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The Tiger effect

Ten years ago, Tiger Woods' Masters triumph shook golf. But it has yet to produce waves of black players.

By J. BRADY McCOLLOUGH
The Kansas City Star

AUGUSTA, Ga. | Ernie Banks watched in amazement. Earl Woods' son was making it look way too easy, shattering records, turning golf's greatest tournament into a joke. All those white men in green jackets better run and hide.

"Ten years," Banks pondered from his home in California this week. "Ten years! That's something. That's really something."

Hope rang through the pines of Augusta National that day. Members of the all-black kitchen staff cheered from the big oak tree outside the clubhouse as Tiger Woods teed off Sunday, already leading by 9 shots. Lee Elder, the first black golfer allowed to play the Masters in 1975, was there, too, fielding interviews. Banks, attending his second Masters, was overjoyed. Things were most certainly going to change.

"I was thinking it would inspire a lot of young black kids to get into golf and start playing it," says Banks, the former Chicago Cubs great. "I left there, and the next year, I went to a lot of golf courses, and I saw kids. They wanted to swing like Tiger Woods."

Everybody wanted to believe that Woods would fix everything. It was the easy thing to believe, that one 21-year-old who was hell-bent on being the best golfer in the world would have the time and energy to patch up golf's long-standing lack of diversity.

But 10 years after Woods' groundbreaking Masters victory in 1997, the Doppler reading is something close to zero. Here are the facts: In 2007, Woods is the only player of African-American heritage on the PGA Tour. There are no black players on the LPGA Tour. There is one black player on the Nationwide Tour, the PGA's farm system. At the college level, the increase of black players is just a blip.

That's not to say that Woods hasn't had an impact. Banks is right. There are plenty of black kids who want to swing like Tiger Woods out there. But they aren't anywhere close yet to making an impact on the game.

"I have been around long enough to know that the predictions of opening the floodgates of golf to large numbers of African-American kids was a long shot at best," says Richard Lapchick, director emeritus for the Center for the Study of Sport in Society. "I watched people talk about Arthur Ashe breaking the barriers of tennis, and not much changed after that."

On that fateful Sunday in Augusta, one name kept coming up: Jackie Robinson. It was no coincidence that Woods' victory came two days before the 50th anniversary of Robinson breaking baseball's color barrier. Tiger was golf's Jackie.

"It was an amazing expectation," Lapchick says. "It couldn't be done."

"Tiger will do more than any other man in history to change the course of humanity. He'll have the power to impact nations. Not people. Nations. The world is just getting a taste of his power."

| Earl Woods in Sports Illustrated, December 1996.

Talk about fatherly pressure. Earl Woods died 11 months ago, and it's quite possible that the desire for Tiger to be Gandhi died with him.

Tiger Woods never asked to change the world. He just wanted to play golf. After winning the Masters in '97, Tiger didn't feed the monster. He said things like, "My goal is always to win and be the best. I'm proud that I achieved my goal this week."

Ten years later, Woods is asked if he knew that Duke University held a symposium last month about his impact on golf.

"They have nothing else to do, do they?" Woods says jokingly, then turns serious. "First of all, I have no idea what they said, and second of all, I have no idea why they even talked about me."

Either Woods doesn't get it, or he simply wants no part of it. Aside from his work with the Tiger Woods Foundation, which promotes golf to minority youth and educates them on things such as forensic science in a learning center, Woods has avoided the issue. He simply can't make everyone happy. For every person he pleases, there is another saying that he could do more.

Orin Starn, a cultural anthropology professor at Duke, ran the Tiger symposium. He's working on a book about golf and American society.

"What's so striking," Starn says, "is the contrast that there were actually 10 different African-American pros playing in the '60s and '70s. Not only have things not changed for the better in terms of more minorities in golf, but actually things have gotten worse."

Most of the early black golfers started as caddies and got into the game that way. Then they moved on to the all-black United Golf Association tour and in later years, if they were lucky, the PGA. Starn says that the invention of the golf cart took away many

opportunities for potential black golfers because it reduced the need for a caddie. He also points out that caddying for pro players became so lucrative that almost all caddies on the Tour are now white.

Those are just starters. Starn says that, indirectly, Woods made it harder for a black player to emerge on the Tour.

"In a weird way," Starn says, "Tiger himself was responsible for setting this higher standard of play for the PGA Tour. These kids are starting at 6 and 7 years old. They have nutritionists, weight trainers, and all of this takes money."

Starn thinks Tiger isn't reaching the inner-city market. Tiger came from a country-club background in Southern California. He sells Buicks and expensive golf equipment aimed at a white, affluent demographic.

"In the original Nike rollout campaign," Starn recalls, "they played upon the idea of him as a racial pioneer. It was 'I am Tiger Woods,' and there was an association there with inner-city kids taking their golf bags on the subway. If you look now, in all his ads he is the bland, corporate pitch man."

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL STUDENT IN HARLEM: If you try your hardest, you can succeed. And if you really focus on what you want to do, you can do it.

ABC NEWS: And then there's young Timothy Sneed of Houston, who picked up his first club after watching Tiger Woods.

TIMOTHY SNEED: He's a good golf player. And someday I might be like him.

ABC NEWS: A simple thing to say. But it's taken Tiger Woods to help Timothy believe it.

| World News Tonight with Peter Jennings, April 14, 1997

There are many Timothy Sneeds out there, and Tiger Woods deserves the credit for that. But how could these kids ever get a chance to play?

The First Tee answered that question when it was founded in 1997. The program's goal was to introduce the game to kids who normally wouldn't have a chance to play, and also teach them life skills in the process.

The program, in that regard, has succeeded. Tens of thousands of minority kids every summer play through the First Tee's scholarship program.

But here's the thing: First Tee isn't trying to train great black golfers. They're more interested in teaching them core values such as sportsmanship, respect and integrity rather than how to get up and down. At First Tee, it's a bonus if a kid ends up pursuing the sport seriously.

"Our purpose is not to find the next Tiger Woods," says Pat Zuk, executive director of The First Tee of Kansas City. "Our purpose is to give kids an alternative to some of the bad things the society offers out there. We're not looking for Tour players."

The First Tee has been golf's effort at change for the last 10 years. And it is doing something. But there are an increasing number of black golf coaches and enthusiasts who want more.

"I'm tired of our kids getting 'introduced' to something," says Eddie Payton, the men's golf coach at Jackson State (Miss.) University, a historically black college. "I can introduce my 11-year-old daughter to a jet plane, but I'll be damned, if someone doesn't get in there and teach her how to fly it every day, she won't be able to fly a jet plane. It has to be a consistent education in this game.

"Doing it once a year to make your conscience feel good ain't going to get it done."

That shows in the fact that from 1999 to 2005, the percentage of black men playing golf in college only increased from 1.8 to 2.4, even though there were more black youths playing the game. Last year, Payton said there were golf teams at three historically-black colleges that were all white.

"Those kids playing in college now, 10 years ago would have been 8 or 9 years old, the perfect age to start them in golf," says Payton, older brother of former Chicago Bears great Walter Payton.

"The pool is just as shallow as it was before Tiger. We should be seeing them now, and we're not. We should see them at non-historically black programs doing well. If you want to see black golfers, you have to go to historically black colleges."

Payton doesn't blame Tiger, and he puts part of the blame on his own people. He says they haven't run with the blueprint that Earl Woods laid out for them. Bill Dickey has tried to do his part. Dickey, a golf enthusiast and former Phoenix real estate executive, started the National Minority Junior Golf Scholarship Association in 1983.

Dickey's original goal when he started the association was to try to develop proficient black golfers. But, he says, people didn't want to donate for that cause. He had to change the goal to helping black kids attend college, whether they were going to play golf at that level or not.

While many of the scholarships don't go to kids who play golf in college, Dickey's association has helped black golfers into college programs such as Payton's.

Payton and Dickey are part of a growing number of blacks that want to do something. Payton particularly is feeling ambitious. His dream is to start a teaching academy for black golfers, similar to the Leadbetter Golf Academy in Bradenton, Fla.

"It's real simple," Payton says. "When you look around the country and you see where all these prodigies are going, they go to somewhere, to somebody who's identified as one of the best teachers at a golfing school. We just wait around for the next prodigy to come along as opposed to bringing around people with talent so that they become prodigies."

Payton already has chosen a plot of land in Mississippi for his school. Dickey says they need a "fairy godmother" to drop \$10 million in their laps to start it. Payton says money shouldn't be a factor.

"Who cares about the cost?" Payton says. "We're talking about a generation of people. If I go broke, and it works, so be it. We've hidden behind money our entire lives."

"Somebody has to introduce them to this way of learning. If not, we'll have this conversation 10 years from now, and the situation will be the same. It was the same before Tiger won the Masters."

In the galleries at the Masters, people stared at him as if he was from another planet. And maybe he is.

| *The New York Times*, April 14, 1997

After today, we will have a situation where no one will even turn their head to notice when a black person walks to the first tee.

| Lee Elder, April 14, 1997

Elder was right. Nobody at Augusta National turns to notice anymore. That's because there is only one black player, and today, he'll be going for his fifth green jacket. Tiger Woods is so much more than a golfer of African heritage.

"Race," Lapchick says, "is of secondary importance to the caliber of his play."

So when will another black pro join Woods on Tour? Odds are, it will be years. Tim O'Neal, 31, is playing on the Nationwide Tour and is currently ranked No. 448 in the world. He has made \$13,722 in making two cuts so far this year.

The Savannah, Ga., native wishes he could be at Augusta with Woods. In 2004, O'Neal

was 1 stroke from earning his Tour card at the PGA Tour Qualifying School.

"I work hard every day trying to get there," says O'Neal, who played under Payton at Jackson State. "I should be out there. Besides me, there should definitely be more. At least more on the Nationwide Tour."

Yes, O'Neal is alone there, too. How has he done it? O'Neal credits his parents, who started him on the game when he was 5 years old. He got plenty of instruction and was able to earn a college scholarship. O'Neal was in school when Tiger won the Masters. He remembers all the talk about doors opening.

"I don't know what they meant by that," O'Neal says. "Opening what doors? I still don't know. Because it wasn't like black golfers weren't allowed to play golf or anything like that."

O'Neal says the biggest obstacle for capable black golfers is finding sponsorship. He's been lucky in that several well-to-do black people, including actor Will Smith, have helped him stay on his feet over the last decade. Most black golfers haven't been so lucky.

Steve Monroe, who plays the Long Drivers Tour and the Moonlight Golf Tour, drives an average of more than 300 yards and says his short game is coming along nicely. But he doesn't have the money to play the Nationwide or lower tours. Monroe, who grew up poor in Clearwater, Fla., says he has just found a possible sponsor in Outback Steakhouse owner Hugh Connerty, who sees potential in him.

Monroe learned the game from the Chi Chi Rodriguez Foundation, which is similar to The First Tee. He believes he can make it to the Tour, but only with some help.

"I'm just short of money, man," Monroe says. "I've got the whole package. I've never had a swing coach or nothing like that. I've been self-taught. Once I get the money in my hand, I'll be out there with Tiger. I want to get out there bad, man."

That would be nice, but logic doesn't coincide with Monroe's optimism. For a black golfer in 2007, there are many obstacles to overcome.

"It's sad, to be honest," O'Neal says. "It is very sad that 10 years after Tiger won the Masters, there is not another player on the Tour."