

# HOW THE RETURN OF TIGER WOODS EXPLAINS WHY WE ARE SPORTS FANS

By Ron Sirak • @ronsirak  
November 27, 2017



Some day I'm going to write a book entitled: "Tweets I Never Sent." Believe me, I've had a bunch linger on my laptop for more than a few seconds before I deleted them. But as an early adopter of Twitter I learned quickly not to engage in 140-character confrontations. That's good advice for anyone.

As the anticipation for this week's return of Tiger Woods at the Hero World Challenge amped up it was difficult for me not to react to the over-reaction of both Tiger Lovers and Tiger Haters. Sadly, our culture has devolved to where it's not enough to have an opinion; you also have to make fun of those who disagree. #Sad.

Recently, when I tweeted that I'd be on Golf Channel the next day to talk about Tiger's return a few people used their Twitter platform – well, my platform actually since most of them have very few followers – to attack my intelligence, my integrity and to make vile suggestions about my motivations.

That's when I typed, but did not send, this Tweet:

“Dear Tiger Haters: Have enough confidence in your beliefs to not feel the need to denigrate those who disagree with you. I'm curious to see what Tiger has in store for us. That's what sport is all about: It is an immediate window into the essence of a person.”

Yes, that tweet takes advantage of the doubling of the character limit. And yes, even at 280 characters that is not nearly enough space in which to have a reasonable conversation. That's why I created this website: So I can explain fully how I feel about issues that matter to me.

Journalism matters to me. Sports matter to me. When I am asked how I became a golf writer the first thing I say is that I am not a golf writer; I write about people who happen to live their life in the world of golf. I write about people trying to do the best they can as they pursue their passion.

Part of the courage of athletes that is under appreciated is the fact they lay bare their soul for all to see every time they compete. As a writer I get that because we do the same thing. Every time we publish something we expose ourselves to second-guessing and criticism. It's part of the game.

But the world of sport is different than any other pursuit. I have been writing professionally for 47 years. Few athletes will have a career that lasts that long. What people have learned about me over decades fans discover about athletes in the span of one shot, one hole, one round, one tournament or one season.

Sport speeds up the timeframe of human existence. In a relatively short period of time, we learn how an athlete deals with success or failure; we learn a lot about their integrity and whether they cheat; we learn how they treat others; we learn how they perform under pressure; we learn how much they really want what they are pursuing.

In 1997, two months after 21-year-old Tiger Woods won the Masters by a record 12 strokes and shook up the world when a black man slipped on the winner's green jacket at the most-watched event in a sport dominated by whites, Jack Nicklaus was asked if Woods would become the best-ever golfer.

Always a thoughtful man, Nicklaus said time determines greatness and that we need to be patient. Jack also said we need to wait and see how Tiger handles it when he has to struggle. Well, we had to wait a dozen years for that to happen but when the stuff hit the fan it was in a major way – a perfect storm of physical, technical, mental and emotional issues washed over Woods.

Since he won the last of his 14 major championships at the 2008 U.S. Open, Woods has had major surgery on his left knee; four back operations; a shocking final-round loss to Y.E. Yang at the 2009 PGA; the 2009 Thanksgiving night car crash and ensuing scandal; a messy divorce; multiple swing changes; the chipping yips; the loss of many lucrative endorsement deals and the realization that his two children would someday read all about Dad's misadventures.

Because of the heights Tiger reached, his demise was as compelling as his rise. The lows were as newsworthy as the highs. That is part of the price of success. That is part of that very special immediate window into the being of an athlete. It's why we play the game.

I've covered Tiger for 23 years. I was there when he came from 5-down to win a U.S. Amateur; I saw him win majors by 15 strokes, 12 strokes and 8 strokes. I can't count how many shots I've seen him hit that defied credulity. He was, at his peak, not only the most-gifted golfer of his generation but also the smartest, most fit and the one who wanted it the most. The competitive fire rages in Woods.

What does Tiger have left? I don't know. That's why we watch. That's why we play the game. That's why we love sports. There is no re-set button. You keep playing the ball until it gets into the hole. For the umpteenth time Woods will lay bare his soul this week in the Bahamas. That matters in a way that can't be expressed in 140 characters – or 280. I, for one, will be watching.