

PERSPECTIVE: Tiger Thoughts
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A few weeks ago, more than 20 million Americans and I watched a young man named Tiger Woods win the Masters. I was glued to the TV set on the last day of the tournament as he finished what was arguably one of the most tremendous rounds of golf ever. I was much more aware of the significance of his age, 21, than his race, Asian American, African-American and Native American. For many people, especially minorities, his victory was more far-reaching...similar to Jackie Robinson becoming the first black to play professional baseball. It was especially significant since golf has officially and then unofficially continued to shun minorities.

What amazed me the most about Tiger was that any human being could hit that little white ball more than 1,000 feet down a narrow pathway so consistently without hurting someone. Having just started the sport myself a few months ago, I know firsthand how difficult it is to hit that tiny ball with a club. Actually, in golf circles, this is called addressing the ball. This is how Tiger Woods addresses the ball: "Ah, very nicely done." This is how I address the ball: "Stupid ball. Why won't you go straight?"

My game is much more suspenseful than Tiger's, from a spectator point of view. I've introduced the element of surprise: You never quite know where I'm going to hit the ball next. I played my first nine holes about a month ago and drove one ball over a 50-foot-high netting on the right side of the fairway...bouncing across a street...and, I fear, through a window onto someone's plate of apple pie. This must be why the professionals call it a slice (ba da bum!). But, as usual, I digress.

It is rather ironic that the same society that rewards a great golfer with more than \$60 million in earnings and endorsements pays outstanding teachers only about \$30,000 a year. Not that I have a problem with Tiger making all that money. His years of dedication and strict training have resulted in a successful career — more power to him.

Millions of young people will now dream of becoming the next Tiger Woods, just like millions of young people dream of being Michael Jordan or Cal Ripken. But it would be refreshing if millions of young people dreamed of being the next Mrs. McCord, my ninth grade English teacher (1964). She was another real superstar. I guess it's all about values and dreams.

SGI President Ikeda has said: "You should not be pulled down or defeated by your worries in life; otherwise, you are only heading toward unhappiness. First, to overcome your worries, you must win over yourself." Golf requires deep concentration. You could really see Tiger struggling to keep a high life-condition, especially the few times he hit a ball poorly.

Tiger's success will hopefully encourage many of our youth to overcome their disadvantages and achieve something of value in this lifetime. His sincere behavior, the mature way he deals with interviewers, and the foundation he has already established to help inner-city youth are encouraging signs that he will be as successful off the golf course as he already is on it.

That, in this time of self-indulgent, instant millionaires, is no small feat.

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