



Tiger Woods studies a putt.

The Tiger Factor

By **Andrea Furst**

The news of Tiger Woods shooting the lowest score of his phenomenal career to blow away the field to win the PGA Tour Championship in Atlanta by eight strokes is making headlines throughout the golfing and sporting World. What makes this man so much better than his peers? How much further can he go? Is he the greatest player ever? Is he possibly the greatest athlete ever?

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The questions, explanations, and forecasts continue to roll in. He has captured the World and we all are extremely inquisitive regarding anything Tiger. There is so much information about Tiger yet we may even say that there is still not enough to answer the first of the abovementioned questions.

Indeed, he is an amazing benchmark for golfers and all athletes dreaming of pursuing an international career in sport. There are several descriptors that tend

to come to mind when I assess Tiger from afar. He is disciplined, driven, self-focussed, honest, a learner, purposeful, planned, pedantic, and most importantly a person who holds high self-confidence in his abilities as a golfer and high self-esteem in his personal life.

One of the latest advertising campaigns that Tiger is involved in is the Gillette Champions. It involves Tiger, Roger Federer, and Thierry Henry. There are several aspects of this campaign that give us insight into the mindset of this

champion. One of the quotes that is used is 'Most people don't understand what it takes to get there'. The reason I find this so interesting is that I truly believe most people don't want to do what it takes to get there, which opens up the pathway for those that do. Of those people that do want to do what it takes to get there, we see a small percentage of people that do an exceptional job, and not just sometimes, but all the time.

Tiger strikes me as an individual who is driven by the pursuit of continual self-improvement and an individual who will push himself constantly to get more out of himself as a player and as a person. He has mentioned over the years that he is not sure how far he can go and that he is always looking forward to reaching the next level, always.

Here is a quote from Tiger in 2000. He is on the same pursuit now as he was then. "There are things in your life that you don't feel are quite right, so you change them," he told *TIME*. "And you've got to tweak them every day – because it's very easy to get out of balance and not have everything exactly as you would like to have it. It could be that you're sleeping too much or not sleeping enough. Or you're not eating enough or eating too much. You've just got to keep the right balance... Each year I've learned that much more about myself. I guarantee I'll be a totally different person next year from who I am now" **(Tiger Woods, cited in *TIME*, 2000).**

Most of his achievements can be attributed to the intangibles which is consequently why it is so difficult for the World to completely understand Tiger. We can't see all of the personal attributes and qualities he possesses. However if we take a look at his upbringing and his development there are several key elements which stand out as relatively unique in the international sporting World.

Tiger's interest in golf started

Mary Schilpp/US PGA TOUR/Getty Images



Tiger Woods smiles on the 11th green during practice for The Presidents Cup on September 26, 2007, at The Royal Montreal Golf Club in Montreal, Quebec, Canada.

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very young. This interest was not just with the technical game, it included many other vital aspects such as the development of a mindset as well as life skills that have given him the tools and support to get him to where he is today and beyond. He was taught how to think from a very young age. I feel confident in saying that he is probably ten years or more ahead of players his own age due to this deliberate teaching of how to maximise your thinking on the course and in life.

It is apparent that Tiger always felt loved by his parents. He felt that as long as he was demonstrating effort on the course or range, it did not matter what the result was to either parent. This concept was instilled within Tiger. He was taught how to push himself outside his comfort zone with no fear of negative consequences. He was taught that it was better to extend himself beyond current limits and be unsure what might occur than to be comfortable in knowing the current state of play. He was taught how to fall, pick himself up, dust himself off, and go again. The attention given to training these skills throughout his development are paramount in becoming the Tiger Woods of today.

This love from his parents extends into the development of high self-esteem. When parents demonstrate that there is unconditional love, the child can learn that they are a good person despite a substandard golf performance on a given day. High self-esteem linked with high self-confidence is a potent tool for any athlete. When we see the personal flaws of so many international athletes behind the sporting scenes of stardom, perhaps this is why Tiger is just so much better than his peers. He actually likes himself. He learnt that he can be self-confident in his abilities as a golfer through his natural talent plus his

discipline to continually work at and fine-tune the technical, mental, physical, and tactical skills.

More importantly, he knew that his performance does not dictate his self-confidence. And even more importantly again, he knew that his golf performance certainly does not dictate his self-esteem. He can separate his professional life as a golfer and his personal life as a son, husband, and now father.

Tiger also appears very honest with himself, something which seems he was taught by his father. He knows his game intricately and will learn from whatever successes or failures come his way. There is a commitment to taking the good with the bad and ensuring that there are lessons in everything he does so that he improves for the next shot, hole, round, and tournament. This learning is purposeful and it is evident on the course and on the range. Take one look at Tiger's practice schedule in the lead up to any major and you see that there is not much left to chance.

When reviewing Tiger from every angle of his game and of his personal life he demonstrates a myriad of skills that stimulate the feeling of awe in his current peer group and the international sporting audience. There are certain points to remember and pay close attention to when absorbing my comments on Tiger. These skills that he possesses appear to be deliberately taught from a very young age. He has been practising these skills for a relatively long time compared to his peers. He is the master of these skills right now. However, given his never ending pursuit of improvement, he continues to fine-tune these skills through experience and learning. Tiger does what most other athletes don't want to do. He does this all of the time. He is relentless in the experiment of how far he can push himself, and he is being rewarded

continually for this characteristic. Despite all of these points, the finishing and most valuable point is that he has high self-esteem. He values himself as a person and he demonstrates this with everyone who is close to him. He has the entire package because he has worked conscientiously at both sides of the rope. This is where most of his accolades should be directed. Praise must go to his parents and all those influential people in his life to have moulded an elite athlete that when the last putt has sunk in his career, he will walk away and be already comfortable with the life he has developed outside golf.

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