

# The Tale of Tiger Woods

by Bill Plaschke  
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To my great-grandchildren:

I am writing this with sore legs and a sweat-soaked shirt, neither of which can stifle my urge to run across a closely cut lawn while pumping my fist.

Please don't find me a sentimental old fool. But I have just spent an afternoon walking with history.

It is a history you have certainly already seen in books, but I was there. I bumped against it and shouted for it. I melted in its heat and shivered at its triumph.

Just as somebody once told me about Babe Ruth, dear children, I want to tell you about Tiger Woods.

You know by now that he was the greatest golfer who ever lived.

Today, through a meandering old woods known as August National Golf Club, he first set foot on the edges of that superlative.

Today, April 8, 2001, he won the Masters Golf Tournament to become the first golfer to hold the titles of the four modern major championships at the same time.

And, as you surely know now, it hasn't been done since. Maybe you have even read about what Woods achieved today, after shooting a 16-under-par 272 and finishing two strokes ahead of David Duval. How he talked about putting all four major trophies on his coffee table. How he hugged his dad.

But still, you must wonder. A golfer? A national hero was once a golfer?

Now that people are now hitting balls for miles off the moon, what is the big deal about hitting a crooked 300-yard drive?

And all this fuss over somebody who is just 25 years old? How can somebody make a lifelong impact while virtually still a child?

I'll admit, I was thinking about this too, until I watched Tiger Woods walking down the 18th fairway today into a thunderous standing ovation that quieted even the birds.

Then, as I accidentally brushed my pen against a white shirt in front of me, while accidentally elbowing a woman to my left, steam rising from the mass of people in 85-degree heat, I had some thoughts.

Here was a black man, walking into the teeth of a nearly all-white crowd at an exclusive club that didn't accept its first black member until 1991.

And they were standing for him.

Including a guy named Hootie.

"You're the greatest," said club chairman Hootie Johnson.

Here, also, was a young athlete with black shoes and a scowl, walking through a group of older colleagues in saddle shoes and shrugs.

And they were cheering him.

"Under these circumstances, with what he was trying to accomplish, to shoot 68 and win the golf tournament in the manner that he did, is outstanding," said Duval.

Here was a guy unafraid to be unlike anybody else in his sport, a guy who took those differences and turned them into fuel that burned him into another atmosphere.

You know what he said was his favorite shot today? It was a soaring, hooking tee shot on the dog-leg No. 13 that led to a birdie. It occurred just one hole after he botched a six-foot putt for a bogey that dropped him into a first-place tie.

You know why he liked the shot?

"It's a shot I've been practicing the last couple of months, knowing the fact that I'm probably going to need that shot," he said.



Tiger Woods made it cool to practice. He made it cool to work. He made it cool to care.

Do you know how many times I saw him smile at the crowd during today's round? Not once.

His playing partner, Phil Mickelson, a nice man who you'll remember as being famous for final-round putting yips, smiled and waved throughout.

Not Woods. He threw his putter on his bag. He flipped his putter behind him. He defiantly swooped his ball out of a cup after matching a Mickelson birdie.

He yelled at his shots - "Stop! Stop! Stop!"

He yelled at the crowd - "No cameras, amateur or professional!"

Tiger Woods made it cool to be in a zone.

Then he taught us when it was cool to step out.

After his final fist pump for his final birdie on the final hole that clinched the tournament, he suddenly took off his black cap and buried his face inside.

He later admitted he was crying.

"For some reason, my emotions started coming out and I started experiencing and reflecting on some of the shots I had hit," he said. "A lot of different things went through

my head at that moment."

But then, he reminded us it was cool to be polite.

"I had to pull myself together, because Phil was finishing his round, and I had to congratulate him," he said.

Everything that Woods represents can be found in other sports, of course. But rarely in one person. And only in golf can these lessons be so clearly individual and openly inspirational.

He was the right person, in the right place, at a time in our sports evolution when we needed him most.

I know you have probably debated with friends about whether Woods' holding all four major titles - Masters, U.S. Open, British Open and PGA - is the best individual sports achievement in history.

There was no debate today.

Walking with what seemed like 40,000 fans here - the media is not allowed inside the restraining ropes, unlike at other tournaments - it was impossible not to feel the celebration.

People were lined up 10 deep to see Woods tee off. People were jumping up and down behind long lines to see him putt. People were sliding down hills and hanging on to dogwoods just to watch him walk.

Woods paused several times to cover his sweaty face in a towel. Another time he held up a shot to chase away a bug.

His gallery, though, stayed hot and bothered, standing sweaty and motionless from shot to shot, never requiring a marshal to quiet them, huddled together to cheer the moment and the man.

Among those in the crowd were Woods' mother, Kultida, who somehow wedged her way in front of small trees or bushes to watch every shot.

The first family member Woods hugged afterward was his father, Earl, a loud man who celebrated his son's final putt by jabbing his finger into the air in a major-league "I told you so."

Everyone seemed to understand the history here today except, as usual, Woods.

After all, when he was asked what he would say to the late legendary golfer Bobby Jones, Woods replied, "Well, how did he come back?"

You may wonder, children, did Woods appreciate what he was doing? Did he enjoy it as we did?

Perhaps the answer is that such unprecedented focus on the course doesn't easily translate to romance in the interview room.

After spending an afternoon thinking only about the next shot, it may be difficult for Woods to place that shot in history.

But he does know this much: His buddy Michael Jordan won six major championships. On this day, Woods tied him.

"This will probably go down as one of the great moments in our sport," Woods admitted. "I cannot imagine accomplishing something greater."

I will end this note by reminding you that some people actually tried to downplay Woods' four consecutive titles because they didn't occur in the same calendar year, taking special pains to note that he did not win the elusive prize known as golf's "Grand Slam."

Like greatness ever needs a name. Like greatness ever needs to be anything other than something to embrace, something to share.

His name was Tiger Woods, and here's hoping his memory can touch you like his presence once touched us.

Love,  
Great Granddaddy.

# For Troy Aikman, the show is over

by Jean-Jacques Taylor  
Knight-Ridder Tribune  
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In an emotional soliloquy that lasted nearly an hour, Aikman provided a glimpse of a different side of the man, who often shielded his emotions from the public during his 12-year career.

"I've seen Danny White retire and Tom Rafferty and Ed Jones and Michael Irvin and Darryl Johnston and Jay Novacek, and you think your time will never come. My time has come," Aikman said as his lower lip quivered and a tear slid down his face.

"Today I announce my retirement from the National Football League and the Dallas Cowboys. It was 12 of the best years of my life. It was fun. Walking away from that is hard."

Aikman's official retirement came 33 days after owner Jerry Jones waived Aikman to avoid paying him a \$7 million roster bonus that would have extended his contract through 2007.

Though he flirted with San Diego and Kansas City, Aikman ends his career having worn one uniform, just like future Hall of Fame quarterbacks John Elway of Denver and Dan Marino of Miami, who recently retired.

Aikman, whose legacy has been forged by three Super Bowl rings, six NFC East championships and six Pro Bowl appearances in 12 seasons, said his body could no longer withstand the rigors of a 16-game sea-

son.

Aikman missed five games and parts of three others last season with head and back injuries. He suffered the ninth concussion of his NFL career and 11th overall, while compiling a quarterback rating of 64.4, his worst in 10 seasons.

"I know it's the right thing for me because of my health," said Aikman, wearing a navy suit, matching tie and a crisp, white shirt. Only a wedding ring adorned his fingers.

"The concussions, the back problems that I've had took their toll. I know to try and go out there and play next year would be a tough thing to do. The competitor in me wanted to do it. I still want to play. I just can't do it anymore."

A crowd of more than 200 - including the current coaching staff and several former teammates such as Emmitt Smith, Michael Irvin and Darren Woodson - listened to the 12-year veteran's farewell speech and watched the five-minute video of Aikman's career that was produced by NFL Films. Former Cowboys such as tight end Eric Bjornson and quarterback Jason Garrett also attended the event.

Aikman did not divulge his plans for the future, though he said he would continue his charity work through the Aikman Foundation and he hinted at a broadcast career.

Aikman, who has been negotiating with FOX, said an announcement probably would be made in the next few days. Industry sources said that minor details remain to be worked out between FOX and Aikman but



Troy Aikman, the stoic leader whose workman-like efficiency guided the Cowboys to an unprecedented three Super Bowl championships in four seasons during the '90s, announced his retirement Monday at Texas Stadium's Stadium Club.

that a deal could be announced as early as Tuesday.

"He made terminally ill children have hope," Jerry Jones said. "He

made Cowboys fans have pride, and he made our football team a champion again. He showed why athletes can be heroes. He's a cornerstone of

this franchise and a treasure of this community. He's ours to enjoy and be proud of forever."

Five years from now, Aikman will probably be enshrined into the Pro Football Hall of Fame.

Aikman, the first player selected in the 1989 draft, ended the '90s as the winningest starting quarterback in any decade in NFL history by posting 90 wins - four more than San Francisco's Joe Montana had won in the '80s.

Along with Montana and Pittsburgh's Terry Bradshaw, he is one of only three starting quarterbacks to earn at least three Super Bowl rings. He holds nearly every important passing record in franchise history and was one of the best postseason quarterbacks in NFL history.

"I grew up watching the Dallas Cowboys and Roger Staubach, and I liked them because you could never count them out," Aikman said. "They had Bob Lilly, Lee Roy Jordan, Roger Staubach, Drew Pearson, Tony Dorsett and Randy White and a lot of other great names. There was such a history that I wanted to be a part of that."

Aikman became the most emotional when he talked about former teammates Michael Irvin and Emmitt Smith and how instrumental they were in his career and the club's success.

He talked about the disappointment of knowing he won't be around to hand the ball off to Smith on the carry that makes him the NFL's all-time leading rusher, and he fought

back tears as he talked about the special relationship he has with Irvin, who retired after the 1999 season.

"We were known as 'The Triplets' and I loved it," Aikman said. "It meant a lot to me because of the way these guys went about handling their business."

Aikman said he loved football's ambiance.

He will miss the roar of crowd before the big game and the pall in the locker room after a bitter defeat. He will miss telling deep snapper Dale Hellestrae his deepest secrets the night before a big game and the card games on the flight home after a hard-fought victory.

For Aikman, playing football was about relationships with coaches. And teammates. And trainers. And support staff.

He will miss diagramming plays with offensive consultant Ernie Zampese and afternoon jogs with special teams coach Joe Avezzano.

It is time, he said, for another phase of his life.

One that will focus more on family than football. Aikman and his wife, Rhonda, are expecting a child on Aug. 29. They already have a daughter, Rachel.

Although Aikman recently purchased a home in Santa Barbara, Calif., he said he will continue to have a strong presence in the Dallas-Fort Worth area.

"This is my home. This is where family and friends are," Aikman said. "I look forward to watching the Dallas Cowboys be successful. Right now, I'm their biggest cheerleader."