

The Passion of Tiger Woods: An Anthropologist Reports on Golf, Race, and Celebrity Scandal

Orin Starn

Duke University Press (February 2012)

Softcover \$19.95 (144pp)

978-0-8223-5210-5

For more than a decade Tiger Woods has been one of the most celebrated men in the history of sports. At a young age, this dynamo took the golf world by storm, accumulating the same number of titles and trophies in a dozen or so years that legends Arnold Palmer and Jack Nicklaus took a career to accomplish.

But as Orin Starn reports, Woods' undoing opened the floodgates for long-held racial animus and not a little bit of schadenfreude, exacerbated by an irresponsible media and its insatiable public.

Starn's *Passion* seeks to cover numerous issues, extending beyond Woods to celebrity culture in general: why do we care so much about what they earn, what they do, with whom, and how often? Several pages in this slim volume concern reactions culled from websites and blogs where writers chime in with the vilest sentiments under the safety of anonymity.

Then there are fans who feel let down when a hero "fails" them by being all too human. Woods was certainly not the first to stray, but "tell-all" interviews with several of the women with whom he had affairs certainly make it seem that Woods was a champion cad as well as athlete. Certainly his multiple affairs helped ugly stereotypes about African American males' sexual appetites to easily surface.

The author—a professor and chair of cultural anthropology at Duke University—also points out the hypocrisy of those who have traditionally controlled golf on the professional and amateur levels; that is, middle-aged Caucasian males, often upper-class and conservative. For the most part, African Americans who desired to take up the game in the generations before Woods were met with the same hostility they faced in day-to-day life. Even Woods, with all his talent, was not immune to taunts and prejudice. The fact that he was the product of a mixed marriage brought enmity from white *and* black circles, the latter for his seeming reluctance to take a stand on issues important to their community. (There were also complaints because all of the women with whom Woods strayed who came forward were white.)

Starn's indictment of both Woods and those who rush to tell on him suffers slightly in the book's organization, which seems to jump back and forth in covering the golf, race, and infidelity angles. Nevertheless, it's a fascinating and thought-provoking look at how society gets its information and, often immediately, hands down its judgments.

RON KAPLAN (Spring 2012)

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