



A Tiger by the tail is a Tale of the Tiger.

By Kerry Schmidt 08-27-2006

Yes, Tiger has the world by the tail and he is the tale of the sports world.

He is the most recognized athlete in the world, having passed his good friend MJ (some NBA guy named Michael Jordan) last year.

People, who in the past few years had little or no interest in golf, are now camping in front of the tube if Tiger is in contention. And I admit, I am one of those new believers. Saturday's ratings were up 11% over last year's coverage (when Tiger tied for 4th) and up 22% from last year, when Phil Mickelson won. Also, Sunday's final ratings were the highest overnight for the final round in the PGA since 2002.

A little later on herein, we will take a closer look at what the Big Cat has done for golf. Until then, as Nike President Bob Wood said, "Every player out there ought to kiss Tiger's feet when he walks past them. The TV money is all about Tiger. There's no other reason for its growth." Note: As tiger's biggest sponsor, Wood and Nike have made a zillion off of Tiger.

By winning his 12th major – and second in a row, only Jack Nicklaus, at 18 majors, lies ahead. Like Joe DiMaggio's 56-game hitting streak, everyone thought 18 was untouchable.

And the scary part is Tiger is just now entering the prime part of a golfer's life. Speaking of his life.

Hey, other than his 40 million dollar home on the water in Florida, being the most recognized athlete, making about \$100 million a year, being married to a perfect Bo Derek type "10" wife, being, right now, far and away the best golfer on the planet and having the greatest smile on film, he is just the same as you and I.

But the fact is he does have all those things. I hate him.

Just kidding.

The first question many ask, is he the greatest golfer ever?

I would say, not yet. Nicklaus currently holds that title, but, barring some unforeseen happening, he will eventually become the greatest to ever play the game.

As such, we all are very lucky to be able to watch his every move over the next 10,15, maybe even 20 years, as he does achieve the best ever title.

Now, to get most people to agree on one athlete in his field as the greatest, is very hard to do, but Tiger will eventually fall into that rarified atmosphere.

Many a cold beer has gone down a thirsty gullet over discussions/arguments as to who is the best at various sports.

With an individual sport, such as golf, it will be pretty easy to proclaim him the best if he keeps up this torrid pace.

Until then, I think there are only two, maybe three individuals on whom at least a majority would agree are the greatest.

Hockey is a team sport, but you will get very little argument that Wayne Gretzky (AKA "The Great One") is the best of all time in his field.



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Another is Muhammad Ali. Yes, some people will disagree, perhaps due to his early convergence to Islam, his Vietnam war views and his often and loud self-promoting, but, with the passing of those turbulent times, most have now agreed he is the greatest. The only other I will place in this category is a bit difficult, only because it also is a team sport, and without the support of his teammates, Jerry Rice may not fit the bill. But not only does he own virtually every relevant record for a wide receiver, his totals often double his nearest competitor. No reasonable individual can say there is/has been a better WR than Rice.

So, enjoy tiger's ride, which likely will lead him to the pinnacle of his profession. The next 10 years will be a joy.

But there is one area in which I believe that Tiger stands alone among his peers.

Tiger the Intimidator. No insult to Dale Earnhardt, SR.

When Tiger is on his game, the competition melts on the final day. Why? Because they just know he will win. He is that intimidating.

When tied or leading after three rounds of majors, he is 12 and 0 in victories.

Over all, he is 38 of 41 under the same conditions.

The old movie, "Never on Sunday" certainly does not apply to Tiger. With him, it is Always on Sunday.

The only other person I saw like that, while intimidating, was really more of an individual who put pure fear into his opponents, and that was Mike Tyson in his early stages.

Besides Wood, listen to what PGA Commissioner Tim Finchem has to say. He credits Woods for both the long and short term effects on the game.

"The reason he has so much impact is not only his skill, but his persona and the way he carries himself. (Sic). He drives TV ratings, brings more people out to the tournaments and creates more media coverage."

He continued by saying, "His long-term impact has yet to be defined .I believe it will be that he greatly changed the game. He's attracting so many kids who haven't had access to golf, and he's (opening the game to a larger ethnic and minority group).

"I think he'll change the game globally. That may be his finest accomplishment."

Nicklaus set the standard for winning. Tiger is setting the standard for all of life.

So, what effects has Tiger really had on golf?

Tiger joined the tour in 1996. In '97, his first full year, Woods led the PGA tour with \$2,066,883. (Note: Hale Irwin led all of golf by winning \$2,343,364 on the Champions tour).

Last year, Woods won \$8 million more than the top Champions winner.

In 96, nine players won over a million bucks. Last year, 78 did so.

In the 10 years pre-Tiger, the purses increased \$37.5 million. Post Tiger, they have increased \$186 million.

And as I mentioned above, the TV ratings when Tiger was in contention since the onset of his career are up between 35 to 50%!

A 2004 study showed that prior to his debut, new golfers increased 1% annually. Since 1996, 5%, or a 500% increase! Also, the percentage of African-American golfers has doubled since 1996.



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Hard to believe that one man could be responsible for all of the above growth and attention, but he has.

One of Tiger's biggest (and sometimes contentious) rivals, Mickelson, said the obvious. "I thank him all the time for (the increase in TV and purse money.)"

Had Tiger not shown up, 11 well known players would have won a total of 46 more victories.

There is also another way he has changed the face, and physique, of golf. Before Tiger, many looked like John Daley. Some even looked like they needed sports bras. Their workout regimen consisted of a few practice rounds and a few rounds at the 19th hole. Woods does practice, plenty, but he also has a work out regimen that is second to none. He lifts weights. He works on his cardiovascular. He works on his concentration. Next time you see him on TV, take a look at his physique and compare it to many other golfers. He has shoulders as broad as some bridges.

He can bench press 300 pounds – 11 times.

His 6 foot, 180 pound frame looks like an inverted pyramid, with the 30" waist leading up to the driver-length shoulders.

Nike's Wood again chipped in. "Look at the kids coming out of college. Their practice and work ethic are totally different than what was the norm 10 years ago."

For years the TV analysts have regaled in the monster drives Woods smashes, but that is due to his strength advantage.

"The whole power aspect of the game comes from Woods," says Wood.

Woods certainly does not need any outside incentive to push him to excellence.

"I thoroughly enjoy coming down the stretch on the back nine with a chance to win it. That's why I practice as hard as I do, what I live for. That to me is the ultimate rush in our sport."

But prior to the start of the PGA, Mickelson's caddie made the statement that (Mickelson), not Tiger, was the best. He said, "When Phil is on his game, no one can beat him."

Well, apparently Phil is not on his game that much, at least when Tiger is playing.

Also, watch him closely during play, compared to other players. He hardly utters a single word to those in his 3-some. He only talks to his long-time caddie and confidant, Steve Williams.

As Williams puts it, "he's certainly not an unfriendly guy. Just the opposite, but when he is out there on the course, he is all business. His concentration is just unbelievable."

So, are we watching the best golfer ever? Yes and no.

Yes, because he is the best golfer active today, and no, because Nicklaus still holds the records Tiger covets. But make no doubt about it, he will eventually surpass Nicklaus and become the best ever.

Thus, you are truly privileged to be able to observe sports history in the making. Enjoy.