Maybe it's just the heat here in Florida relentlessly pounding away like an Oliver Stone movie, but to me this weekend seemed quite remarkable.

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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