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## The Soap Box (8/21/02)

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Do we appreciate greatness as it happens, or is greatness something we must reflect on to appreciate?

I'm having breakfast with Mark and DS and the PGA Championship is on and Justin Leonard is -7, some other guy is about 3 strokes back and Tiger is barely on the leader board. I get home later and I see the 'other' guy (Rich Beem) won, but Tiger of course made his Sunday run and finished just a stroke behind.  
(Would've won it too, but Beem hit a miracle eagle on a 600ft par 5)

But it brings up the question:

Do we already take Tiger's greatness for granted?

I mean he's in his mid-twenties and he dominates his sport like no one I've seen in my lifetime since Wayne Gretzky in his prime. Jordan too, but even Jordan didn't rule his sport like Gretzky back in the day. Wayne was doing things in his sport that made everyone else look like they were playing a different game.

But back to Tiger. I've had bets with people at my office and instead of a 'Masters Pool' they are more like do you want Tiger or the field?

That's how great Tiger is. It's an upset when he *doesn't* win a tournament. Especially a major.

What separates Tiger is that gene. That clutch gene. You know that certain thing that some athletes were born with. That gene that makes things slow down in the clutch. That little thing that separates good from great, champions from also rans.

Jordan had it. Montana had it, and Tiger for sure has it. Derek Jeter, probably. Magic Johnson and Larry Bird had it. Charles Barkley didn't. Jack Nicklaus had it, Greg Norman doesn't. Kobe Bryant has it, Chris Webber doesn't.

Today's PGA Tour is an amazing thing. It's never been as popular as it is today, but it's never been as dominated by one player as it is today. I mean Nicklaus, who has more majors than any other player, had Watson, Player, Trevino, Ballesteros and other people who would actually make a tournament out of it. On the other hand, players today have Tiger in their rear view mirror. I have never seen professional athletes so afraid of one player. The only player in my lifetime that's close is Jordan, but a team sport is way different than an individual sport. (Mike Tyson back in the early days was like that, but he's taken care of any sort of legacy or invincibility he had, but that's for another column)

I mean these guys on the tour . . . they're soft. Duval, Leonard, Els . . . they're pussies, and don't even get me started on Phil Mickelson. But let's face it. What's the motivation?

I had another discussion with a co-worker the other day: Who would you rather be: Phil Mickelson or Tiger Woods?

My answer: Phil Mickelson. Before you scream . . . a few months ago, Mickelson tanked again and placed second in a major and then a week later won the 7-11, Arby's, Marlboro

Light 100 Open and pocketed about 1.5 million for two weekends of golf, besides, Phil can take the kids out to a movie without being mobbed.

The point in the whole thing is that there is NO motivation for the other players to rise to Tiger's challenge. (No disrespect to Beem and his eagle) They can make millions of dollars for just showing up. So you watch Tiger and it's almost like he's playing against the record book. Almost like he knows no one will step up to meet the challenge. These guys are scared of him. They change rules and courses just to counter Tiger's game. That's what the NBA did to Chamberlain back in the day, but at least Chamberlain had Russell.

Who does Tiger have? Fred Funk?

What I propose for the PGA Tour is a 'winner take all' tournament, or at least a win-place or show. That way you'd have guys going for it on Saturday and Sunday. Playing like Costner in Tin Cup. Because that way it wouldn't matter if you put up a 12 on the last hole, because you're either going to get paid or your not. This way players would have to pull out the driver a little more and attack the greens more than if they were going to get 100K for finishing 14th. But these softies would never agree to something like that, because deep down they know that Tiger would win. He's a money player and they are not.

I do hold out hope for Sergio Garcia because he seems to be the only player not buying into the Tiger-Worship, but he does need to get the consistency and the killer instinct on Sunday.

Without question Tiger, already is the greatest. He's Ali. He's Jordan. He's Montana.

He is Tiger Woods. The chosen one.

Appreciate his greatness.

Until next time.

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**Soap Box**

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