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# A Study of How Four Black Newspapers Covered the U.S. Masters Tournament 1994 through 2001.

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A Study of How Four Black Newspapers Covered the U.S. Masters Tournament  
1994 Through 2001

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A thesis  
presented to  
the faculty of the Department of Liberal Studies  
East Tennessee State University

In partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree  
Masters of Arts in Liberal Studies

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by  
Mark James Sharman  
May 2007

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Dr. Elwood Watson, Chair  
Dr. Marie Tedesco  
Dr. Emmett Essin

Keywords: Tiger Woods, Augusta National, Golf, Racism, Newspapers, Black

## ABSTRACT

A Study of How Four Black Newspapers Covered the U.S. Masters Tournament

1994 Through 2001

by

Mark James Sharman

The intent of this thesis is to discuss the manner in which four black newspapers covered the U.S. Masters Tournament, hosted annually at the Augusta National Golf Club, Georgia, from 1994 through 2001. The four black newspapers include two from the North, the *New Pittsburgh Courier* and the *Chicago Defender*, and two from the South, the *Atlanta Voice* and the *Birmingham Times*. It is my contention that U.S. Masters coverage in the aforementioned black papers is dependent upon the presence of Tiger Woods. Without Woods' participation at the Masters, coverage of the event would be diminished in the four black newspapers. The years 1994 through 2001 (excluding the *Birmingham Times* which was only microfilmed to 1999) have been analyzed in each of the four newspapers in order to present my case. The thesis proves that to the four black newspapers Tiger Woods is the deciding factor in its Masters coverage.

## DEDICATION

To Mum, Dad, Claire, Christopher, and David.

## AKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank my Mum, Dad, and sister, Claire, who have all offered me advice, encouragement, and support, not only during this thesis but during my time in the United States. Thank you. I would also like to thank Kelly Hensley from the Inter Library Loan department at East Tennessee State University. Kelly worked so hard to get the materials I needed, and I am very grateful to her. I would also like to thank Elwood Watson and Emmet Essin who were on my thesis committee. Over the last two years both have helped me enormously. Their time, advice, and eagerness to help was much appreciated. I would also like to thank Randy Sanders, Roberta Herrin, Sara Peters, and Ruth Hausman at the Appalachian Studies department. They have all been wonderful to me from the moment I started work with them two years ago. I thank them for making me feel so welcome and for being such lovely people. I would also like to acknowledge John Delves, Bryan Hardman, John Caldow, George Gee, Paul Berg, Jim Mcgarity and the rest of the Lagers for their interest in this project.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Like millions of other golf fans around the world, I sat transfixed as Tiger Woods won the 1997 U.S. Masters. The distance he hit the ball was incredible, his putting phenomenal, and his calm and composed demeanor was beyond his years. After Woods had completed his round, he was presented the green jacket, the prize for winning the Masters, by the defending champion, Nick Faldo. As Faldo slipped the jacket onto the shoulders of Woods, the crowd at the Augusta National warmly applauded their new champion. Since Woods' inaugural Masters victory in 1997, he has won the tournament on three other occasions. Each time Woods was warmly congratulated by the chairman of the Augusta National as he was presented with his prize. Woods, always the gentleman, smiles at the chairman and thanks him graciously for his kind words.

After seeing this ceremony in 2005, which is, to date, the last time Woods won the Masters, I began to wonder how Woods' Masters victories were covered by the black press. I was aware, as any other golf fan would be, that the Augusta National had a very discriminatory past, and as such, was interested to find out if the black press was interested in covering the U.S. Masters. If the black press did cover the tournament, I wanted to know what the coverage was like and if it differed greatly before and after the emergence of Tiger Woods. After considering the question and discussing it with my advisors, I decided to conduct a thesis into the black newspaper coverage of the U.S. Masters.

My methodology was to study four black newspapers, two Northern, two Southern, in order to gauge their reaction to Woods' wins. After deciding on the newspapers that would comprise this study, the next problem was to choose the years of analysis. After careful consideration I opted to cover the years 1994 through 2001 (unfortunately the *Birmingham Times* was only microfilmed until 1999). These years were chosen because I wanted to see how the four black newspapers covered the Masters before Tiger Woods emerged, how they covered his win, and if their coverage changed following his victory. At the beginning of the project it was decided that in order for the analysis to be fair, I would need to cover black newspapers with slightly different political biases. My first newspaper, the *New Pittsburgh Courier*, was fairly central politically, the three other papers that made up the study, the *Chicago Defender*, the *Atlanta Voice*, and the *Birmingham Times*, were decidedly leftist. Although this was surprising, it did not change my project.

From 1994 through 1996, despite publishing articles on Tiger Woods' amateur debut at the Augusta National, the four papers were not interested in any other facet of the tournament, including the winner. During the tournament in April 1997, when it became apparent that Woods was going to win, and become the first black winner, all four black papers began to extensively cover the event. After 1997, interest in the Masters from the four black newspapers was still minimal, but their interest in Tiger Woods' chances of winning the Masters was huge. The four papers were not interested in the Masters per se, but interested in Tiger Woods at the Masters. Almost without exception, every article on the Masters following 1997 was about Tiger Woods. The four black newspapers also try to link Woods' achievements with Jackie Robinson, as



coincidentally, Woods won the Masters on the fiftieth anniversary of Jackie Robinsons Major League Baseball debut. The result of this is that some of the papers, the *New Pittsburgh Courier* in particular, try to categorize Woods as a racial pioneer, in the same way that they label Robinson.

After a literature review of black participation at the U.S Masters and a brief history of the black press in America, there will be chapters on each of the four black newspapers in this study, the *New Pittsburgh Courier*, the *Atlanta Voice*, the *Chicago Defender*, and the *Birmingham Times*.

## CHAPTER 2

### A BRIEF HISTORY OF BLACK PARTICIPATION AT THE MASTERS AND THE BLACK PRESS

The bus boys, waiters, cleaners, rubbish collectors, and valet parkers stood in silence as Tiger Woods hit his opening tee shot from the first hole at the Augusta National in the final round of the 1997 U.S. Masters. The whiteness of the clubhouse was in stark contrast to the blackness of their faces. All those of color had come out to show their support to a man who, with an eight-stroke lead going into the final round, was going to be the first black winner of the U.S. Masters. Twenty-two years earlier a scene like this had occurred when Lee Elder became the first black man to play in the Masters. Elder recalled that as he left the Augusta National “every Black person who worked at the club; caddies, servants, the people who worked in the restaurants, lined up against the wall, waiting for me, waiting to congratulate me and thank me for what I had done.”<sup>1</sup> Lee Elder did not win the Masters he missed the cut, but being under the media spotlight, and dealing with the pressure of death threats for months, his failure was hardly surprising. The black people who thanked Elder for his courage went back to their menial jobs and no doubt hoped that they would welcome Lee Elder again. Thankfully they did see Elder again; he played in five of the next six U.S. Masters tournaments.<sup>2</sup>

Five hours after Tiger Woods had hit from the first tee the sun was sinking low behind the Georgia pines. Tall shadows fell across the pure white bunkers as Woods strode purposefully up the eighteenth fairway. Now with a twelve-stroke lead the twenty-

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<sup>1</sup> Lawrence Donegan, “Wiser Elder Lifts Lid on Augusta’s Dark Past,” *The London Guardian*, 6 April 2005, Final Edition.

<sup>2</sup> David Owen, *The Making of the Masters. Clifford Roberts, Augusta National, and Golf’s Most Prestigious Tournament* (New York: Simon and Schuster 1999), 249.

one year old Woods was about to become the youngest winner, the winner by the most stokes, and the first non-white winner of the U.S. Masters. With all the aplomb of a Masters champion Woods fired a perfect nine iron into the green. His eighteen-foot birdie putt rolled down the sloped green before curling into the center of the hole for a birdie three. The putt never looked as though it was going to miss. Woods raised his arms in triumph and fell into the arms of his father who was waiting by the eighteenth green with tears streaming down his dark cheeks.<sup>3</sup>

The Augusta National's new champion was not somebody who would have been welcome at the club in years gone by. To say that the Augusta National, the home of the U.S Masters, has a messy racial past would be something of an understatement. Woods' win in 1997 came towards the end of a decade in which the integrity of golf had been dragged through the mud. In August 1990 the United States Professional Golfers' Association (USPGA) Championship was held at a golf club in Birmingham, Alabama, called Shoal Creek. As Shoal Creek readied itself for the staging of the event, the club president, a Mr. Hall Thompson, was called to do the customary pre-tournament press conference. Several papers in the area had recently been running stories about the exclusionary practices of private country clubs in the southern states. When a reporter pressed Thompson on this matter, he replied, "we have a right to associate or not to associate with whoever we chose. The country club is our home and we pick and choose who we want. I think we've said that we don't discriminate in every other area except the Blacks. We don't invite Blacks to join our club because that is just not done here in

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<sup>3</sup> CBS Broadcast, 13 April 1997.

Birmingham.”<sup>4</sup> Thompson’s comments outraged many in the United States and caused untold embarrassment to the United States Golf Association (USGA) and the Professional Golfers Association (PGA). Following Thompson’s comments the PGA quickly “adopted language that prevented future PGA Championships from being played at clubs with discriminatory membership practices.”<sup>5</sup> The PGA’s statement that it would only consider holding future events at clubs with fair membership policies caused many private country clubs to recruit black people. In the scramble to acquire black members, joining fees would often be waived, as would the annual subscription. The Shoal Creek incident left a scar on golf that is still visible today. Thompson did not resign, nor did he try to defend his comments. That Thompson is one of the select members of the Augusta National (he actually is on the tournament committee) does little to help the image of the U.S Masters.<sup>6</sup>

The Augusta National took part in a nationwide recruitment drive by private country clubs to attract Black members; Ron Townsend was admitted just before the 1991 Masters tournament. This was done either to appease the PGA (which is unlikely as the Masters tournament is individually run) or in order to stop any financial loss. The latter would seem more appropriate, as the Augusta National relies almost exclusively on Masters week for their annual income. The Augusta National has always prided itself on doing things its way. It will not relinquish control to anybody, under any circumstances, which is why they would not admit a black member just because it had been bullied into doing so by the PGA. The Augusta National admitted a black member because it was in

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<sup>4</sup>Alan Shipnuck, *The Battle for Augusta National – Hootie, Martha, and the Masters of the Universe* (New York: Simon & Schuster 2004), 26.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>6</sup> Steve Eubanks, *Augusta – Home of the Masters Tournament. A Revealing Look Inside America’s Most Intriguing Golf Club*. (New York: Broadway Books 1997), 110.

its best interests to do so. The official Masters statement reads “this is *our* tournament. If you do not like the way we do business, you are free not to do business with us. If you find our past policies on race or our current policies on gender offensive, you need not attend the tournament, televise the tournament, or for that matter, play in the tournament.”<sup>7</sup> The control that the men who run the Masters have over their tournament is absolute. It is an institution of tradition that prides itself on the policies and rules that were adopted by their two founders, Bobby Jones and Clifford Roberts. The Masters tournament is run with the blessing of the PGA, but in reality the PGA has little sway over what goes on behind the gates at the Augusta National. In effect, the Masters tournament is run in exactly the way that those who run the Augusta National decide it should be run. Even with the Masters’ status as a Major championship the PGA (which is effectively golf’s governing body) has little or no control over the tournament.<sup>8</sup>

To appreciate why the Augusta National is stereotyped as inhospitable, elitist, and racist, one need only look towards the founder and former chairman Clifford Roberts. Roberts’ legacy still hangs over the club and dictates even today how the Augusta National and the Masters tournament are run. Born on the family farm in Iowa in 1894, Roberts and his family relocated to Texas where he spent his childhood working on his father’s land. Roberts was a dreamer with lofty ambitions. His childhood evenings had been spent reading of great men who had changed the United States. Robert’s mother committed suicide when he was a thirteen years old, which obviously caused him untold distress. Roberts did not attend college, but instead made his fortune selling suits. He

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<sup>7</sup> John Feinstein, *A Good Walk Spoiled – Days and Nights on the PGA Tour* (London: Little, Brown and Company 1995), 242.

<sup>8</sup> Eubanks, xiii – xxxiii.

bought an apartment on Park Avenue, New York City, and lived with all the style of a man with no financial constraints.<sup>9</sup>

The game of golf in the 1920s was glamorous and fashionable. As such, Clifford Roberts was drawn to it like a bee to honey. Roberts began attending golf events that were held in close proximity to New York City. In 1926 Roberts attended the final of the USGA Amateur Championship at Baltusrol, New Jersey. It was here that Roberts first met Bobby Jones. Jones had been playing in the final and had just lost to the talented George Von Elm. After his defeat Jones retired to the bar along with a few other people who had watched the match. Roberts recalls, “I was one of the half dozen who were having a drink with the loser and trying to think of something comforting to say to him. He [Jones] informed me that Elm had won for the very simple reason that he had played better and therefore deserved to win.”<sup>10</sup> Jones and Roberts became close friends. After Jones retired from tournament golf, he wished to realize his lifelong dream of building his own golf course. Roberts and Jones, deciding that it would be in their best interests to do this together, began to look around the South for a suitable place to build the course. Eventually, after it became known that Roberts and Jones were looking for a place to build their club, Tom Barrett contacted them and informed them that he had a place that he thought might be what they were looking for. Barrett showed Jones and Roberts the Berckman’s nursery property, which lay in central Augusta. In his autobiography Roberts recalled, “Bob took one look and remarked perfect! To think that this ground has been lying here all these years waiting for someone to come and lay a golf course on it.”<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Shipnuck, 14.

<sup>10</sup> Clifford Roberts, *The Story of the Augusta National Golf Club* (New York: Doubleday & Company 1976), 11.

<sup>11</sup> Roberts, 17.

Jones and Roberts agreed to purchase the land for the large sum of \$70,000. They put a consortium together with several other men and managed to secure the land. The Augusta National was born.<sup>12</sup>

Roberts was a southern man in every sense of the word. He had grown up in a small town in Texas in the early 1900s when blacks were subservient to whites. Racism was what Roberts had been exposed to all his life and all he knew. Although Roberts officially lived in New York, he moved to Augusta in order to monitor the construction of the Augusta National. The South in the 1930s was a place where Roberts' racist attitude towards Blacks was perfectly normal and acceptable. The Augusta National was opened in 1931 after the brilliant white colonial looking clubhouse had been refurbished.

Roberts, given the title by Jones and the consortium of money lenders as chairman, went about hiring employees to work for the club. Unsurprisingly Roberts deemed that it should be black people who should cater to the exclusively white membership. As the Augusta National grew in size, standing, and structure, the number of black employees began to increase, partly because of the large black population in Augusta.<sup>13</sup>

Before Tom Barrett died in 1934, he told Roberts that he wanted him to "have" Claude Tillman (Barrett's Black servant) should anything ever happen to him. Roberts recounts, "Tom Barrett's war injuries were credited with bringing on a fatal illness, and during that time he told me that he wanted me to have Claude. He apparently made a stipulation to that effect, because Tom's widow, Louise, placed a Christmas wreath around Claude's neck, tied a card to it bearing my name, and sent Claude to me. I passed along my gift to the club [the Augusta National] by placing Claude in charge of the

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Curt Sampson, *The Masters – Golf, Money, and Power in Augusta, Georgia* (New York: Villard 1999), 77.

kitchen.”<sup>14</sup> An explanation for this bizarre episode in Roberts’s life could simply be that Robert’s deemed that there was nothing wrong with his treatment of Claude. In the 1940s there was nothing unusual about treating black people as cattle. Yet, one must remember that when Roberts published his biography of the history of the Augusta National, it was 1977, two years after Lee Elder became the first black player at the Masters. There are other such episodes in Roberts’ book regarding his dealings with black people. His autobiography is littered with references to “little Black fellows” who worked at the club. In one such instance he refers to one of his employees, a Bowman Milligan, as a ‘large and strong and a fine looking Black man.’<sup>15</sup> Whether or not Roberts was used to being around black people, his conduct was inexcusable. Yet because he was surrounded by men of the same ilk his behavior was hardly noticed, and no doubt practiced by other members.<sup>16</sup>

If Roberts felt no shame in publishing a book recounting episodes of such overt racism in 1977, perhaps we should not be surprised that a black player did not play at the Masters until 1975. In fact, many golf scholars believe that it was Roberts’s intention to prevent blacks from playing at the Masters in his lifetime and that he purposefully blocked black players from rightfully competing.<sup>17</sup> Defenders of Roberts dismiss this accusation by counter-arguing that the entry requirements for the Masters tournament were not racially orientated, and thus not exclusionary to anybody. At the tournament’s inception in 1934 it was an invitation-only tournament (and still is today). In 1935 the

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<sup>14</sup> Owen, 227.

<sup>15</sup> Roberts, 45.

<sup>16</sup> Sampson, 78.

<sup>17</sup> Owen, 241.



Augusta National released requirements that qualified a player for automatic entry in the Masters:

1. Past and present U.S. Open champions
2. Past and present U.S. Amateur champions
3. Past and present British Open champions
4. Past and present British Amateur champions
5. Present members of the Walker Cup team
6. Present members of the Ryder Cup team
7. The first twenty-four players in the first Augusta National Invitation Tournament (which had been held the year before)<sup>18</sup>

The list is obviously small, with each category offering few places; as such the Masters amended its list for the 1940 tournament to include the following.

1. Past and present Masters Tournament champions
2. Past and present U.S. Open champions
3. Past and present U.S. Amateur champions
4. Past and present British Open champions
5. Past and present British Amateur champions
6. Past and present PGA champions
7. Members of the current Walker cup team
8. Members of the current Ryder cup team
9. The first thirty players in the 1939 Masters
10. The first thirty players in the 1939 U.S. Open Championship
11. The last eight players in the 1938 Amateur championship
12. The last eight players in the 1939 PGA championship
13. The two professionals not on the above list who established the best scoring records during the current winter circuit

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<sup>18</sup> Owen, 242.

14. One amateur not on the above list selected by ballot by the U.S. Amateur champions and
15. One professional not on the above list selected by ballot of the U.S. Open champions<sup>19</sup>

The 1940 list ensured that the Masters was competed in by a growing number of players. Although the qualification criteria are not, as supporters of Clifford Roberts point out, specifically exclusive of any players, blacks would have found gaining entry to the Masters somewhat difficult, as they were not allowed to play on the PGA tour until 1961. Until that year there were restrictions limiting black participation in golf, rather like there were in baseball in the 1940s. Nineteen sixty-one was a landmark year in terms of black golfing history as that was the year that the “Caucasian only clause”<sup>20</sup> was lifted. Yet, whereas the other three major championships began accepting minority players, the Masters did not follow suit. There are numerous possible reasons for this; first, the US Masters is the only major championship that is played on the same course every year. The other two major championships held in the United States (the PGA Championship and U.S. Open) are hosted annually at different courses across the country, often in the North one year, the West the next, and the South the next. Therefore, when the majors were held in the more liberal north, black players were far more likely to try to qualify. Another reason that the Masters is charged with racism, over other tournaments, is because it was still an invitation only event that refused to accept anybody who did not meet its strict entry requirements.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 243.

<sup>20</sup> Calvin Sinnette. *Forbidden Fairways – African-Americans and the Game of Golf* (New York: Sleeping Bear Press 1998), 125.

<sup>21</sup> Sampson, 179.

If a black man was not able to play on the PGA Tour until 1961, then he had no chance of playing in the Masters as he would not qualify under any of the above categories. The Masters list was amended several times, with a clause being introduced in the 1960s by Masters officials that entitled anyone who won on the PGA Tour to play in the Masters. After the Caucasian-only clause was lifted in 1961, a small group of African Americans began to play limited events on the tour, predominately in the North and West of the country. Many times these African American golfers entered tournaments in the South, only to be refused entry for unspecified reasons. Often these men played in tournaments where the hate for them was unimaginable. Many times the spectators turned their backs on black players as they putted on the greens. Other times the holes would be full of excrement or urine.<sup>22</sup>

Charlie Sifford was one of those men who braved the PGA Tour in the early 1960s in order to make his living. Sifford, an extraordinarily talented golfer, had largely been playing in exhibition matches prior to 1961. With the end of the Caucasian-only clause in 1962, Sifford entered the Canadian Open. The most well known and talented black golfer of his generation, Sifford played the tournament of his life. On Saturday evening he was leading the event and in high spirits. According to Sifford “someone from Augusta called the clubhouse at the Royal Montreal Golf Club. A sign was immediately posted on a bulletin board: The Masters golf tournament has announced that it will not offer an automatic invitation to the winner of this year’s Canadian Open.”<sup>23</sup> This was the first time since the new qualifying criteria was introduced (these criteria included entry to the Masters for PGA Tour winners), that the winner of the Canadian

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<sup>22</sup> Sinnette, 131.

<sup>23</sup> Sampson, 179.

Open was not to be invited to Augusta. The men at Augusta explained that as the event was held outside the United States, it did not count, and, therefore, was null and void, as was the Masters invitation.<sup>24</sup>

Instances such as these conspired against Sifford his entire career; he never did play at the Masters, although many a lesser white golfer did. Asked why he never sought the help of the greats of the game like Jack Nicklaus or Arnold Palmer to assist him in getting into the Masters, Sifford answered, “Shit, I’m stronger than either of them. If they’d been through what I’ve been through. I didn’t want any help. All I wanted was the chance to play. Them motherfuckers at Augusta kept me out.”<sup>25</sup> The segregation at Augusta continued until Lee Elder won the Greater Hartford open in 1974 and thus played in the Masters in 1975.

As previously mentioned, Augusta is a place of tradition. Rules, regulations, and protocol are abided by religiously. For example, it was not until 1983 that the rule that prohibited the use of white caddies at Augusta during the Masters was abolished. Up until 1983 black men were expected to caddy for white men. By 1983 communism was ending, satellites were in space, and the internet had been invented, yet still black men were forced into subservient roles by white men behind the gates of the Augusta National.<sup>26</sup>

The Augusta National was built on a plantation; its clubhouse is the proverbial white colonial plantation house. The Augusta National’s membership was all white until 1991 and a black member was only admitted to protect the club’s finances. The majority of the staff at the Augusta National are black and are prohibited from using the main

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 80.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 174.

entrance on Magnolia Lane, even today. Instead they have to arrive and leave through gate seven which is tucked away at the outermost point from the clubhouse.<sup>27</sup> No black player participated in the Masters until 1975, despite many black players possessing the talent to do so. Blacks were required to carry the bags of the white players until 1983. The only reason this rule was changed was because of complaints from white players that they missed their regular white caddies. The former chairman's use of language in describing his black employees was despicable, as was his decision to publish a book that contained such racist language in 1977 (only twenty years before Woods won). The Augusta National was a place bypassed by the civil rights movement, a place that chose to desperately cling on to a long gone and shameful era of American history. The Augusta National and everything about the Masters is steeped in racism. Covert racism, overt racism, and, institutional racism. Those black men and women who stood on the veranda of the white clubhouse and watched Tiger Woods hole his winning putt had every right to feel warmth, compassion, and pride for the young man. Woods' victory was their victory, his triumph their triumph, and his tears their tears. Did Tiger Woods, on that blissful Georgia evening in 1997, end the struggle for Black equality at the Augusta National?

By becoming the first black man to win the Masters, Tiger Woods made headlines around the world and he became an iconic figure overnight. The press swarmed around Woods, hoping to gain insight into the psyche of the man whose win had had such a dramatic effect on the world of golf. Tiger Woods in 1997 was the hottest property in all of sport (and probably still is today). The repercussions of Woods' win meant that interest in the Masters and its past policies on race were thrust into the media spotlight.

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<sup>27</sup> Feinstein, 241.

White run newspapers around the world published articles that praised Woods for the skill and courage it took to win the Masters tournament. But how did the black newspapers react to Woods' historic Masters win?

The first black newspaper was published in the United States on March 16, 1827, in New York City, under the name of the *Freedom's Journal*. As the name would suggest, the main purpose of the Freedom Journal was to crusade for the emancipation of the slaves in the Southern States. The *Freedom's Journal* was originally published by two men, the Rev. Samuel Cornish, and John Russworm, in response to attacks on African Americans in another New York paper, the *New York Enquirer*. The *Freedom's Journal* was a weekly paper that carried the slogan "Righteousness Exalteth a Nation."<sup>28</sup> Although the paper was an early proponent for the advancement of blacks in the United States, the paper, even in New York, could not be seen to be too damning of slavery. Despite better living conditions in the North for blacks, it was still a hostile environment, albeit far less so than in the Southern states. The paper mainly focused on the issues relating to blacks, essentially giving them a voice, and championing the ideology of "racial unity and progress."<sup>29</sup> The *Freedman's Journal* was the first newspaper written for black people by black people. Cornish and Russworm, transfixed by the notion that blacks were receiving vicious treatment from other papers, summarized that other racial groups have "for too long spoken for us in order to discredit people of color" and that the *Freedman's Journal* was a place where blacks "could plead our own cases."<sup>30</sup>

Following the Civil War, according to black historian Ronald Wolseley, the black press shifted its attention from emancipation to campaigning for the fair treatment of

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<sup>28</sup> Bernell Tripp, *Origins of the Black Press – New York 1827-1847* (Newport: Vision Press 1992), 14.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Amistad Pride, *A History of the Black Press* (Washington DC: Howard University Press 1997), 13.

black around the country. For example, the black press championed fair “access to eating places, attendance at white colleges, and use of public beaches.”<sup>31</sup> Yet, before the origins of the black press is discussed further, one must understand what the black press actually is, and what the black press hope to achieve from publishing newspapers around the country. Wolseley contends that for a black newspaper to actually be considered a genuine black newspaper, it must meet the following criteria.

1. Blacks must own and manage the publication.
2. The publication must be intended for black consumers.
3. The paper must “serve speak and fight for the black community.”<sup>32</sup>

Essentially, Wolseley is contending that for a black newspaper to be considered a black newspaper in the eyes of the black consumer, it can have no outside influence from other racial groups. It should be a vehicle for black progression, views, and the empowerment of the black community.

After the Civil War ended, black newspapers became far more prevalent in America. The boom years for African American newspapers occurred between 1875 and 1895 when the great migration from the South to the North by emancipated slaves took place. According to Wolseley, in 1887 alone 68 black newspapers were formed.<sup>33</sup> If the first black paper was published in order to discourage slavery, then after emancipation took place, the newspapers naturally had to move their political agendas. Similar to Wolseley, Amistsad Pride contends in his book *A History of the Black Press* that early black newspapers needed to have guidelines for what they and their papers hoped to

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<sup>31</sup> Ronald E. Wolseley, *The Black Press USA* (Iowa: Iowa State University Press 1971), 5.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.

achieve. Pride highlights the *Weekly Anglo-African* in order to make his case. The *Weekly Anglo-African* strived to,

1. Set forth “our cause”
2. Cultivate industry. Perseverance, economy, self reliance, and material possessions.
3. Peruse appropriate education
4. Eschew costly edibles and apparel in pursuit of “elevating employment”
5. Establish a communication correspondence network for mutual knowledge and benefit.
6. Sketch the lives of those who had overcome odds.
7. Relay to readers events bearing on “our cause” as guides in their own careers.
8. Promote justice and virtue.<sup>34</sup>

The early guidelines established and followed are not dissimilar from what the black newspapers of today use as guidelines. Although the political climate is very different from what it was, black newspapers are still fighting for a minority group to be heard. For example, the *Atlanta Voice* use the slogan of “A people without a voice cannot be heard” and the *Chicago Defender* characterizes itself as “unashamedly black.” Considering the astonishing number of African American newspapers that were established around the turn of the nineteenth century, it was obvious that black newspapers were going to be a powerful tool in the advancement of African Americans throughout the century. Several newspapers gained national prominence for their size and stature in the early 1900s, none more so than the *Chicago Defender* and the *Pittsburgh Courier*.

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<sup>34</sup> Pride, 46.



Robert Abbott was born in Georgia 1868 to a mother who was a hairdresser and a father who was a butler. Abbott was a clever boy who was influenced heavily by the writings of Frederick Douglass and Ida Wells. After his graduation from high school Abbott decided to study law, but because of his color he was not admitted to the bar. After a brief foray into printing, Abbott decided he wanted to work in journalism, but when it became apparent that he would not be given a job, he decided to start his own newspaper. Abbott chose Chicago to publish his newspaper as at the time, 1905, it had a relatively high black population of about forty thousand. Working from a room in his landlady's house, Abbott managed to establish a paper that appealed to the ideals of the black people in the Chicago area. Abbott was only concerned with issues relating to the African American community, and was remembered for his campaign for equality following World War One and his ability in persuading blacks to leave the South and travel North.<sup>35</sup>

The campaign that Abbott launched against the government following World War One was in response to the appalling treatment that African Americans soldiers received when they got back to the United States. Despite fighting for their country African Americans were still not granted first class citizenship, also as the Ku Klux Klan membership had swelled to five million by 1916 many blacks were receiving horrendous treatment. Wolseley contends that the Klan and its sympathizers were “tarring and feathering, branding, hanging, and burning black people; in one period in 1919 as many as seventy were lynched.”<sup>36</sup> In agreement with Wolseley, Charles Simmons argues in his book *The African American Press* that the *Chicago Defender's* first editor Abbott was

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<sup>35</sup> Wolseley, 52.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid, 53.

instrumental in condemning treatment of blacks after World War One.<sup>37</sup> Because of his stance for African Americans, the *Chicago Defender* was hugely popular in the black communities.

Abbott's other great accomplishment was to help those blacks living in the oppressed Southern states migrate North. The *Chicago Defender*, under the stewardship of Abbott, was often accused in the white press and by government officials of causing instability in the Southern economy by encouraging migration.<sup>38</sup> By 1918 the *Chicago Defender*, with Abbott still as editor, had a weekly circulation of 92,000. By this time The *Defender* was not only sold in Chicago but across the nation. Abbott had a network of distributors and would often have his associates leave stacks of the paper at railway stations for easy distribution.<sup>39</sup> Because of the high circulation, Abbott's was in a powerful position. Some government officials called the *Chicago Defender* "the most dangerous of all Negro journals" and toyed with the idea of censoring it.<sup>40</sup> Although probably not dangerous (only to bigoted white conservatives), it was, at the time, a powerful tool that many blacks in the South used to decide their future.

In agreement with Jordan, Charles Simmons argues in his book *The African American Press* that the *Chicago Defender's* first editor, Robert S. Abbott was instrumental in the migration of black to the North. For example, in a bid to stop the migration, Southern newspapers had warned African Americans that if they moved north they would freeze to death, as they would be unaccustomed to the cold weather. Upon

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<sup>37</sup> Charles Simmons, *The African American Press – A History of News Coverage during National Crisis, with Special Reference to Four Black Newspapers, 1827-1965* (London: McFarland & Company 1998), 26.

<sup>38</sup> William Jordan, *Black Newspapers & America's War for Democracy, 1914-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press 2001), 119.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*,

hearing this, Abbott printed on the front page of the *Defender* a tactful riposte. “If you can freeze to death in the North and be free, why freeze to death in the South and be a slave, where your mother, sister, and daughter are raped and burned at the stake, where your father, brother, and son are treated with contempt and hung to a pole, at the least mention that he does not like his treatment.”<sup>41</sup> When Abbott was seventy-one he handed the newspaper over to his nephew, John H. Sengstackle. Sengstackle carried on the paper and with a secure financial platform it continues to publish up to the present day. Although it is unlikely that the *Chicago Defender* will ever reach the circulation it enjoyed in the 1920s, it remains a well respected paper and has a history of producing fine journalists.<sup>42</sup>

Established two years later than the *Chicago Defender*, the *Pittsburgh Courier* was another paper that was in the forefront of the black reform movement. The early history of the *Pittsburgh Courier* is not dissimilar to the *Chicago Defender*. The paper was started by Edwin Harleston, a security guard at the Heinz food packing plant. Harleston had a love of poetry, and during the course of his tedious work he was able to compose hundreds of poems. As there was no way that he could publish his work, Harleston decided to do it himself in a paper called *A Toilers Life*. By 1909 Harleston’s small paper was in financial trouble so he sought the help of outside agencies. He contacted a local attorney, Robert Lee Vann, as well as several employees of the packing plant where he worked. Although none of the men Harleston contacted had the means to support him financially, they were willing to help him produce a paper that had the

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<sup>41</sup> Simmons, 33.

<sup>42</sup> Wolseley, 55.

potential to earn money. With his new consortium, a new paper was organized and named the *Pittsburgh Courier*.<sup>43</sup>

With a fresh management structure in place, the newly established *Pittsburgh Courier* released five hundred copies of their paper 1910 which quickly sold out. Unfortunately for Harleston the paper was still in financial trouble and fighting had developed between Harleston and his consortium. According to Simmons, in a fit of rage Harleston quit as editor as he thought he was losing control of the paper.<sup>44</sup> Vann was then offered the job as editor which he accepted. Vann, like Abbott in Chicago, was a shrewd man who saw that Harleston had created a sound base for producing a profitable newspaper. Under the stewardship of Vann, the *Pittsburgh Courier* managed to climb out of the red and subsequently went on to thrive. Like Abbott, Van saw that having a newspaper would present a great opportunity to help his race, especially as America was in the midst of the black migration from the South. The *Pittsburgh Courier* and the *Chicago Defender* really worked in tandem. While Abbott was calling for blacks to migrate north, Vann, once they arrived, was more than content to teach the new arrivals how to survive in their new home.<sup>45</sup>

Vann, like Abbott, also made a name for himself in the way he covered World War One. Vann's rationality was that by fighting for their country, black Americans could perhaps gain the trust and respect of a country who despised their very presence. Vann argued that if African Americans went to war, when it was finished "the Negro soldier will have assumed his rightful place in the opinions of Americans."<sup>46</sup> One of

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<sup>43</sup> Simmons, 43.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid, 44.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid, 45.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.,

Vann's editing traits was not only to focus on the betterment of black people but also to concentrate on local news. For example, Vann covered local sports, mostly boxing, as well as other events that were taking place in the community. The local coverage of the community is still reflected today in the *Pittsburgh Courier*, as will be seen in subsequent chapters. The *Pittsburgh Courier* was by 1926 was selling around 10,000 papers a week, and had to move to a new business premises to keep up with demand.<sup>47</sup> The paper was gaining a reputation for its fair reporting and uncompromising struggle to make the world a better place for African Americans.

Like the *Chicago Defender*, the *Pittsburgh Courier* had expanded further than anyone could have envisioned at its inception. By 1936 its circulation had reached 174,000<sup>48</sup> and like the *Chicago Defender*, the *Pittsburgh Courier* was causing whites to take notice. The *Courier* ran several campaigns designed to help blacks, some of their more notable successes included; an "all out campaign in 1938 to give Negro's full recognition in the armed services" which was rewarded in 1949 when President Truman issued an executive order banning discrimination in the armed forces. A thirteen year campaign to allow blacks to play Major League Baseball, which culminated in Jackie Robinson being signed by Branch Ricky (the *Pittsburgh Courier* actually paid for Robinson to have his tryouts with a Major League Team). Finally the *Pittsburgh Courier* organized a campaign to end segregation in Washington DC in 1946, which ended with the "formation of a strong committee to end discrimination in the nation's capital."<sup>49</sup> Like the *Chicago Defender*, the *Pittsburgh Courier* was also at the forefront of civil rights, and tirelessly promoted the cause of African Americans.

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid, 46.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid, 49.

<sup>49</sup> Pride, 139.

The *Pittsburgh Courier* changed its name to the *New Pittsburgh Courier* in 1970. Despite an extremely high circulation in the mid 1900s the paper suffered financially after the death of several benefactors. As there were no suitable candidate's within the paper to take control, the *Pittsburgh Courier* was sold to the Sengstackle group (Sengstackle was the nephew of Abbott at the *Chicago Defender*), who in order to signal its renaissance renamed the paper the *New Pittsburgh Courier*, which is what it is still known as today.<sup>50</sup> Despite having a huge circulation in its heyday, the *New Pittsburgh Courier* now only has a weekly circulation of 30,000. Yet, as Wolseley argues, this is much to do with the easier media access of today and the movement away from newspapers. Despite this, the *New Pittsburgh Courier* is still regarded in the highest esteem within the black newspaper industry.<sup>51</sup>

Unfortunately, literature on the two Southern newspapers that are also included in this study, the *Birmingham Times* and the *Atlanta Voice*, is in short supply. Despite thorough research, only fleeting references were found to either of the papers. Atlanta, being a large city with a sizable black population had no shortage of black newspapers. In Atlanta, at one time or another, one would be able to choose from up to seven black newspapers that were published. For example, the *Atlanta Constitution*, *Georgian*, *Independent*, *University*, *Monthly*, *Daily World*, and *Inquirer* were all available at various times in the city's history.<sup>52</sup> According to Henry Lewis Suggs, who wrote *The Black Press in the South 1865-1979* the *Atlanta Voice* was founded because some readers of the *Atlanta Inquirer* thought the paper was becoming too liberal and was including far too

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid, 139.

<sup>51</sup> Wolseley, 105.

<sup>52</sup> Penelope Bullock. *The Afro-American Periodical Press – 1838-1909* (Baton Rouge & London: Louisiana State University Press 1981), 316.

much white advertising in its paper. They subsequently wanted to set up their own paper. The *Atlanta Voice* was established five years after the *Inquirer* and promoted itself as a “crusading” newspaper.<sup>53</sup> Wolseley, in a brief paragraph about the *Atlanta Voice*, contends that the paper set out to have “a strong editorial page stance, relying often on sarcasm. Space provided for syndicated columns as well as for local writers; these balance the world’s viewpoint. It [the *Atlanta Voice*] has a combined paid and free circulation of 50,000.”<sup>54</sup> After studying the paper, it is easy to see why Wolseley would contend that the *Atlanta Voice* has a sarcastic undertone, some of its articles are very dry, and the paper covered Woods’ inaugural Masters win with more than a hint of irony.

The *Birmingham Times*, like the *Atlanta Voice*, has not been written about much in either books or articles. Again, there are only limited references to the paper from various sources. Henry Lewis Suggs provides the best information on the origins of the *Birmingham Times*, but again, the information is limited to say the least. The *Birmingham Times* was established one year before the *Atlanta Voice* in 1964 by Jesse J. Lewis. The paper, even today, runs the slogan “the South’s Largest Black Weekly,” yet whether the editors are referring to the circulation of the paper or the size of the paper is unclear. Certainly though, other black papers in the South would have had a higher readership than the *Times*. The paper set itself up as a “type information center for black people” and a “type of communication that they [African Americans] can bank on as the truth.” Suggs claims the paper is almost entirely focused on local news and the lives of black people in the Birmingham area. Suggs is pretty accurate here; during my analysis of the paper this certainly seemed to be the case. The *Birmingham Times*, although much

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<sup>53</sup> Henry Lewis Suggs, *The Black Press in the South 1865-1979* (London: Greenwood Press 1983), 139

<sup>54</sup> Wolseley, 125.

less prominent than the *Chicago Defender* and the *Pittsburgh Courier*, still championed for the empowerment of blacks in its early days, and still does today to a certain degree. The paper gave special attention to the activities of the Ku Klux Klan and its cross burning during the late 1960s. Suggs contends that by 1980 the *Birmingham Times* was “the most widely read and financially successful black newspaper in Alabama.”<sup>55</sup> Although this is no doubt true, the *Times*, by 1980, did not have a lot of competition. Several black newspapers had gone out of business and by 1980 only five black newspaper were still publishing in Birmingham. These included the *Selma Black Belt Journal*, *Montgomery-Tuskegee Times*, *Tuscaloosa Courier*, *Florence Shoals News Leader*, and the *Mobile Inner City News*.<sup>56</sup>

Despite there being no shortage of books, articles, and periodical about the black press, there is, unfortunately, a distinct lack of information in academia about the black presses’ coverage of sports. Suggs, yet again, proves to be the best source of information on the way black newspapers cover sporting events, but unfortunately he only goes so far as to say that black local papers covered black local sports.<sup>57</sup> Suggs is right, as in the four papers that were analyzed in this study, local sports made up a high percentage of their sports coverage in general. This is not surprising, as black regional newspapers would naturally cover local sports and black participation in them. Although black papers do cover major sporting events, it seems that the common denominator is black participation in these major events. The four papers in my study, the *Chicago defender*, the *New Pittsburgh Courier*, the *Birmingham Times*, and the *Atlanta Voice* continue to be published today.

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<sup>55</sup> Suggs, 48.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>57</sup> Ibid, 126.



## CHAPTER 3

### THE NEW PITTSBURGH COURIER

The *New Pittsburgh Courier's* coverage of the Masters tournament in 1994 was nonexistent. Throughout March and April (when the tournament is played annually) not a single word was dedicated to the goings on at the Augusta National. Any reader of the *New Pittsburgh Courier* would not know that the Masters was played, the winner of the event, or anything else related to the tournament. Instead, through March and April that year the *New Pittsburgh Courier's* sports pages ran stories on basketball, boxing, and, football (specifically on the Pittsburgh Steelers and the New Orleans Saints). The extensive National College Athletic Association (NCAA) coverage of basketball should not be surprising as during March, the college basketball season culminates with the NCAA tournament. The interest of the black press in basketball is heightened by the large number of African-American participants in both the National Basketball Association (NBA) and men's college basketball. Barry Cooper, a sportswriter for the *New Pittsburgh Courier*, was the author of an interesting article that appeared during April. Cooper's article, which headlined "Black Youths Should Consider Golf, Tennis" discussed the need for black participation in both these sports. Cooper does not mention the upcoming Serena or Venus Williams but does draw attention to the young Tiger Woods, who at the time of the article's publication was still in high school. Cooper states that Woods "could become the greatest Black golfer ever, but it's too early to burden him with that. He's only a senior in high school and has signed a grant in aid at Stanford."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Barry, Cooper, "Black Youths Should Consider Golf, Tennis," *New Pittsburgh Courier*, 30 April 1994.

As early as 1994, at a time when Tiger Woods was only a senior in high school, the *New Pittsburgh Courier* identified him as a potential star, and in doing so heaped pressure upon his then young shoulders. The *New Pittsburgh Courier's* early stance on the potential greatness of Tiger Woods does not come as a surprise. The black press has a habit of highlighting young up and coming black sports stars and running feature articles on them. In that same year an article appeared on the now infamous Koby Bryant, in which the author claimed that Bryant was ready-made for NBA stardom. Shaquille O'Neal also had the same expectation placed upon him from a very early age. That the *New Pittsburgh Courier* was reporting on Tiger Woods when he was still a high school student in braces should not, in the light of the treatment of past potential black sports stars, come as a surprise. This was not a one-off profile signaling the next great hope for black America but merely an article drawing attention to a young black hopeful who could possibly break into a predominantly white sport.

Nineteen ninety-five followed the same trend as 1994 in regard to the lack of Masters coverage in the *New Pittsburgh Courier*. The newspaper not only fails to mention the Masters but fails to report on golf in general. The lack of coverage could be traced to a number of reasons. First, why would the Black press report on the Masters when the field consisted of only white golfers? Second, the Augusta National's bigoted past was well known, in which case the snubbing of the event by the *New Pittsburgh Courier* should have raised few eyebrows. Third, the Black press was exactly that, a press system that covers black people, their achievements, and issues relevant to African-Americans. The white winner of the U.S. Masters at the Augusta National was of little concern to the paper or its readers. Again, in 1995, the paper's sports pages were filled

with the NBA playoffs, the beginning of the baseball season, football, and boxing, specifically the exploits of Mike Tyson. These were sports and athletes that directly related to Black people, and as such dominate the sports pages.

The Masters was again omitted from the sports pages of the *New Pittsburgh Courier* in March and April of 1996. Later in the year, however, there was a distinct shift in their coverage of golf that directly relates to the newspaper's later coverage of the U.S. Masters. In 1996 Tiger Woods won his third straight U.S. Amateur Championship. The win signified that Woods was highly unlikely to just be a child prodigy, but was instead the sort of black athlete who could dominate his sport. Subsequently, much space was devoted to the potential of Tiger Woods and the repercussions that he could have in his sport. The *New Pittsburgh Courier's* golf coverage was practically nil during the preceding two years of this study. But Woods' third straight U.S. Amateur Championship win in 1996 made the front page of the *New Pittsburgh Courier*. There was a striking photo of Tiger Woods kissing the trophy with a bold headline underneath that reads "Woods May Turn Pro."<sup>2</sup> The article written by Ron Sirak highlights the talents of Woods, and speculated on the enormous impact that he was going to have on the game of golf. Sirak writes that "Woods is extremely marketable because of his youth, good looks, intelligence and his ethnic background."<sup>3</sup> Essentially the black press began to associate itself with Woods because he had the potential to be the next black superstar. There is a great deal of excitement in the writing of Sirak as he lists the reasons why Woods will change the game of golf.

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<sup>2</sup> Ron Sirak, "Woods May Turn Pro," *The New Pittsburgh Courier*, 14 September 1996.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

Can we blame the *New Pittsburgh Courier* for being excited over the prospect of a black golfer with the world at his feet? Of course not, its response is natural and expected. Woods is a black man, and as such, of interest to the black press and black people. Woods turned pro in late September of 1996 and in only his third start as a professional he won the Las Vegas Invitational. Again, his triumph made front page news in the *New Pittsburgh Courier* but with a slight twist. On the front page of the *New Pittsburgh Courier* Tiger Woods stands with a huge check, beaming like a man who knows that the world is his oyster. Instead of the congratulatory headline one would expect, the headline reads “Don’t Call Tiger Woods an African-American.”<sup>4</sup> After his victory at the Las Vegas Invitational, Woods began to be hailed as the next black superstar and a man who could do for African Americans what Michael Jordan had done for African American sport over the previous fifteen years. The problem was that Woods did not wish the world to refer to him as an African American. Instead, he preferred to be known as a “Cablinasian,”<sup>5</sup> which is a mix of many races. Herman Baxter did not take too kindly to the young Tiger Woods seemingly wishing to distance himself from African American people and severely criticized Woods for claiming to be part of a larger ethnic group. “Don’t call him an African-American. Woods rejects this term because of the racial mix of both his parents, a virtual melting pot that includes Black, Asian, Native-American, and Caucasian ancestry. Preferring to trumpet his cross-pollination, Woods seemingly ejects only one inference, his African-American heritage; the one that’s apparently in vogue to shed once many Blacks reach superstar status in sports,

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<sup>4</sup> Herman Baxter, “Don’t Call Tiger Woods An African-American,” *The New Pittsburgh Courier* 26 October, 1996.

<sup>5</sup> Farai Chideya, *The Color of our Future – Race for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (New York: Quill William Morrow 1999), 38.

entertainment, and sometimes politics.”<sup>6</sup> Baxter goes on to say that it is that “very heritage [African-American] that is readily embraced when pitfalls arise and the reality of racism eventually rears its ugly head.”<sup>7</sup>

Was Tiger Woods rejecting his heritage? Was the article directed to the twenty year old Woods fair? In the light of Woods’ claim about his racial orientation, perhaps the *New Pittsburgh Courier* was rejecting Woods before he openly rejected it. Here was a supposedly black superstar demonstrating the behavior at twenty years of age that Herman Baxter had seen too many times. His anger at Woods is open but perhaps too judgmental of a young man not old enough to be considered an adult. That this story made front page news was indicative of the growing stature of Woods in professional golf. The article caused many Blacks to feel anger towards Woods, as there was consensus that Woods should take it upon himself to be a role model for black children all over the United States. Less than three weeks later the *New Pittsburgh Courier* published another story criticizing Woods for not attending an awards ceremony where he was to be decorated for being the top collegiate golfer for the 1995-96 season. Although the paper carried the story on the sports pages, the tone of the article was no less critical than the previous story on his perceived snub of the black race. This time Ken Peters claimed that Woods “dropped out of the event the day before citing exhaustion and left without speaking to the media or officials.”<sup>8</sup> Clearly still angry over Woods’ comments regarding his race, the press coverage of him was less complimentary than one would expect, especially as Woods was still only twenty years of age. The issue

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<sup>6</sup> Herman Baxter, “Don’t Call Tiger Woods An African-American,” *The New Pittsburgh Courier* 26 October, 1996.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ken Peters. “Woods Returns For Georgia Award,” *The New Pittsburgh Courier* 23 November 1996.

of Woods claiming to be Cablinasian will be discussed in chapter 5, as many of the same questions are posed of Woods by the writers at the *Chicago Defender*.

From early 1996 to late 1996 Tiger Woods went from being the great black sporting hope to almost a traitor to his race in the eyes of the *New Pittsburgh Courier*. This transformation could either be accredited to genuine anger over Woods comments or it could simply be a case of the press building up a man to then knock him down, which is commonly done in journalism in order to sell papers. The early relationship that Woods had with the *New Pittsburgh Courier* was almost one of love and hate. By the early part of 1997, however, the writers at the paper were back to reporting Woods in a more favorable light. Woods made the headlines in the international section of the paper in February of 1997 by winning a tournament in Thailand, which the paper pointed out as his mother's homeland. The paper published various other articles on Woods' actions throughout the month, paying special attention to Woods founding youth clinics (for example, there is a photo of Woods teaching an African-American child how to grip a club). There is only one piece of negative reporting on Woods in late March 1997, where the paper reported that Woods told "Off-Color Jokes"<sup>9</sup> in an interview that he did with GQ Magazine. But generally, the *New Pittsburgh Courier's* coverage of Woods is very favorable in early 1997.

If Tiger Woods had somewhat redeemed himself in the eyes of the *New Pittsburgh Courier* in February and March of 1997 through his golf, then his redemption was absolute following his Masters win in April that year. During 1994, 1995, and 1996 there was no coverage whatsoever of the Masters in the *New Pittsburgh Courier*. Even build up to the event was negligible. Yet when Woods won in April 1997 and became

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<sup>9</sup> Ron Sirak, "Woods' 'Off-Color' Jokes Quoted in GQ," *The New Pittsburgh Courier*, 26 March 1996.

the first black major champion and the first black Masters champion, his triumph was front page news. However Woods had labeled him-self in terms of his racial ethnicity in the past was seemingly forgotten by the *New Pittsburgh Courier* and it adopted him as one of its own following his Masters triumph. The paper forgave him for his perceived slur about his ethnicity and treated his victory as a victory for all black people. “Woods Makes History”<sup>10</sup> screamed the headline on the front page of the paper on April 16 1997. John Curran used Woods’ win to draw parallels to Jackie Robinson’s debut in Major League Baseball (coincidentally this was fifty years previously to the day Woods won the Masters). The tone of the article was that Woods was perhaps breaking through the same barriers as Robinson had done half a century before. As one would expect with a victory of this magnitude, Woods’ win received blanket coverage in the *New Pittsburgh Courier*. Not only was Woods’ win reported on the front page, but also it was referenced in the metro section, business section, and of course, the sports section, which dedicates two whole pages to Woods’ victory at Augusta. The paper played heavily on the racial significance of Woods win by drawing attention to those black golfers who struggled for equality in the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>11</sup>

Encompassed on the sports pages are many short articles that describe how Woods won the Masters in such flamboyant style with his breathtaking play. Yet the main article was headlined “Mastering The Masters – Woods Give Thanks to Black Pioneers.”<sup>12</sup> Along with the article there is a big picture of Tiger Woods receiving a hug from Lee Elder, who was the first black player to participate in the Masters. Sirak’s

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<sup>10</sup> John Curran. “Woods Makes History,” *The New Pittsburgh Courier*, 16 April 1997.

<sup>11</sup> Ron Sirak. “Mastering The Masters – Woods Gives Thanks To Black Pioneers,” *The New Pittsburgh Courier*, 16 April 1997.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

article draws attention to the fact that it was men like Lee Elder and Charlie Sifford who made it possible for Woods to slip on that prestigious green jacket after his win. Sirak writes how “Woods’ victory came just two days shy of 50 years after Jackie Robinson became the first Black to play major league baseball.”<sup>13</sup> Obviously the paper linked together Robinson, Woods, and the breaking down of racial barriers. Jackie Robinson became a role model for desegregating baseball, while Tiger Woods, to a lesser extent, was being categorized in the same way by the *New Pittsburgh Courier*.

If the *New Pittsburgh Courier* did embrace Tiger Woods after his Masters victory in 1997 and adopt him as a representative of black Americans, an explanation of why can be found by studying Sirak’s article in its entirety. Woods was quoted by Sirak as saying after his Masters victory “I wasn’t the pioneer. Charlie Sifford, Lee Elder, Ted Rhodes, those are the guys that paved the way. All night I was thinking about them, what they had done for me and the game of golf. Coming up 18 [hole 18], I said a little prayer for those guys. Those guys are the ones that did it.”<sup>14</sup> By thanking and paying tribute to those men Woods emphatically embraced his African American heritage, which is probably why the paper gave him such favorable coverage. The men Woods mentioned were African Americans who suffered terribly in order for Woods to be able to win at Augusta. That he speaks of them in the way he did is testament to Woods’ growing maturity in 1997. To an extent, it is possible that the *New Pittsburgh Courier* accepted that at the time Woods made the comments about his racial ethnicity, he was not as media savvy as he should have been. Thus, by running stories such as this one about the African American

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.



men who allowed Woods to win the Masters, the paper essentially forgave his past “mistake.”

So colossal was Woods’ victory for African Americans, that for many weeks after his Masters win the *New Pittsburgh Courier’s* sports pages and editorials were full of comments and stories about him and his win. In the edition of the paper that followed Woods’ win, the writers at the *New Pittsburgh Courier* embraced the story by examining his victory in its larger context for African Americans. For example, James Alsbrook, a professor at Ohio University who wrote a weekly column for the *New Pittsburgh Courier*, dedicated his column to how Tiger Woods had challenged the portrayal of African Americans in the press. “Tiger Woods Smashes Mean Old Stereotypes”<sup>15</sup> drew attention to the positive effect that Woods will have on the black community. In his article Alsbrook lambasted black sports stars for the image they portray to America. Alsbrook writes of Woods that “he is not the vile, profane, and obnoxious stereotype projected too frequently on television and by some professional athletes as some clowning buffoon who degrade themselves and all other black people.”<sup>16</sup> Alsbrook alludes to his, and perhaps black America’s, shame at the way African American athletes are portrayed by the press. This negative portrayal must, in part, be by the white press, who unashamedly victimize African Americans sports stars for their seemingly poor behavior. It is far more common to see black sports stars mocked in the press than white sports stars. Terrell Owens and Randy Moss, for example, have come in for severe criticism over their wage demands and bad attitudes. Yet, in Tiger Woods the press, black or white, have no grounds to play on the age-old stereotype of the uncontrollable

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<sup>15</sup> James Alsbrook, “Tiger Woods Smashes Mean Old Stereotype,” *The New Pittsburgh Courier*, 30 April 1997.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

African American sports star. Alsbrook highlights the “courtesy, modesty, dignity, and determination to succeed qualify him as an excellent role model for African-Americans.”<sup>17</sup>

In the same edition Bernice Powell Jackson, writing for the civil rights journal section, reported that “Victory at Augusta A Sign of Hope.” Jackson, like Alsbrook before her, praised Woods for his victory and again drew comparisons to Jackie Robinson who broke the color boundary in baseball. She also argued that “Golf remains a game of the well-to-do and of European Americans for the most part. Business people of color, aware that deals are made on the golf course, have long lamented their lack of access to private clubs.”<sup>18</sup> Although Woods’ victory was a milestone for blacks in sports, can the same similarities really be drawn between Woods and Robinson? The America that Robinson lived in was vastly different from the world Woods inhabited in 1997. Woods’ victory marked the first time that an African American had won a major golf tournament; that Woods’ win came at Augusta was ironic. But golf has been desegregated since 1961, and as Woods was not the first black man to play at the Masters, perhaps the *New Pittsburgh Courier* is too quick in comparing Woods’ achievements with Jackie Robinson’s. Woods did not suffer like Robinson did, nor was he subject to the abuse, threats, and ridicule that followed him. For example, in 1947 lynching was still common place in the south, and in many cities Jackie Robinson was not allowed to share the same hotel as his teammates.<sup>19</sup> Also, contrary to popular belief, Jackie Robinson was not the first black player to play Major League Baseball. That honor fell to Moses Fleetwood

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Bernice Powell Jackson. “Victory At Augusta A Sign Of Hope,” *The New Pittsburgh Courier*, 23 April, 1997.

<sup>19</sup> Jules Tygiel, *Baseball's Great Experiment – Jackie Robinson and his Legacy* (New York: Oxford University Press) 1997, 312.

Walker who played for Toledo in 1887.<sup>20</sup> Woods did break a color boundary, but it was not the same color boundary that Robinson had broken fifty years previously. America was not an apartheid society in 1997 as it had been in 1947. By placing Woods in the same category as Robinson the *New Pittsburgh Courier* was inadvertently putting pressure on him and obligating him to be a symbol of African American racial triumph. It is nonsensical to put Woods and Robinson in the same category, as is the suggestion that he could have the same impact on black society as Robinson had. Woods is certainly a role model, but he was not a pioneer, and as such cannot be synonymous with Jackie Robinson, even though he did, and still is, doing great things for minority golf.

The most interesting article on Tiger Woods appears some five weeks after his Masters win. Instead of being attacked by the black press for some perceived slight, the *New Pittsburgh Courier* defended Woods for telling some unwise jokes in GQ Magazine. Woods told a joke about the perceived superiority of black males genitalia. When the *New Pittsburgh Courier* first heard about Woods' comments, the newspaper scolded him for his foolishness, as mentioned previously. After Woods' Masters victory, columnist Dave Anderson of the *New York Times*, criticized Woods and insisted that he owed an apology to black males for stereotyping them as oversexed. James Alsbrook defended Woods' comments in an article titled "Does Tiger Owe Blacks An Apology? "The fact that Woods may have repeated an age-old joke about Black male sexual equipment and performance is not sufficient reason for the white sportswriter to be offended on behalf of Black men".<sup>21</sup> Notice the term "white" sports writer; Alsbrook's usage suggests that a white man has no grounds to criticize Tiger Woods. There seem to be numerous reasons

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid, 13.

<sup>21</sup> James Alsbrook. "Does Tiger Owe Blacks An Apology?," The *New Pittsburgh Courier* 14 May 1997.

for his defensive coverage of Woods, in this instance Woods was young when he made the comments, his being black means that Woods belongs more to the black community than the to white community and as such white criticism will not be tolerated. Alsbrook demonstrates an unwillingness to tolerate white journalistic criticism of Woods. Clearly the black press feels as though it owns Woods because he is black, and as such it is free to cover him how they wish, but criticism from outside agencies will not be accepted.

The *New Pittsburgh Courier's* extensive coverage of Woods continued throughout 1997, with most articles reporting on how he was doing in the tournaments in which he participated. The following year, 1998, Tiger Woods was named male athlete of the year by the associated press and subsequently made the front page of the *New Pittsburgh Courier* in its first issue of the year. The *Courier* reported that it was Woods' Masters win that had given him the title over other black athletes.<sup>22</sup> Instead of the *New Pittsburgh Courier* ignoring the Masters as it had in the years 1994, 1995, and 1996, it engaged in sustained build up to the 1998 Masters that focused on speculation about Woods' chances of defending his title. The pattern that clearly emerged is that the *New Pittsburgh Courier's* Masters coverage focused only on Tiger Woods. The paper did not concern itself with charting the progress of other potential winners. A black newspaper is primarily interested in the fortunes of black people. Therefore, the *New Pittsburgh Courier's* neglect of white golfers and the Masters prior to Woods' emergence was unsurprising.

Unlike its coverage of the Masters in the previous four years, the Masters in the *New Pittsburgh Courier* in 1998, was subject to a lengthy build up by the *New Pittsburgh Courier's* sportswriters. Again, there was only interest in Tiger Woods and whether he

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<sup>22</sup> Larry Gross. "Woods' Masters Win Top '97 Story," *The New Pittsburgh Courier*, 2 January 1998.

was playing well enough to repeat his 1997 triumph. In the three weeks preceding the 1998 Masters an article on Woods and his Masters chances was published each week in the sports pages. Ron Sirak, the golf writer at the *New Pittsburgh Courier*, reported with excitement on March 14 1998 that “Tiger Woods Keeps Getting Better.”<sup>23</sup> Sirak alluded to a recent tournament win by Woods where in an interview the golfer claimed “I’m driving better, my iron play is more crisp, my distance control is better, my sand saves are a lot better.”<sup>24</sup> Although Sirak did not prophesize a repeat victory for Woods, he certainly seemed excited by Woods’ chances. Excitable coverage of Woods’ Masters chances continued in the next three editions of the *New Pittsburgh Courier* as the 1998 Masters drew nearer. The coverage reached a crescendo in the edition published before Woods was due to defend his title. Again, Ron Sirak is the reporter who wrote “for many, particularly those casual fans, anything short of a victory in this year’s Masters will be considered a failure.”<sup>25</sup> One could look at this article and the extended build up to the Masters in 1998 and rightly accuse the *New Pittsburgh Courier* of putting too much pressure on Woods. Perhaps this is not the case. Over the previous year it was obvious from the paper’s coverage that the black community was extremely proud of Woods. The extensive pre-Masters coverage in 1998 could have been a reaction to the possibility that Woods might not win the Masters again, and that the black community would lose its Masters champion. Therefore, the *Courier* simply could have been reaffirming Woods’ success as a way to boost black pride and moral.

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<sup>23</sup> Ron, Sirak. “Tiger Woods Keeps Getting Better,” *The New Pittsburgh Courier* 14 March 1998.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ron Sirak. “Tiger Lived ‘Impossible Dream’ At The Masters,” *The New Pittsburgh Courier*, 11 April, 1998.

Unfortunately for Tiger Woods and the black press, Woods' defense of the Masters was unsuccessful in 1998 and as finished a distant eighth. Only one article in the paper reported on Woods' ineffective defense. The article headlined "Woods Less Masterful This Year."<sup>26</sup> The low-key manner in which the paper reported on Woods' perceived failure was in stark contrast to the media excitement that preceded the tournament. Ferguson, in an almost ridiculing reaction to Woods pre-Masters comments, notes that "he [Woods] didn't hit his drives so far or his irons as crisp, nor did he putt particularly well."<sup>27</sup> There is very much a tone of disappointment in Ferguson's writing, which suggests that he expected Woods to win the Masters and the fact that he did not was somewhat anticlimactic.

In contrast to the way the *New Pittsburgh Courier* covered the Masters after Woods' win in 1997 and 1998, its pre-masters coverage in 1999 was subdued, to say the least. Woods was in the midst of making some drastic swing changes and although he was still the top ranked golfer in the world, he was not the force he had been in the two previous years. There was no coverage of the Masters in March and there was only one article about the Masters in early April of that year. Although the article was headlined "Eve Of Masters: It's Duval, Woods,"<sup>28</sup> it is surprisingly not limited to Woods and his chances. The article focused more on Ernie Els, the third ranked golfer in the world. This was the first time during the analysis of the specified years that Woods is not the main protagonist at the Masters for the *New Pittsburgh Courier*. Although Woods was championed in the article briefly as a potential winner, the pressure and expectation on him was not nearly as stifling as it was in 1998. The repercussions of Woods' success at

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<sup>26</sup> Doug Ferguson. "Woods Less Masterful This Year," *The New Pittsburgh Courier*, 15 April 1998.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Doug Ferguson. "Eve of Masters: It's Duval, Woods," *The New Pittsburgh Courier*, 10 April 1999.

the Masters in 1997 had turned the event into worthwhile material for the *New Pittsburgh Courier*. Although there is only one article 1999, the disinterest of the early 1990s had been overall replaced by a distinct interest in the event by the late 1990s. There was no further coverage of the Masters in 1999, perhaps because of Woods' failure once again to win the tournament. This is similar to the reporting in 1994, 1995, and 1996, where there was no coverage whatsoever.

Tiger Woods was only of interest to the *New Pittsburgh Courier* when he was doing well, which suggests that the paper was only interested in black winners. When Woods is not winning or contending in the Masters, the Masters is of little interest to the paper. Surprisingly, there is no criticism of Woods for making swing changes at a time when he was the best golfer in the world, in fact the *New Pittsburgh Courier* did not even report on it. Nor were there any articles that questioned whether Tiger Woods would become Masters champion again. The *New Pittsburgh Courier's* silence regarding Woods' lack of form and swing changes is actually supportive. That the paper does not criticize him for this is noteworthy.

Woods' indifferent form continued throughout 1999 and into 2000. The year 2000 was the first time since Woods emerged as a contender at the Masters that the *New Pittsburgh Courier* did not cover the event. The paper's failure to cover the Masters when there were no black participants was understandable, but Woods was playing at Augusta in 2000. So why was there no coverage in the paper? The gradual decline of Masters coverage after Wood's win in 1997 coincided with the downturn in form of Tiger Woods. Did the paper abandon Woods when he needed its support? Whether or not Woods needed the support of the paper is questionable, but the lack of coverage does

highlight the perceived need of the paper to cover winners. The Masters in itself was not newsworthy enough in 2000 for the *Courier* to cover even though Tiger Woods had played in the tournament. As we saw in 1999, the Masters was covered but only in relation to Woods. Reporting on the failure of Woods in 1999 was not deemed necessary, nor was an inquest into why he had not won since 1997. By 2000 The *New Pittsburgh Courier* does not deem the Masters newsworthy at all when Woods is not playing well, and subsequently does not report on the tournament.

Tiger Woods' decision to change his swing resulted in unbridled success in the latter half of 2000 and the early part of 2001. Prior to the Masters in 2001 Woods had won the previous two major championships, the U.S. Open and the USPGA Championship. Woods was again dominating his sport as he had during 1996 and 1997. Subsequently, black media interest in Woods was reignited, especially around the time of the Masters. In conjunction with its policy of covering black winners, the *New Pittsburgh Courier* predicted Woods might win again in 2001 and consequently gave extensive coverage to the Masters that year. The build up to the 2001 Masters did not rival the build up to the 1998 Masters, but there was the same air of expectancy from the writers at the *New Pittsburgh Courier* that Woods would win at Augusta. Woods did win the Masters in 2001, but unlike 1997 when the *New Pittsburgh Courier* hailed his win as a sporting landmark for African Americans, the 2001 coverage was more subdued. There is still an enormous amount of pride in the writing of the journalists at the *New Pittsburgh Courier*, but instead of highlighting Woods' blackness in relation to his win they instead focus on his golf. Doug Ferguson wrote on the masterful performance of Woods by



stating that “he is a dynasty unto himself.”<sup>29</sup> By this point in Woods’ career he was conquering all before him, so the pride and acceptance of Woods is tangible in the writing of Ferguson.

By 2001 the paper shifted its focus from discussions about Tiger Woods the man to Tiger Woods the golfer. We can perhaps take this shift as an indication that the *New Pittsburgh Courier* was now satisfied with Woods and his African-American credentials, his status as a role model, and his place in the black community. By 2001 the paper no longer debated his blackness. It claimed “ownership” of him and felt no need to discuss his place in the community. The paper then concentrated its reporting on his golfing achievements.

In its early reporting of Woods the *New Pittsburgh Courier* was wary of him because it was unsure about the role he would play as a role model to the black community. Because some African American sports stars do not create a good image for themselves in the press, the paper was worried that Woods would reject them. They initially criticized him when he seemed to be denigrating the community by denying his African American heritage. After his tournament wins, Woods matured as a person and became more media savvy and, as such, the *New Pittsburgh Courier* decided that it would be a champion of Woods. When writers from white publications attempted to criticize him, they leap to his defense. By the late 1990s Tiger Woods had become the Masters for the *New Pittsburgh Courier*. The paper does not cover the Masters, it covers Tiger Woods at the Masters, which suggests that the Masters tournament *per se* is not

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<sup>29</sup> Doug Ferguson. “Young, talented Woods Creating History,” *The New Pittsburgh Courier*, 11 April 2001.

important to the paper. What is important is Tiger Woods and the role he can play as an ambassador to the black community and a role model for black children.

Having championed Woods during his high school days as a potential future role model for the African American community, the newspaper reacted with considerable anger to Woods not wanting to be labeled as an African American. The *New Pittsburgh Courier* perceived his comments as an attempt to deny his black heritage and, by extension, to distance himself from the black community. Woods' performance at the Masters in 1997 cancelled any negative implications of his previous comments. The *New Pittsburgh Courier* had to forgive him, as the win was so important in terms of black sporting achievement, or risk alienating its readership. His achievements are so much more positive than his comments are negative that they cancel each other out.

The paper's interest in the Masters prior to the emergence of Tiger Woods was nonexistent. When Woods won in 1997 it was a giant success story for African American people and consequently the paper devoted many pages to the story. Despite some justifiable criticism of Woods in late 1996 when he asked to be called a "Cablinasian," the reporting on Woods was favorable throughout. Woods' win at the 1997 Masters drew comparisons to Jackie Robinson's debut in major league baseball. Yet, surprisingly the paper did not take Woods' win at Augusta as an opportunity to lambaste the golfing fraternity for the years of subordination toward African-Americans. Instead, the *New Pittsburgh Courier* covered the win in terms of its significance to African Americans and refrained from any form of vitriolic or aggressive coverage. The Masters coverage in the *New Pittsburgh Courier* was dependent on Tiger Woods, and thus changed radically when Woods emerged as a potential winner in the mid 1990s.

Without the participation of Woods the *New Pittsburgh Courier* would not cover the Masters, as was the case in 1994, 1995, and 1996. That the paper refrains from gloating about Woods' domination at Augusta is testament to the professionalism of the *New Pittsburgh Courier* and its writers.

## CHAPTER 4

### THE *ATLANTA VOICE*

Founded in 1966 by J. Lowell Ware the *Atlanta Voice* has a clear message “A people without a voice cannot be heard.”<sup>1</sup> The paper was established after Ware determined that black people in the Atlanta area were not getting fair coverage of the civil rights movement by the local white press and that other black papers in Atlanta were carrying too much white advertising.<sup>2</sup> The *Atlanta Voice* has such a positive response by the black community that the paper continues to publish up to the present day. It is now the leading black newspaper in the Atlanta area with a weekly readership of 50,000.<sup>3</sup> Ware died in 1991, his daughter Janis took over the paper and is the current publisher. Like her father, she believes that African Americans need the paper as much today as they did in the 1960s. She states on the *Atlanta Voice*'s website that “black papers probably have more of a need today than ever before. If you start looking at the issues that we are dealing with, we're not being recognized. There is the same discrimination taking place; it's just being done differently. There is another divide taking place today. It is a digital divide. Most of us (African Americans) don't even have a computer or know how to do research on this World Wide Web. So, our people are going to be left behind again. If we don't continue to tell the story about how the issues are going to affect our community, we will never know why or what is really happening. We must continue to

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<sup>1</sup> The Atlanta Voice. “Atlanta Voice History” available from: [http://www.theatlantavoices.com/AV\\_History.htm](http://www.theatlantavoices.com/AV_History.htm) Internet; Date accessed 22/12/06

<sup>2</sup> Suggs, 139.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

educate our people.”<sup>4</sup> If we take Ware at her word and accept her statement that the paper is the black communities only voice, expression, and opinion, then the *Atlanta Voice* is vital to the equilibrium of the city of Atlanta and the black people who live there. The *Atlanta Voice*, like any paper, is divided into different sections. Each edition of the paper has a news-front, editorial, lifestyle, religion, business, sport, and classified section.

The *Atlanta Voice* was chosen for analysis for several reasons. First, when choosing a Southern paper, one of the two used for this thesis needed to be in the state of Georgia, the state in which the Masters is played, in order to assess the importance of the Masters to a prominent black paper. Second, the size and importance of Atlanta to the South and the large black population of the city made the selection logical. From a geographical point of view the close proximity of Atlanta to Augusta was a deciding factor in choosing the *Atlanta Voice*. Augusta is about one hundred forty miles to the east of Atlanta. Politically, the paper is to the left of the *New Pittsburgh Courier*.

Similar to the *New Pittsburgh Courier*, the *Atlanta Voice* did not cover the U.S. Masters at all in 1994. The *Atlanta Voice*'s sports pages during March and April of that year were filled with articles on football, boxing, baseball, and basketball. In an extension of its sports coverage, every two weeks the *Atlanta Voice* offers a further page devoted to sports that is titled “Brother on Sports,” abbreviated as B.O.S.<sup>5</sup> The April 9 edition (1994) of Brother on Sports offers valuable insight into the readership that the Atlanta Voice is hoping to reach. Contained on the page is a synopsis of what has been happening in the previous two weeks since the last *Brother on Sports* page was published. This page is very much a “black on black page,” a page that uses the language

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<sup>4</sup> The Atlanta Voice. “Atlanta Voice History” available from: [http://www.theatlantavoices.com/AV\\_History.htm](http://www.theatlantavoices.com/AV_History.htm) Internet; Date accessed 22/12/06

<sup>5</sup> Stan Washington. “Brother on Sports,” *The Atlanta Voice*, 26 April 1994.

and style that would be appealing to a black readership. For example, Stan Washington writes in response to Magic Johnson making a comeback “whoa boy, what a marketing move on behalf of the management for a failing team that couldn’t even keep Jack Nicholson in his seat.”<sup>6</sup> Washington continues to comment on other sports such as basketball where in response to a scheduling change he runs an article headlined “How Bout Them Hogs?”<sup>7</sup> Washington goes on to lambaste the organizers of college basketball by stating “despite the fact that I think Monday night is a dumb time to play college basketball, Arkansas and Duke made their networks proud.”<sup>8</sup> The next edition of “Brother on Sports” is again full of basketball, baseball, football, and boxing. The main article is on boxer Evander Holyfield and his decision in 1994 to retire from the sport. Washington, the resident columnist for B.O.S, writes that “heeding to doctors’ advice, homeboy, ‘Real Deal’ Holyfield wisely hung up the gloves.”<sup>9</sup>

In April 1995 the *Atlanta Voice* surprisingly reported on Tiger Woods and his participation at the forthcoming Masters tournament. This was the first year that the paper had reported on Woods and the first time that there was reporting on the Masters during the years examined in this study. Unlike the *New Pittsburgh Courier*, which carried Woods on the front page when he first appeared at Augusta after he had won the U.S. Amateur Championship, the *Atlanta Voice* kept the story on Woods confined to the sports pages. But the presence of the story suggests that, like the *New Pittsburgh Courier*, the *Atlanta Voice* expects Tiger Woods to perhaps increase participation in golf for African Americans. On the front page of the same edition is the iconic Michael

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Stan Washington. “Brother on Sports,” *The Atlanta Voice*, 6 May 1994.

Jordon. The headline reads “Who’s the Man?!!”<sup>10</sup> and has a picture of Jordon in mid air about to dunk a basketball during a game with the Atlanta Hawks. The presence of Jordon on the front page demonstrates that black sporting superstars are incredibly important to the newspaper and their readers. The “Who’s the Man” headline is a very proud statement of ownership on behalf of the paper. Like the *New Pittsburgh Courier* the *Atlanta Voice* promoted black winners.

That Tiger Woods happened to appear in the same edition could be coincidental only, or it could be a deliberate attempt by the paper to reaffirm to their readers that another black superstar is up and coming. The article on Tiger Woods is headlined “Tiger Woods Plays First Masters.”<sup>11</sup> Special attention is paid to the fact that Woods was the only amateur at the Masters that year to make the cut, which is the halfway cut off point where the top seventy players are allowed to play the weekend. The writer of the article, Paul Newbury, is obviously very proud of Woods’ achievement in making the cut, but he also alludes to Woods education, and that he is a Stanford freshman. By mentioning Woods’ education, Newberry could either be following the four “W’s” (why, what, where, and who), or it could be a subtle was of informing the readership of the *Atlanta Voice* that Woods, should he make the grade in golf, was not going to be the stereotypical black Sports star, which will be discussed later. Newbury reports ‘so, Tiger Woods, you’ve just played in your first Masters at the age of nineteen. What are you going to do now? Go to Disney World? Sorry there is no time for that kind of revelry. Not when he has to make a history class the next day.’<sup>12</sup> There are three obvious things

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<sup>10</sup> Homer Stewart. “Who’s The Man?!!,” *The Atlanta Voice*, 7 April 1995.

<sup>11</sup> Paul Newbury. “Tiger Woods Plays First Masters,” *The Atlanta Voice*, 7 April 1995.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

that Newbury draws attention to. Woods' age, his college education, and that he was the only amateur to make the halfway cut.

Is the *Atlanta Voice* championing Woods in the same way the *New Pittsburgh Courier* championed him? By highlighting Woods when he was still a college freshman, the *Atlanta Voice* is promoting him, but perhaps not the same as the *New Pittsburgh Courier*, which began its reporting on Woods in 1994. The *Atlanta Voice* also refrained from placing any undue burden on Woods. For example, the writers do not predict that he is the next great black sporting hope, nor do the writers seem to expect anything of Woods other than gradual progress and improvement. There is obviously expectation, hence the article, but not at the same level as seen in the *New Pittsburgh Courier*.

The story on Tiger Woods in April of 1995 was not followed up by the paper, and there was no reaction to the story in the editorial pages. The results of the 1995 Masters tournament were not covered in the paper, which follows the same trend as 1994. That the *Atlanta Voice* does not even give the results of the Masters is surprising, especially as the paper is located in such close proximity to Augusta. Yet, when looking at the paper and its coverage as a whole, it is understandable why it does not publish the results. The *Atlanta Voice* seems to cover more working class sports, boxing, football, and basketball. As golf is not traditionally a working class game, the paper's indifference to golf is understandable. Therefore, perhaps there is a distinct lack of interest in the event from its readership? Otherwise the paper would surely cover the Masters? As there is no coverage of the masters *per se* in 1995, but coverage of Tiger Woods at the Masters, one must conclude, that the *Atlanta Voice*, like the *New Pittsburgh Courier*, views the U.S. Masters and Tiger Woods as being synonymous.



In 1996 there was no mention of Woods, his third straight U.S. Amateur Championship, or the Masters in the *Atlanta Voice*. Even more blatant by its absence is the lack of reporting on the comments Woods made about wanting to be referred to as a “Cablinasian.” If the journalists at the *Atlanta Voice* had doubts over Woods’ acceptance by the black community, which they possibly did because he played a game that was not easily available to blacks, or his credibility as a black role model, then his comments would have been easy fodder for the journalists. That they do not pick up or offer comment on the story is surprising. Perhaps one reason why they did not make an issue of the story was in order to protect Woods from the wrath of its readers. This is in complete contrast to the *New Pittsburgh Courier*, who all but labeled Woods a race traitor after he made those comments. The more Woods won in 1996 the more obvious it became that he was going to be a major sports star, so the omission of Woods or the Masters is mystifying. The 1995 article on Woods appearing at the Masters seems even more of an anomaly in light of the lack of reporting in 1996. Again, perhaps the journalists do not think Woods is appealing to the readers because golf is an essentially an elitist sport? One thing is certain though, without Tiger Woods, there would have been no coverage whatsoever of the Masters, even in 1995.

The journalists at the *Atlanta Voice* did not report on the Masters in March and April of 1996, instead they were covering local sports. During Masters week the *Atlanta Voice* carried a front page story about the Atlanta Braves receiving their World Championship rings on the opening day of the season.<sup>13</sup> Again, the presence of this story highlights the importance of sports to the paper. In the weeks prior to the Masters the paper’s sports pages ran stories on the Atlanta Braves, the Atlanta Hawks, and the Atlanta

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<sup>13</sup> Gloria D McKinley. “Finally the Rings,” *The Atlanta Voice*, 6 April 1996.

Falcons. There was also a sizable column devoted to the impending March madness basketball playoffs.<sup>14</sup>

Excluding the brief article on Tiger Woods in 1995, the *Atlanta Voice* did not report on the Masters at all during 1994, 1995, and 1996. There was no mention of the event whatsoever, to the extent that the paper did not even publish the results of the Masters tournament in any of the specified years. In 1997, the year that Tiger Woods won the Masters, there was a shift in the coverage of the event. There was no build to the Masters in the *Atlanta Voice* prior to the tournament in 1997. That in itself was unusual as Woods was dominating his sport and was a consensus favorite to win the Masters that year. The week before the event the *Atlanta Voice* celebrated the fifty-year anniversary of Jackie Robinson making his Major League baseball debut. The *Atlanta Voice* reported that Robinson was very much a pioneer and protagonist of the changes that happened during the 1940s because of his involvement in desegregating baseball. The paper reported that because of Robinson's involvement in Major League Baseball, civil rights issues were brought to the forefront of American consciousness. The headline reads "Jackie Robinson Led The Way For Other Changes"<sup>15</sup> and paid tribute to the courage of Robinson and the mental strength it took to be the only black baseball player in the major leagues. There was no link to Tiger Woods in the story, nor are there comments on the Robinson article on the opinion pages.

Having not covered the Masters at all over the previous three years, Woods' win in the 1997 tournament made front page news in the *Atlanta Voice* (as did Woods' win in the *New Pittsburgh Courier*). The way the *Atlanta Voice* covered Woods' win differed

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<sup>14</sup> Stan Washington. "March Madness Begins," *The Atlanta Voice*, 16 April 1996.

<sup>15</sup> Paul Shepard. "Jackie Robinson Led The Way For Other Changes," *The Atlanta Voice*, 4 April 1997.

substantially from the way the *New Pittsburgh Courier* covered his Masters triumph. For example, the *New Pittsburgh Courier* used the story as a spin off to the fiftieth anniversary of Jackie Robinson joining the Brooklyn Dodgers. The *New Pittsburgh Courier* also argued that Woods was breaking the same sort of barriers as Robinson had done half a century previously. Although the *Atlanta Voice* covered Robinson in an earlier addition, it did not regurgitate to story and attempt to draw parallels with Woods' maiden Masters win.<sup>16</sup>

Not only did Tiger Woods win the Masters in 1997, he also won new prominence on the pages of the *Atlanta Voice*. The *Atlanta Voice* reported on Woods' Masters win by covering it from the perspective of a black janitor who was an employee of the Augusta National. In a story beneath the headline, "Tiger Woods: A New Hero takes Center Stage"<sup>17</sup> the paper praised Tiger Woods for his great achievements. Newberry writes, "Will the Augusta National ever be the same again? The Masters has a Black champion, and the Black workers who occupy the lower end of the clubs hierarchy have a new hero, Tiger Woods."<sup>18</sup> What is notable, however, is the extent to which the rest of the article switches its attention from Woods himself to the other black people working at the Augusta National. The paper pointed out that the vast majority of African Americans present at the Masters tournament were not there to play golf, or to enjoy the clubs facilities, but to work in menial jobs such as waiting tables, collecting trash, and caddying for white golfers. By highlighting these individuals and going on to speculate about how Woods' victory will affect African American golfers, the paper is actively engaging with a black working class readership. After all, a paper like the *Atlanta Voice* would be keen

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<sup>16</sup> Paul Newberry. "Tiger Woods: A New Hero Takes Center Stage" *The Atlanta Voice*, April 19 1997.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

not to be seen as giving undue coverage to golf as it was still seen as an elitist and white sport, which was unavailable to most African Americans.

In its coverage of Woods' Masters triumph, the *Atlanta Voice* did not attempt to mislead its readers about the Augusta National's past. In his article, Newberry conducts an interview with one of the waiters who explain in regard to the racism at the club, "it's not as bad as it used to be, but everyone around here knows their place. It's a good job. As long as they don't show it [racism] too blatantly, it's ok."<sup>19</sup> To demonstrate racism, blatant or otherwise, is not okay despite what the black waiter claims. In further summary the author heeds further warnings that Woods' win may well upset the equilibrium of the club. Newberry writes "there is some trepidation about how a new era of golf will be received at a place like the Augusta National, which treasures its traditions so dearly."<sup>20</sup> One of these traditions is obviously the racial and social hierarchy that Newberry had alluded to previously. That such trepidation should be felt by anybody of color in 1997 is a damning indictment to the Augusta National and the Masters tournament. Woods' winning the Masters perhaps signaled a power shift at the Augusta National that threatened the club to the very core. The inconceivable had happened, a black man had won their tournament, and no amount of crocodile smiles by the members could convince the *Atlanta Voice* that it was a joyous day for the Augusta National. The *Atlanta Voice* seemed to think that Woods' victory would not change anything at the Augusta National. Perhaps by its coverage the paper is warning their readers, the black employees of the Augusta National, and maybe even Tiger Woods, that racial equality at Augusta is still unattainable, and perhaps always will be.

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<sup>19</sup> Newberry, Paul. "Tiger Woods: A New Hero Takes Center Stage," *The Atlanta Voice*, 19 April 1997.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

Not only did the *Atlanta Voice* cover the Masters from a working class perspective, by reporting on it from a working class man's perspective, but the paper also viewed Woods' win in its larger context of race issues in the United States. A seventeen-year old trash collector who patrols the Augusta National during Masters week in a yellow boiler suit with the words "trash" stamped on the back, said of Woods. "It's a good thing to see a black man in a position like that. When you see people of my race you tend to think of Violence. But when you look at Woods you see a guy who is just living his dream. It shows that not all of us are out there shooting up people and drinking liquor."<sup>21</sup> Is the seventeen-year old referring to the stereotype the white middle class has of black people in general? If this man picked up such feeling, then in part those feelings must have been heightened by working at the Augusta National. After all, most of the patrons who attend the tournament are of the white middle class, as are the members. Working at the Augusta National in a yellow boiler suit picking up the litter of white people must have had a debilitating effect on this young man. The Augusta National is not only a racist institution, but a place that belittles the role of black people in society, and a place that can irretrievably damage and humiliate African Americans.

The impact that Woods' victory had on the African American community as a whole was also highlighted on the *Atlanta Voice's* opinion pages the next week. Reginald Eves takes the opportunity to lambaste elitist White Anglo Saxon Protestant (WASP) country clubs for their failure to accept and nurture black talent. He argues that Tiger Woods sent a message to those racist country clubs. "There was a lesson there for those who believe that African Americans are inferior. Tiger's performance proved to these narrow minded individuals that given a chance, African Americans can reach the

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

top of any ladder.”<sup>22</sup> This is certainly true, but in order to get on to the ladder that Eaves alludes to, one must have the economic prowess to do so. Country clubs cost thousands of dollars a year in membership fees. Although Eaves is probably not writing specifically about golf, he inadvertently raises the question of access to golf in his article. By drawing attention to exclusive country clubs in the South, Eaves is able to critique them for their closed membership policies. Yet, one must consider, however, that there are also many poor whites who cannot join these country clubs because of their backgrounds. Certainly race is an issue at many country clubs, but class is just as important to discriminatory membership practices.

The *Atlanta Voice* also used Woods’ Masters victory as a subtle way of critiquing black stars from other sports. Eaves argues that “Tiger, unlike some of the African American millionaire baseball or basketball players, knows the history of Blacks in his game. Most of these self-centered, poorly informed, cocky but gifted young Black athletes, have no idea who [Jackie] Robinson or Curt Flood were and the role they played in making them millionaires today.”<sup>23</sup> This is the first time in the study of the specified years that the paper has raised the question about the role that the working class black sports hero plays in African American society. Eaves is essentially saying that these sports stars are ignorant and unworthy of their millions because they fail to see the role of the pioneering black athletes in breaking the color barrier. Woods, for having the foresight to mention the pioneers in his sport after his Masters triumph, gave pride, hope, and satisfaction to the older generation who watched his victory that day. It is quite possible that Eaves is reinforcing to his readers that education is not something that

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<sup>22</sup> Reginald Eaves. “50 Years Later, A Lesson Well Taught,” *The Atlanta Voice*, April 19 1997.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

should be ridiculed or something that blacks should feel ashamed of choosing, but something that can ultimately give blacks better lives. Perhaps he is saying that the black community does not value education. After all in many schools, studying hard is associated, by black youths as “acting white.” Eaves not only critiqued black sports stars but also critiqued black society in general.

The *Atlanta Voice* is very proud of Woods for paying homage to those first few black men who tried to play on the PGA tour after the Caucasian only clause was disbanded in 1961. That Woods did this endeared him to the journalists and perhaps their black readership. Subsequently, the paper highlighted him as a suitable role model for black people. The *Atlanta Voice* also pointed out that although Woods won a great victory, the majority of the African Americans who worked at the Masters were still in subservient positions at the lower end of the club’s hierarchy, and their status should not be forgotten. Using Tiger Woods’ victory at the Masters to draw attention to the ongoing discrimination that African Americans face at predominantly white country clubs is another example of how the *Atlanta Voice* is able to engage with its readership. It is also a subtle way by the paper to introduce golf to a new audience. By promoting golf, the paper is encouraging blacks to play it, which would diminish the elitist feel that the sport carries.

In order to compensate for covering golf, which the *Atlanta Voice* and its readership perhaps viewed as unimportant and elitist, the paper had to cover the Masters from a viewpoint that would reach out to its audience. By reporting on the event from the perspective of a working-class man, it attempts to bridge the divide between the white bourgeois and the common black man. In doing so it used Tiger Woods because he is a

black man who is able to transcend both worlds. The paper often refers to Woods' Stanford education. Perhaps they do this to distance Woods from the working class? Equally, the paper could be doing so in order to highlight that education is a viable option for black progressiveness, and should not be dismissed.

The coverage of Woods' Masters win, surprisingly, was not vitriolic, defensive, or negative. Instead the *Atlanta Voice* used Woods' triumph to highlight that although Woods' win was another racial first, much ground still needed to be covered before golf could be a viable sport for African Americans to participate in. The reporting of the Masters in 1997 by the *Atlanta Voice* defiantly has an edge to it. The paper was happy to emphasize the subservient roles that African Americans undertake at the Augusta National, as well as criticizing the club for their past policies on race. Above all else, the paper seems to be ambivalent as to whether Woods' win would actually change anything at the Augusta National. The paper is certainly pleased that Woods won, but also stresses that the Augusta National is still a place that used blacks in submissive roles to white people. The paper only reported on the Masters that year because Tiger Woods won, which suggests that like the *New Pittsburgh Courier*, the *Atlanta Voice* see the Masters and Tiger Woods as being the same. Although the paper may not have embraced Woods as enthusiastically as the *New Pittsburgh Courier*, the writers are none the less proud of his achievements and keen to use him as a black role model. Although Woods was in some way disconnected from the *Atlanta Voice's* readership in previous years, his 1997 Masters win meant, in the eyes of the paper, he will forever be a symbol of black triumph and, as such, achieved new status with the paper and its readership.



The *Atlanta Voice* did not cover the Masters at all in 1998, 1999, or 2000, and made only one small reference to Tiger Woods' win at Augusta in 2001. It is surprising that in 1998 the paper did not run a single story on Woods and his defense of the Masters, as interest in the event for the black community would surely have been heightened. The *Atlanta Voice* would have covered the event had Woods defended his title. Therefore, either the *Atlanta Voice* only reported on black winners, or perhaps the novelty of covering golf had worn off. As Woods did not win the Masters in 1998, he was not of interest to the paper. Instead the paper reported on local sports such as, boxing, football, and baseball. The same theme continued into 1999, when Masters coverage was again omitted from the sports pages of the *Atlanta Voice*. Although the *Atlanta Voice* did not cover the Masters in 1999, it did publish an article on Tiger Woods during Masters week that praised him for his support of an anti-drugs initiative.<sup>24</sup> In the article, Debora Bundy praised black superstars for their help in trying to educate young people about the dangers of drugs. That Woods is categorized as a superstar by the *Atlanta Voice* in 1999 means that the paper has obviously elevated him to the status that it holds for the other blacks sports stars mentioned in the article. Along with Woods, stars such as Michael Jordon and Evander Holyfield were praised.<sup>25</sup> Woods did not hold such a position prior to his 1997 Masters win, so the *Atlanta Voice* obviously see him as an appropriate role model for the black community following his 1997 victory.

In 2000 there was also no coverage of the Masters in the *Atlanta Voice*, but unlike in 1999, there was no reporting on Tiger Woods either. The paper again reverts to covering local sports during Masters week. Throughout March and April of 2000 the

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<sup>24</sup> Deborah Bundy. "Anti-Drug Group Trying to Build Clean Bodies and Strong Minds," *The Atlanta Voice*, 17 April 1999.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

paper covered the Atlanta Braves, baseball, and basketball.<sup>26</sup> The lack of Masters coverage is, again, conspicuous by its absence. After all, the *Atlanta Voice* had legitimate grounds for not covering the Masters in the early 1990s as there were no black players participating. Yet, not to cover the event when the top ranked golfer in the world is black, and a past Masters champion, is strange. Woods' win was seen as being historic in 1997 by the paper and as such demanded extensive coverage. Unlike the *New Pittsburgh Courier* which did make reference to Woods in these years, the *Atlanta Voices'* ambivalence to the event is curious. Perhaps Woods single victory in 1997 was not enough to cause further coverage of the event?

Two thousand-one was a landmark year in the career of Tiger Woods; he dominated golf in a fashion that had never been seen before. Before the Masters in 2001, Tiger Woods had won the previous two major championships, the U.S. Open and the USPA Championship, and was playing the best golf of his career. Yet, there was no build up to the Masters in 2001 by the *Atlanta Voice*. Woods went on to win the Masters in 2001, but unlike in 1997 where his victory was front-page news, and hailed as a proud day for African-Americans, the *Atlanta Voice* offered minimal reporting on the event. In the edition after the Masters, tucked away in the corner of the sports pages is a picture of Tiger Woods punching the air and the headline "Who's The Man?"<sup>27</sup> This was the only reference to Woods in the paper. There is not an article to go with it, nor is there any comment on the opinion pages. This low-key coverage is a reflection of a larger ambivalence toward golf in the *Atlanta Voice*. Despite his 1997 Masters victory, the

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<sup>26</sup> Stan Washington. "The Sports Box," *The Atlanta Voice*, April 7 2000.

<sup>27</sup> Stan Washington. "Who's the Man?," *The Atlanta Voice*, April 4 2001.

paper still does not see Woods as newsworthy enough to extensively report on, and, as such, the Masters itself is certainly not worthy enough to cover.

The *Atlanta Voice* only covered the Masters thoroughly when Woods won his inaugural Masters in 1997. Barring a small article in 1995, the paper did not report on Woods or the Masters previous to 1997. After Masters coverage reached a crescendo in 1997, following Woods' win, coverage again tailed off into obscurity during the remaining four years of this study. The *Atlanta Voice* is no doubt proud of Woods and his achievements, and subsequently happy to champion him as a role model, but it did not embrace him in the manner the writers at the *New Pittsburgh Courier* did. The *Atlanta Voice* is probably a paper more marketed towards the working classes, and as such, it had limited interest in an elitist white golf tournament. Even when Woods won, the paper covers the victory from the perspective of a working class black man. Certainly the paper is disinterested in the Masters, as the lack of coverage would suggest, and not even the presence of Tiger Woods can ignite thorough reporting of the event. It is also apparent that the writers at the *Atlanta Voice* perhaps do not see Tiger Woods as being a "true" representative of the black community, as he plays a sport that is out of reach to most African Americans. While it was happy to highlight Woods as a role model; Woods, to the *Atlanta Voice*, is disconnected with their readership, and as such, is not news on his own. The *Atlanta Voices'* ambivalence to the Masters, and subsequent lack of coverage, is because the paper probably views the Augusta National as a racist institution and golf as an elitist sport played by the well-to-do. The paper supports Tiger Woods because he is black, but does not support the Masters. The only time the Masters would be featured in the *Atlanta Voice* is if Woods won.

## CHAPTER 5

### THE *CHICAGO DEFENDER*

Although the *New Pittsburgh Courier* carried a brief article on the potential greatness of Tiger Woods in late April 1994, the paper otherwise ignored the U.S. Masters. Similarly, the sports pages of the *Atlanta Voice* and the *Birmingham Times* in March and April of the same year ignored the Masters. Unlike the three aforementioned black papers, the *Chicago Defender* did cover the U.S Masters in 1994, albeit briefly. At the beginning of every week the *Chicago Defender* publishes an itinerary of the sporting events that are taking place over the following week. The paper also publishes statistical facts, figures, league tables, and world rankings. Included in the itinerary for the week commencing April 7, 1994, were the tee times for the start of the 58<sup>th</sup> U.S Masters.<sup>1</sup>

In March and April of 1994 the *Chicago Defender* included one Masters-related story in its sports pages. Written by an unknown author the story titled “Golfers at Masters Deny Charges of Drug Usage”<sup>2</sup> and focuses on allegations that Masters participants could be using performance enhancing drugs. The article responded to former player Mac O’Grady’s comments that most of the world’s top golfers were using nerve calming drugs before participating in tournaments. The author of the article conducted interviews with several golfers playing at Augusta regarding the allegations; all those interviewed rebuked O’Grady’s claims.

Despite the single Masters story in 1994, the *Chicago Defender*, like the *New Pittsburgh Courier*, the *Atlanta Voice*, and the *Birmingham Times*, devoted much of its

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<sup>1</sup> Tom Krish, “Sports,” *The Chicago Defender*, 7 April 1994.

<sup>2</sup> “Golfers At Masters Deny Charges Of Drug Usage,” *The Chicago Defender*, 7 April 1994.

sports coverage to local teams and individuals. For example, over March and April of 1994 the paper featured numerous articles on the Chicago Cubs' impending baseball season, the fortunes of the Chicago Bulls basketball team, and the Chicago Bears football team. As Masters week always coincides with the anniversary of Jackie Robinson's major league baseball debut, the *Chicago Defender* duly celebrates Robinson's achievements in April 1994. This was a full two years before the *New Pittsburgh Courier*, *Birmingham Times*, or the *Atlanta Voice* wrote about Robinson's anniversary. When the *New Pittsburgh Courier*, *Atlanta Voice*, and the *Birmingham Times* did report on the anniversary of Jackie Robinson's major league baseball debut it was in 1996 and 1997.<sup>3</sup> The aforementioned papers did so because 1997 was the fiftieth anniversary of Robinson debuting for the Brooklyn Dodgers in 1947. Therefore, like the *Chicago Defender* covered the Masters before the *New Pittsburgh Courier*, *Atlanta Voice*, and the *Birmingham Times*, the paper also paid tribute to Jackie Robinson before the other three specified newspapers.

Headlining "Jackie Robinson's Great Legacy"<sup>4</sup> the unknown author of the article used Jackie Robinson's participation in segregated-baseball to emphasize that hard work and dedication can triumph over adversity. The author stressed the horrendous problems that Robinson faced every day and linked those problems to issues that black people still face today in their own communities. The author writes "When we think of the proliferation of drugs, the increase in carjacking and drive-by shootings and the like, it might seem that these malaises cannot be successfully addressed. The same conclusion could have been drawn by Blacks of the past about the same type of institutional racism

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<sup>3</sup> "Jackie Robinson's Great Legacy," *The Chicago Defender*, 11 April 1994.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

that plagued society then.”<sup>5</sup> The author clearly identified Robinson as a role model whom blacks should use to overcome their social and economic problems. In later issues, Robinson’s anniversary in the *Defender* is celebrated in the same way. Every March and April from 1994 through 2001, articles are written on Robinson in the *Chicago Defender*. There were several possible reasons for the extended coverage of Robinson. First, the *Chicago Defender*, unlike the *New Pittsburgh Courier*, the *Atlanta Voice*, or the *Birmingham Times*, is published daily, and, therefore, the writers are under more pressure to fill their sports pages. Second, Robinson is a hero in the eyes of black people for his courage, dedication, and efforts to better the lives of African Americans, so articles on him will always be well received. Third, Chicago is a passionate baseball city, and as such, Jackie Robinson’s achievements would be further elevated.

The *Chicago Defender* again covered the U.S. Masters in 1995. This time, however, the single article written centered on the Augusta debut of a Mr. Tiger Woods. Tiger Woods earned his place at Augusta in 1995 courtesy of winning the 1994 U.S Amateur Championship, where the prize was entry to the U.S Masters, U.S. Open, and British Open. The 1994 U.S Amateur Championship took place at the Tournament Players Club in Jacksonville, Florida. The format of the U.S Amateur Championship is single match play knock out; therefore, the winner has to beat several other top amateurs to win the coveted prize. That year Tiger Woods easily negotiated his first two matches before coming up against Buddy Alexander, the head golf coach for the University of Florida. As one would expect the vast crowd favored Alexander, and at one point a spectator was overheard saying “Who do you think these people are rooting for, the

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

nigger or the Gator Coach?”<sup>6</sup> Hostile crowd or not, Woods beat Alexander at the last hole to set up a final with Trip Kuehne, whom he defeated in a dramatic final.<sup>7</sup> Augusta bound, Woods’ skin color and scintillating amateur career was bound to generate interest from both the black and white press. The *Chicago Defender*, however, was far more interested in the golfing ability of Woods than the color of his skin.

The *Chicago Defender*’s 1995 article on the Masters carried the headline “Woods has Master-ful performance,”<sup>8</sup> and was the first and last piece written on the Masters in the *Chicago Defender* in 1995. The article consists of two reports, the first part a synopsis of Woods’ week at Augusta, the second and shorter part, a brief summary of the tournament and its winner. The unknown writer is obviously very proud of Tiger Woods’ achievements and writes a praising article of the nineteen-year-old. The author describes Woods a “likely superstar of world golf.” Although the article does not mention the past racial problems that surround the Augusta National, it did include an interview given by Woods in which he told reporters that he sent a letter to the club to thank them for being so hospitable. Woods told the members at the Augusta National in an open letter, “I was treated like a gentleman throughout my stay and I trust I responded in kind. I’ve accomplished much here and learned even more. Your tournament will always hold a special place in my heart as a place where I made my first PGA cut. For that I will be eternally grateful.”<sup>9</sup> That Woods sent such a letter to the members at the Augusta National demonstrates his maturity and thoughtfulness. Yet, the letter begs the question. Should Woods have expected anything less? Perhaps Woods sent the letter to

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<sup>6</sup> Lawrence Londino. *Tiger Woods – A Biography*. (London: Greenwood Press 2006), 60

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> “Woods Has Masterful Performance,” *The Chicago Defender*, 11 April 1995.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

quash any fears to African Americans that the Augusta National was still an essentially racist institution? We will never know the true meaning of the letter, but the reasons the *Chicago Defender* published the letter could have been to answer the above questions in regard to the Augusta National and its past. Of course, Woods' treatment by the club could have been a backhanded message to the world the Augusta National does not deserve its reputation and is no longer a racist institution. Lee Elder often spoke of the wonderful treatment he received from the members upon his debut, so perhaps the Augusta National was keen to convey a similar message to the world in 1995.<sup>10</sup>

The *Defender's* early treatment of Tiger Woods is low-key when compared to the *New Pittsburgh Courier*, the *Atlanta Voice*, and the *Birmingham Times'* reporting. The *Chicago Defender*, although keen to champion Woods as a potential superstar, did not over hype him and, thus, did not overtly pressure him. By doing this it allowed its readers to draw their own conclusions about the role Tiger Woods might play on African American sport.

The *Chicago Defender's* trend of covering the Masters continued the next year. In 1996 two articles are written in April that covered the annual Masters tournament. Although Tiger Woods was mentioned in each article, the writer has not written directly about him. This confirms that the *Chicago Defender* was keen to avoid labeling Woods at the next black superstar. It also reiterates that the *Chicago Defender*, at that time, did not consider Tiger Woods and the Masters as being synonymous. Of the two articles in the *Chicago Defender* in April 1996 both were written before the tournament; there were no follow-up articles to either of the stories published that April.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Owen, 247.

<sup>11</sup> "Masters Week Gets Under Way," *The Chicago Defender*, 9 April 1996.



Although the *Chicago Defender* covered the U.S. Masters in 1994 and 1995, its coverage only consisted of one or two articles in each year. Yes, the paper covered the tournament, but its ambivalence to it was also apparent. There was no detailed synopsis of the tournament in 1994 or 1995, nor were the results of the tournament published by the paper on its weekly statistical sports page. This trend continued into 1996, as the *Chicago Defender* again published two stories preceding the event. The first short story, headlined “Masters Week Gets Underway”<sup>12</sup> included a brief synopsis of the weather forecast for the week as well as a short interview with the defending champion, Ben Crenshaw. The second article, published on the day that the Masters officially began, was headlined “60<sup>th</sup> Masters Tees Off.”<sup>13</sup> This article included a more detailed summary of the impending week of golf and gave a short history of the men expected to be the main protagonists in the tournament. The focal point of the article was the chance the then top-ranked golfer, Greg Norman, had of securing his first green jacket. Also, discussed briefly was the second appearance of Tiger Woods. Woods, the U.S Amateur champion, was to do battle with the British Amateur champion Gordon Sherry. The paper confidently predicted that Woods and Sherry “would do battle well into the 21<sup>st</sup> century.”<sup>14</sup> The two articles discussed were the extent of the *Chicago Defenders* U.S. Masters coverage that year and like in 1994 and 1995, there was no follow up to the Masters in 1996. A reader would not have been able to determine who won the tournament as the paper did not publish the results in the sports page the following week.

By April 1997 Tiger Woods had won three times on the PGA before he arrived at Augusta to compete in his first major championship as a professional. Woods’

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> “60<sup>th</sup> Masters Tee Off,” *The Chicago Defender*, 11 April 1996.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

scintillating start to his professional career whetted the appetite of the *Chicago Defender's* writers. Instead of printing one or two vague articles on the impending Masters tournament, the paper printed numerous articles in the weeks leading up to the tournament. The paper's previous stance of not pressuring Woods and not labeling him as the next black superstar was quashed in 1997. The writers at the *Chicago Defender* genuinely thought that Tiger Woods was the next black sports superstar and a man truly capable of winning his first start in the Masters as a professional. Such plentiful pre-Masters coverage suggested that the *Chicago Defender* perhaps had misjudged the talent Woods possessed and his potential impact on golf. Unlike in 1994, 1995, and 1996, the Masters coverage in the *Chicago Defender* in 1997 was only about Tiger Woods and his chances of winning the tournament. The paper went from one extreme to another in its coverage of the tournament and of Tiger Woods. Although the *Chicago Defender* had championed Woods as a superstar of the future, his ability, talent, and progression as a golfer clearly had not been counted on by the writers at the *Chicago Defender*. The writers at the *Chicago Defender* would have been aware of Woods' talent, especially after his amateur career and start to his professional career. After he began winning regularly on the PGA Tour, and given that he was receiving such attention in the black press, the writers at the *Chicago Defender*, eager to not be left behind, perhaps decided to jump on the Tiger Woods bandwagon, hence such plentiful coverage in 1997.

Before Woods began to win regularly on the PGA Tour, the writers at the *Chicago Defender* had often alluded to his "potential" in its articles. When Woods began to win consistently, the sports writers at the paper referred to him as "golf sensation."<sup>15</sup> As was discussed previously, the *Chicago Defender's* writers, when it became obvious

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<sup>15</sup> "Tiger Gives Minority Golfers A Shot," *The Chicago Defender*, 2 April 1997.

that Woods was going fulfill his potential and dominate his sport, the paper devoted much more space to covering him. The sports pages in April 1997 were dominated by Woods' participation at Augusta. In an article with the heading "Woods All Ready for the Masters" the anonymous writer argued that a victory for Woods would signal the start of a new era in the sport.<sup>16</sup> Interestingly, the writer is not referring to the color of Woods' skin as the reason for this probable paradigm shift, but to Woods' age. The writer summarizes that Woods heads a new group of players, including the likes of Phil Mickelson, David Duval, and Ernie Els, who are capable of replacing the older players who have dominated the sport over the proceeding decades.<sup>17</sup> That Woods racial ethnicity is not discussed at all in the article is interesting. Perhaps the writer at the *Chicago Defender* feels that by mentioning Woods skin color it would somehow do a disservice to the talent of the young Tiger Woods? After all, if golf in the twenty-first century was to be color blind, as the Augusta members said they wanted it to be, then it should matter little that Tiger Woods was black. However, this article did focus on Augusta, and considering the past problems the club has had with allegations of racism it was surprising that the writer did not at least make a passing remark on the subject.

Every other day in the *Chicago Defender* that month there was a full-page article in the Life/Times section of the paper that paid tribute to Jackie Robinson. One article titled "Remembering Jackie – in the 50<sup>th</sup> Year Since he broke Baseballs Color Barrier, Robinson's Wife and Daughter Offer Loving tributes," was a celebration and tribute to the life of Jackie Robinson, as well as an advertisement for a book about the career of Robinson, written by his wife Rachel, to be released later in the year. The *Chicago*

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<sup>16</sup> "Woods All Ready For The Masters," The *Chicago Defender*, 7 April 1997.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

*Defender* used this book launch as a vehicle to propel a year-long celebration of Jack Robinson's life.<sup>18</sup> In the same edition in which the Robinson story appeared there was another article on Tiger Woods' presence at Augusta. As with the last article reviewed, there is no mention of the ethnicity of Woods or the significance a possible win would have on the African American community. The article, "Tiger Takes Augusta by the Tail – Woods the Center of Attention at the Masters" reviews the excitement that Woods' attendance was causing at Augusta. According to the writer, patrons attending the Masters were so overcome by the need to see Woods that "as he strolled out of the clubhouse door, some hundred yards from the from the practice surface, he was surrounded by grim faced security men who pushed aside the on-rushing throng of fans. After he stopped on the green, the crowd around the putting surface grew to five deep."<sup>19</sup> That the Robinson and Woods stories appeared on the same page could either be coincidental, or an attempt by the writers to link the two men together.

The next installment on Woods came a day later, after Woods' had completed his mandatory pre-tournament press conference. In the story, which carried the headline "Woods Candid About Favorite's Role," the writer relayed the questions that were asked of Woods and the answers he gave. During the interview Woods spoke of the difficulty he was having adapting to life in the public eye. Woods was quoted as saying "people want to know dirt on anyone. For players like myself, Greg Norman, and John Daly, in our sport, it becomes difficult because people aren't respectful of our private space. They would want us to be respectful of theirs. It should be a two-way street, but it isn't."<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Remembering Jackie – In The 50<sup>th</sup> Year Since He Broke Baseballs Color Barrier, Robinson's Wife And Daughter Offer Loving Tributes," *The Chicago Defender*, 8 April 1997.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> "Woods Candid About Favorites Role," *The Chicago Defender*, 9 April 1997.

What is most surprising about this article is that the writer offers no analysis of Woods' words. He simply translates the interview Woods gave with a few words linking it all together. Although the writers at the *Chicago Defender* certainly saw Woods as the next sports superstar, they did not label him as the next black superstar. The writers of the articles are eager not to bring the race element into any of its reporting the question is why?

Would the *Chicago Defender* have covered the Masters the way it did in 1997 had Tiger Woods been white? Of course not, because the reason that Woods and the Masters received such attention by the *Chicago Defender* in 1997 was because Tiger Woods is black. Although the paper had carried stories about the Masters in 1994, 1995, and 1996, it was very sparsely covered. Yet when Tiger Woods emerged as a favorite for the tournament, the paper follows his progress with no detail spared. The *Chicago Defender* obviously viewed Tiger Woods as the next black superstar, yet why it did not acknowledge this in its writing is baffling.

The *Chicago Defender* continued to report on Tiger Woods and his preparation for the 1997 U.S Masters in each edition leading up to the start of the tournament. As the tournament moved closer, the *Chicago Defender's* air of expectancy over Woods' chances to win the tournament grew. In an article headlined "Woods To Help Usher in New Era at Augusta," the unknown writer spoke of the "electric atmosphere" that surrounded the tournament. Despite the title of the article, the story did not have anything to do with Tiger Woods' ethnicity but instead on his formative years. Like a previous article that week, Woods' presence was equated with a changing of the guard. The "new era" that the writers referred to was that Woods and similar players were set to

replace the more seasoned campaigners who had previously dominated the Masters.<sup>21</sup> By the following Sunday, April 13, 1997, Tiger Woods had produced possibly the greatest major championship performance ever seen. Woods shattered numerous major championship records and broke almost every Masters record. So scintillating was Woods' golf over the four days that by Sunday evening he had reached iconic status in the golfing community.

Similar to the *New Pittsburgh Courier*, the *Birmingham Times*, and the *Atlanta Voice*, the *Chicago Defender* reacted to Tiger Woods' inaugural Masters win by carrying the story on the front page of the newspaper. The front page of the April 14 edition of the *Chicago Defender* displayed a big picture of Tiger Woods and the headline "Can't Hold This Tiger – Tiger Woods Wins Masters with Largest Margin of Victory in History." After avoiding the issue of Tiger Woods' ethnicity in its pre-Masters coverage, the moment Tiger Woods actually won the Masters, the *Chicago Defender* seized upon the historical significance of such an event. Consider the opening two paragraphs on the front page of the *Chicago Defender*. "In the shadows of what once was considered one of the great bastions of segregation, Tiger Woods carved his way into history Sunday. Almost fifty years after Jackie Robinson broke the color barrier in Major League Baseball, Woods became the first African American to win a major golf tournament when he captured the prestigious Masters golf tournament at the Augusta National golf club in Georgia."<sup>22</sup> The *Defender's* article was the first one among all the articles that appeared in the paper studied for the period 1994 through 2001 that encompassed the race issues that surrounded the Augusta National. The front-page story, written by Larry

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<sup>21</sup> "Woods to Help Usher in New Era at Augusta," *The Chicago Defender*, 10 April 1997.

<sup>22</sup> Larry Gross, "Can't Hold this Tiger – Tiger Woods Wins Masters With Largest Margin Of Victory In History," *The Chicago Defender*, 14 April 1997.

Gross, paid tribute to the first black golfers who played on the PGA Tour. In the interview that Woods gave following his victory, he complimented Lee Elder and Charlie Sifford on their courage and thanked them for making it possible for him to adorn the prestigious green jacket.<sup>23</sup>

The question of why the *Chicago Defender* previously had never made even a passing reference to the bigoted past of the Augusta National before Woods won the Masters in 1997 is a curious one. Woods' win seemed ignite the passion of the writers at the *Chicago Defender*. The front page story that discussed the repercussions and racial significance of Woods win was not an anomaly. Over the following days many more articles were written on the Woods' victory. The next article on Tiger Woods was a curious one as it appeared on the same page, and was written by the same journalist, Larry Gross, as an article celebrating Jackie Robinsons anniversary. Although Gross may well have been subtly hinting that Woods' victory and Robinson's anniversary of his Major League Baseball debut were much the same (by putting each article on the same page), he did not link them together in print.<sup>24</sup>

The day after the *Chicago Defender* made front-page news of Tiger Woods' Masters victory, another article written by Larry Gross appeared on the sports pages. The article led with the headline "Woods Still Talk of the Town" and covered the impact that Woods' victory would have on black people everywhere. In order to gage local reaction to Woods' win, Gross had gone to a municipal course in downtown Chicago. He spoke to black golfer Curtis Glover to ascertain his feelings on Tiger Woods' Masters victory. Glover told Larry Gross that "It was the greatest thing that has ever happened in golf. It

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

made me feel good to watch that young man perform like he did. Too often this game hasn't been associated with Blacks, but now because of Tiger it will be."<sup>25</sup>

The article stated that because of Woods' victory, the Chicago Public Schools' golf program had been revived. The coordinator for the Chicago Public Schools golf program, Michael Lowery, said "the fact that Tiger won the Masters during the school year is important because our students are able to identify with him and come to school and talk about his achievements."<sup>26</sup> Although the *Chicago Defender* had championed Woods as a "potential superstar" as early as 1995, it is probable that it underestimated the impact Woods' win would have on the African American community. Woods' aggressive play, the distance he hit a golf ball, and his iconic status in the sport made golf appealing to children all over the world. That he was black made him not only appealing to black children, but also a realistic role model for them to aspire to. Here was a man with whom black children could identify with. The elitist image that golf had could be changed because of Woods. Not only were the school children talking about Woods, but so to were retired people like Curtis Glover, who had profound pride in him.

The "new era" that the *Chicago Defender's* journalists had discussed in previous articles suddenly became a completely different type of new era. Whereas the *Chicago Defender* had previously written about Tiger Woods leading the new era of youth in golf, the new era that it referred to in the "Woods Still Talk of the Town" article was completely different. For example, Gross wrote that Lee Elder, the first black man to play in the Masters, had spoken to Woods before the final round and wished him luck in

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<sup>25</sup> Larry Gross, "Woods Still Talk Of The Town," *The Chicago Defender*, 15 April 1997.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*



“ushering in golf’s new era.”<sup>27</sup> Lee Elder was certainly not wishing Woods luck because he was twenty one years old, but wishing him luck because he was about to accomplish a racial first. Elder obviously recognized this and understood the significance of what Woods was about to accomplish. Gross also suggests that Woods’ victory could “play a meaningful role in assisting race relations in the United States.”<sup>28</sup>

The preceding analysis by Gross could well explain why Woods’ accomplishments were put on the same page as the celebration of Jackie Robinson’s Major League Baseball debut. Although Gross was careful never to entwine Robinson and Woods, the editors, by putting the articles on the same page the inadvertently categorized Tiger Woods’ Masters victory with Jackie Robinson’s debut in the previously-segregated major leagues. Gross identified Woods’ win within the context of other sporting firsts by arguing that “many are ranking it with Jesse Owens’ four gold medals at the 1936 Olympics in Berlin and Arthur Ashe becoming the first African American to win Wimbledon.”<sup>29</sup> Although the paper had previously never mentioned the potential Woods had to become a role model for black people, after his 1997 Masters triumph, according to the writers at the *Chicago Defender*, he has little choice but to accept the accolade.

The furor Woods’ victory elicited meant that his Masters win was not only a sporting issue, but also a social issue. For example, the week following the Masters, Woods’ victory was reported on the front-page of the paper and the editorial and entertainment sections. With a victory of this magnitude, there was bound to be substantial analysis of Tiger Woods in the editorial section, as there was in the other three

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

papers in this study. The editorial's attention grabbing headline that week read "Woods' Victory Points to Things Sports Industry Still Needs."<sup>30</sup> The unknown writer was obviously very proud of Woods' achievements in the sense that the opening paragraph read "We enthusiastically commend Tiger Woods for the dignified and confident manner in which he made his way through the Augusta National Golf Club to become the first African American to win the Masters tournament. From the many interviews that we have seen, and from the way he plays the game, his is truly a class act."<sup>31</sup>

The writer went on to congratulate Woods for his maturity in praising African American golfers of the past who made it possible for him to compete and win the Masters. Although the story champions Woods as an excellent role model, there is also a warning to aspiring athletes that professional sport is only played by "one percent of high school athletes."<sup>32</sup> The writer draws the reader's attention to Woods' Stanford education, and states "Woods sent a good message to millions of youngsters who might otherwise think that they should devote all their time seeking a career in sports. Although the nation must have its professional athletes, it still very much needs more doctors, lawyers, educators, and other professionals."<sup>33</sup> Essentially the paper warned prospective athletes against adopting the "all or nothing approach" when it comes to athletics. The path Woods took was held up as an example of the right way to progress into professional sports. Had Woods failed to make the grade in professional golf, his Stanford education would have been something he could have fallen back upon. Yet, the unanswered

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<sup>30</sup> "Woods Victor Points To Things Sports Industry Still Needs," *The Chicago Defender*, 16 April 199.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

question is where does the high school athlete go if he/she fails to make it into the college system?

Woods' victory continued to be reported on in the *Chicago Defender* for much of the week following the completion of the 1997 U.S Masters. As previously stated, the Woods story was not only confined to the sports pages but appeared throughout the paper the week after his Masters triumph. The most curious article found on Woods was about his perceived snub of Jackie Robinson's anniversary tribute. Like the *New Pittsburgh Courier*, the *Chicago Defender* reported on Tiger Woods missing Robinson's tribute. The article headlined "Tiger Takes a Break, Misses Robinson tribute."<sup>34</sup> The writer of the article did not criticize Woods for being disrespectful in not attending Robinson's anniversary tribute but instead defended his absence. The Jackie Robinson anniversary tribute was headed by President Clinton, an avid golfer who phoned Woods after his Masters win to offer his congratulations. The writer of the article stressed that Woods had pulled out of the event because "he needed a break from the limelight," which a White House spokesman had said was "perfectly understandable." It seems that the *Chicago Defender* was not concerned with Woods missing Robinson's tribute per se, but with his snubbing of President Clinton.

Just when Tiger Woods' Masters victory was beginning to fade on the sports pages of the *Chicago Defender* in late April 1997, Fuzzy Zoeller's perceived racist comments about Tiger Woods caused fury among the writers at the *Chicago Defender*. Zoeller made his foolish comments in response to Woods' possible menu selection for the champions dinner. It is customary that that each Masters champion chooses the menu for the champion's dinner that takes place on the Tuesday of Masters week. Zoeller, in

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<sup>34</sup> "Tiger Takes a Break, Misses Robinson Tribute," The *Chicago Defender*, 16 April 1997.

some ill advised comments to say the least, said that Woods “should not serve chicken or collard greens, or whatever the hell it is that they eat.”<sup>35</sup>

Woods was the pride of the black press in 1997, and, therefore, they responded to Zoeller’s comments with open hostility. Zoeller’s remarks were reported on in both the editorial and the sports section of the paper. The writer of the editorial scathed the racist and offensive words. The headline of the editorial read “Racism must be destroyed around the world.”<sup>36</sup> Unsurprisingly, Zoeller’s comments were not seen as a slip of the tongue or as a mistimed joke but as a sign that racism was alive in America. The columnist lambasted Zoeller for using the term “boy” to describe Woods and noted that “because of people like Zoeller, attention is constantly being given to the racial issue and continually being taken away from Woods’ monumental skill at playing and winning the game of golf.”<sup>37</sup> The writer also blamed institutional racism for Woods referring to himself as a “Cablinasian,” and questions whether Woods should need to explain himself at all.<sup>38</sup> By studying this editorial, one of the previous questions posed, as to why the *Chicago Defender* did not mention Tiger Woods racial heritage prior to the Masters, can perhaps be answered. The *Chicago Defender* did not want to turn Woods’ professional debut at the Masters into a black/white issue but instead wanted the focus to be on the breathtaking golf he played. After Woods won the Masters the *Chicago Defender* had little choice but to pursue the race angle, as to ignore the significance of Woods’ win in its larger context would be poor journalism.

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<sup>35</sup> “Zoeller Says Remarks Were Made About Woods in Jest,” The *Chicago Defender*, 23 April 1997.

<sup>36</sup> “Racism Must be Destroyed Around The World,” The *Chicago Defender*, 23 April 1997.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

The outrage at Zoeller's words continued to be reported in the *Chicago Defender* in subsequent issues, as were Woods' Cablinasian remarks. Whereas the *New Pittsburgh Courier* all but called Woods a "race traitor" for implying that he was not one hundred percent black (which of course Woods was not), the *Chicago Defender* was more cautious to write off Woods in such a fashion. Appearing in the news section of the paper, the article that dealt with Woods' Cablinasian comments was headlined "Mixed race box may cut federal funding" and again dealt with Woods' comments in their larger context. The writer, Chinta Strausburg, uses the Woods story to discourage African Americans from "buying into Tiger Woods' mixed race syndrome."<sup>39</sup> Her rationale was that funding for mixed-race groups would be cut following the census that was to take place later in that year. Strausburg argued that "if your group is reduced significantly it reduces the federal governments attention to any problem you may want to be resolved in your race or community. It's a situation where some white in America would like Tiger Woods to be anything but African American."<sup>40</sup>

The argument that the article poses is that blacks should not consider themselves anything other than black, as to class oneself as mixed race could diminish federal funding for minority programs. Essentially, although it took no stance on whether Woods was right to call himself what he did, the *Chicago Defender* told readers not to further alienate themselves by referring to themselves in the way Tiger Woods refers to himself. To settle the issue, Strausburg interviewed State Republican representative, Monique D. Davis, who said "you're better off when you name yourself. When someone else defines you, you have trouble trying to fit yourself into their definition. Maybe that is

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<sup>39</sup> Chinta Staueburg. "Mixed Race Box May Cut Federal Funding," *The Chicago Defender*, 29 April 1997.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

what Tiger Woods is saying that no one can define him, but African Americans have defined ourselves. If your roots are closely tied to African land then you are Black.”<sup>41</sup> So if Tiger Woods’ father is African American, then is the paper arguing that by labeling himself as something other than black is nonsensical? Yet Tiger Woods’ mother is from Thailand, so could he equally not label himself as Thai? Whatever the answer is, Woods’ comments about his race were dealt with in the larger context they represented, which subsequently tackled issues directly relating to the betterment of black people.

Woods’ comments regarding his mixed heritage caused confusion, not only to the writers at the *Chicago Defender* and the *New Pittsburgh Courier*, but to people in academia. The “race question” was once again raised. In her book, *The Color of our Future – Race for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, Farai Chideya used Woods as an example in order to gain some clarity on the subject. Chideya argued that ones skin color does not necessarily mean that the person in question belongs to a specified racial group. For example, Tiger Woods looks black, but he is of mixed racial heritage, the same as many people in the United States. Therefore, it is wrong to try and categorize him as African American when he is as much Thai as black.<sup>42</sup> Subsequently, Chideya argued that America must ready itself for an examination of its identity as “an increasing number of people claim two or more races as their own.”<sup>43</sup> Chideya went on to claim that blackness was too easily accredited to people in the United States as it was convenient to do so. Woods, by rebuking the black generalization that others put on him, highlighted this issue. There will no doubt be further analysis of multiculturalism from academia, as the subject needs clarity.

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Chideya, 38.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid, 55.

In 1998 the paper charted the progress of Tiger Woods from the beginning of the year. Most tournaments that Woods appeared in were covered by the *Chicago Defender*. As Masters week approached the attention of the paper shifted to the anticipation that Woods' defense of his title would bring. Yet, surprisingly, the Masters coverage that week in the *Chicago Defender* not only focused on Tiger Woods and his chance of successfully defending his title, it also focused on the weather and how the U.S. Masters affected the small town of Augusta for one week every year.<sup>44</sup> Yet, as the start of the tournament moved closer the *Chicago Defender* only covered Tiger Woods chances of winning. In the week before and the week of the Masters tournament there were five articles published on the goings on at the Augusta National. Four of them carried headlines with Tiger Woods in the title, while the exception carried Tiger Woods in the sub heading. The five articles that headlined Woods appeared every day of Masters week in the *Chicago Defender*. In chronological order the headlines read "Tiger Takes Over Augusta," "Woods Ready to Master Augusta," "Woods Looking to Repeat History," "Woods Favored to Win," and "O'Meara the True Master at Augusta – Woods Can't Get on Track and Finishes Eighth."<sup>45</sup> Despite Woods being back at Augusta in 1998, the *Chicago Defender* did not mention the color of Woods' skin in any of the aforementioned articles (just like pre Masters in 1997). The only reporting was on his golf. Woods was undoubtedly the protagonist at that year's Masters for the *Chicago Defender*, but despite him not winning, the paper still carried an article about Mark O'Meara, who won the tournament. Had Woods' achievements the previous year had made the game more popular in the Black community?

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<sup>44</sup> "Time Marches On At The Masters," *The Chicago Defender*, 7 April 1998.

<sup>45</sup> "O'Meara The True Master At Augusta – Woods Can't Get On Track And Finishes Eighth," *The Chicago Defender*, 13 April 1998.

In March and April of 1999, there was not quite the furious reporting on Tiger Woods, and subsequently the Masters, as there had been in the previous years two years. There were of course, numerous articles written on Tiger Woods, but as Woods endured a winless stretch in his career, there was not quite the optimism and expectation regarding a possible win for him. Although Woods dominated the Masters coverage again that year, the *Chicago Defender* identified David Duval as the most likely victor at Augusta that year. In the same way as the *New Pittsburgh Courier* did in 1999, the *Defender* tried to set the scene of a showdown between Woods and Duval. Of the five articles published during Masters week in 1998, three of them prophesized of a possible duel between Woods and Duval for the green jacket. As was the case in the pre-Masters coverage in 1997 and 1998, there was no mention of the Augusta National's bigoted past in the *Chicago Defender*. Yet, the impact of Tiger Woods must be recognized, as despite his dip in form, the paper still provided comprehensive coverage of the tournament. Had Tiger Woods not been at the Masters that year it is unlikely the event would have received such attention, as was the case in 1994, 1995, and to a certain extent, 1996.

Breaking its pattern of not covering racial issues before the tournament, the *Chicago Defender* ran several stories on Lee Elder in 2000. It is curious as to why the paper chose 2000 to celebrate an "A Historic Masters Moment"<sup>46</sup> which was the headline on the Wednesday of Masters week, the most plausible reason was that it was twenty-five years since Elder made his debut at Augusta. The story was perhaps printed to demonstrate how far the Augusta National had come over the last twenty-five years, and how things had changed now that Tiger Woods was the dominating force in world golf. The two-part article focused on Elder, who was the first African American to play in the

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<sup>46</sup> "A Historic Masters Moment," The *Chicago Defender*, 5 April 2000.



Masters, and told of Elder's experiences at Augusta. The second part carried an interview with Elder in which he spoke of the pride he took in seeing Woods win in 1997. Despite the Augusta National's past, the article is not condescending, nor are there any undertones of bitterness. It is more of a celebration of Elder's accomplishments, done in much the same way as the Jackie Robinson anniversary article. The article is moving and tenderly written. Elder's pride in Woods is obvious, as he knows he helped Tiger Woods win at Augusta. Elder was so desperate to get to Augusta when it became apparent that Woods was going to win he was stopped for speeding on the interstate. When Elder did make it to Augusta on that famous Sunday afternoon, he "had tears in his eyes as Woods closed out victory, and shared a hug with the twenty one year-old star."<sup>47</sup> The writer ends the moving article by saying that "A man a color in a green jacket. For Elder, there was never a more beautiful sight."<sup>48</sup>

Following the Elder story there was genuine excitement in the *Chicago Defender* that Woods was to win the Masters for a second time in 2000. In an article headlined "Tiger Ready to Tame Augusta" the writer of the story questions whether anyone has the ability to challenge Woods. Tiger Woods had rediscovered the form that had deserted him in 1999 and was about to play the greatest golf ever witnessed. Unfortunately for Woods, his streak did not begin at the Masters, where he could only manage a top ten finish. Despite Woods' failure to win, the paper still carried articles about the victor, Vijay Singh, the next Monday.<sup>49</sup>

In 2001 the final year of this study, Tiger Woods was playing the greatest golf ever seen by the sporting world. Following his disappointing Masters the previous April,

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> "Tiger Ready To Tame Augusta," *The Chicago Defender*, 6 April 2000.

Woods captured the next three major championships, the U.S. Open, British Open, and the USPGA Championship. He also collected over ten regular tour events and won the player of the year award on the PGA Tour. Woods coming into the Masters on such a winning streak excited the *Chicago Defender*. The paper had been following his progress throughout the year, cataloging every event that he won. As Masters week approached, the writers expressed that there was little doubt that Woods would win his second Masters title. The pre-Masters headlines on Woods were plentiful and the expectation that he would win was never greater. In one pre-Masters article headlined, “Tiger Set to Prowl at Augusta” the unknown writer summarized that “when Woods is at the height of his powers, the rest of the worlds greatest players do not seem to have much hope.”<sup>50</sup> The writer’s prediction was fitting as Woods blew away the competition to win his second green jacket. As was the case in 1997, Woods’ win made the front page of the *Chicago Defender*. The headline on the front page of the paper screamed “The Sky’s the Limit for Tiger Woods,” and the subsequent article paid homage to the talents of Woods.<sup>51</sup>

The *Chicago Defender* published numerous articles on the Masters and Tiger Woods following Woods’ second Masters title. The pride the writers had in Woods was overwhelming. Gross wrote that “at the age of twenty five, he’s considered one of the greatest, perhaps the greatest performer, in the history of a game that dates back to the 1500s.”<sup>52</sup> In the editorial section the writer states that for Woods to hold all four major titles at the same time “is one of the greatest historical sports displays of all time, possibly overshadowing legendary achievements by Ali, Ruth, Jordon, McGuire,

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<sup>50</sup> “Tiger Set To Prowl At Augusta,” The *Chicago Defender*, 5 April 2001.

<sup>51</sup> Larry Gross. “The Sky’s the Limit For Tiger Woods,” The *Chicago Defender*, 9 April 2001.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

Nicklous, and others.”<sup>53</sup> Tiger-mania continued in the *Chicago Defender* for a short time after he won the Masters.

Unlike the *New Pittsburgh Courier*, the *Atlanta Voice*, and the *Birmingham Times*, the *Chicago Defender* does show interest, albeit limited interest, in the U.S. Masters prior to the emergence of Tiger Woods. Of course, as previously stated, the *Chicago Defender* does have more space to fill in its sports pages as the newspaper is published more frequently than any of the aforementioned papers. Yet, its reporting on the event is still significant. It demonstrated an interest that the other papers had lacked. That it reported on the Masters is probably because the *Chicago Defender* has the greatest readership of the papers in the specified study and appeals to a greater number of people.

Although Tiger Woods was the main protagonist in much of the later Masters coverage in the *Chicago Defender*, Masters coverage was not only about him. During Woods’ dip in form, the paper wrote almost as much about David Duval as it did about Tiger Woods. Despite Woods’ Masters win in 1997, the paper still reported on other aspects of the tournament in later years. Yes, Tiger Woods was the most important ingredient for the writers at the *Chicago Defender*, but considering that this is a black paper, this should not be surprising.

That the writers tend to largely ignore the racial controversies that Woods brings with him derive from the reluctance to have the color of his skin to overshadow his golfing ability. Nevertheless, the writers at the *Defender* had no choice but to discuss the racial connotations of Woods’ win in 1997. Despite the bigoted past of the Augusta National, Woods’ triumph did not bring with it any sort of vitriolic gloating from the

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<sup>53</sup> “Tiger Woods: The Master Of His Own Domain,” *The Chicago Defender*, 5 April 2001.

writers, just a satisfaction that Woods was able to display his skills to the world. And that is testament to their professionalism.

## CHAPTER 6

### THE *BIRMINGHAM TIMES*

Following the same pattern as the *New Pittsburgh Courier* and the *Atlanta Voice*, the *Birmingham Times* does not cover the U.S. Masters in March and April of 1994. Its sports coverage during March and April that year focused on basketball (the NCAA playoffs), football, and baseball. Michael Jordan made his professional debut for the Chicago White Sox AA team, the Birmingham Barons, in April of that year and the *Birmingham Times* covered his progress extensively. Many articles appeared on the development of the former basketball star's quest to play professional baseball. The articles mostly reported on the staggering interest in the world of sport generated by Jordan's presence in Birmingham. Reggie McDaniel recounts how over "10,000 fans and over 100 media from everywhere were there to witness Jordan's debut."<sup>1</sup> McDaniel went on to recount how Jordan's debut was less than impressive and posed the question, "Is Jordan's presence in baseball causing a disgraceful mockery of America's national pastime?"<sup>2</sup> Whether or not Jordan was disgracing himself by playing baseball instead of basketball, the paper reported on every game of baseball he played during April of 1994.

The *Birmingham Times* did not cover the U.S. Masters in March or April of 1995, which was particularly surprising as 1995 was the year that Tiger Woods made his amateur debut at the Augusta National. That the *Birmingham Times* failed to report on Woods' first appearance at the U.S. Masters is strange, especially as Woods was conquering all before him in amateur golf at that time and was clearly a superstar in the

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<sup>1</sup> Reggie McDaniel, "Jordan Makes Debut, Sports Media Awed," *The Birmingham Times*, 14-20 April 1994.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

making. Instead of golf, the sports covered by the *Birmingham Times* in March and April of 1995 included college basketball (again, specifically the impending NCAA playoffs), high school basketball, the draft picks for the National Football League (NFL), and baseball.<sup>3</sup> Yet, there is no mention of Tiger Woods, the U.S. Masters, or golf in general.

By 1996 it was apparent, at least to the writers of the *New Pittsburgh Courier* and the *Chicago Defender*, that Tiger Woods was going to be a superstar, and they covered both him and his progress accordingly. Like the *Atlanta Voice*, however, the *Birmingham Times* did not cover Woods' second trip to the Augusta National in April 1996. Yet, like all the papers covered in the specified years, the *Birmingham Times* in 1996 carried several stories on the fiftieth anniversary of Jackie Robinson's Major League Baseball debut. Interestingly, the *Birmingham Times* covered the anniversary of Jackie Robinson from the perspective of William Owens, a successful player in the Negro Leagues.

Although Owens was delighted to see Robinson integrate baseball, he also was distressed to see that Robinson effectively ended the career of many promising African American baseball players, as there was no room for average black players in the Major Leagues. Donn Rogosin, author of the *Invisible Men: Life in Baseball's Negro Leagues* explained "The black community wanted to see their players compete against the white players, which left many players of Owens ability without a place to play."<sup>4</sup>

Although the *Birmingham Times* championed Robinson as a racial pioneer, the paper also held him responsible (or at least Owens did) for the demise of the Negro Leagues and the loss of jobs for black baseball players. This article is really a

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<sup>3</sup> Demarcus Miller, "Basketball Interest Null At Area Metro High Schools," *The Birmingham Times*, 27 April 1995.

<sup>4</sup> "50 Years After Robinson's Debut, A Negro-Leaguer Remembers," *The Birmingham Times*, 18 April 1996.

backhanded compliment to Robinson. Instead of a full blown celebration of Robinson's achievements as seen in the *New Pittsburgh Courier*, the *Atlanta Voice*, and the *Chicago Defender*, the *Birmingham Times* covered Robinson's anniversary in a much different fashion. It is difficult to speculate why the paper ran this story in 1996, as in 1997 the writers at the *Birmingham Times*, as we shall see later, were incredibly complimentary towards Robinson and wasted no time in extensively praising his accomplishments.

Along with the Robinson story in 1996, the *Birmingham Times* covered the same sports that it had been covering in the previous years. For example, in 1996 its sports pages were filled with articles on football and the college basketball playoffs, as well as a story on the behavior of Mike Tyson. The Tyson story coincided with his recent release from an Ohio penitentiary and reported that he had been ordered to avoid strip clubs and bars after he was accused of assault during one such visit.<sup>5</sup> As in the other black papers examined in this study, the *Birmingham Times* often covers Tyson and Jordan. The paper is effectively covering a prominent black winner. Even though Tyson had been in prison for the previous six years, he probably was still seen as a symbol of success to the black community, and as such, was newsworthy.

That the U.S. Masters was omitted from the sports pages of the *Birmingham Times* should come as no real surprise. Aside from the appearance of Tiger Woods in 1995 and 1996 at Augusta, which the paper for some reason ignored, why should it be of any concern to the writers or readers of the *Birmingham Times* as to which wealthy white golfer wins the U.S. Masters? The *Birmingham Times* would no doubt have been aware of the racial past of the Augusta National, and if there were a demand for golf coverage, surely it would have covered the sport. The only way that the U.S. Masters would make

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<sup>5</sup> "Tyson Ordered To Avoid Strip Clubs, Bars," *The Birmingham Times*, 25 April 1996.

the sports pages in the *Birmingham Times* would be if an African American actually won it. The mere appearance of Woods at Augusta, even with its racial connotations, seemingly did not merit coverage alone.

By early spring of 1997 the twenty-one year old Tiger Woods had already won four tournaments on the PGA Tour. It was also at this time that he launched his now famous Tiger Woods Golf Foundation. To generate interest in the foundation, in 1997 Woods gave golf clinics at six cities around the United States. Those cities included Dallas, New York, Chicago, Memphis, Miami, and Orlando. The *Chicago Defender*, especially reported that Woods gave a clinic in Chicago in mid summer of that year.<sup>6</sup> Even though Woods did not give a clinic in Birmingham, the paper, nevertheless, was very interested in what Woods was doing for children across America. In fact, Woods was on the front page of the *Birmingham Times* in late March that year because of the work he was doing with his foundation. The sizable front-page article carried a picture of Tiger Woods helping a black child to grip the club correctly, with the headline “Giving A Little Something Back,” the article explained how Woods, with the excitement that his golf was bringing, had decided to give something back to children across America by starting his foundation.<sup>7</sup>

The *Birmingham Times* had not covered golf in March and April of the three previous years, so it is interesting that the first time Woods made the front-page of the paper the article did not focus on a golf tournament. As the article appeared in late

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<sup>6</sup> “Tiger Gives Minority Golfers a Shot,” *The Chicago Defender*, 2 April 1997.

<sup>7</sup> “Giving A Little Something Back,” *The Birmingham Times*, 27 March-3 April 1997.

The Tiger Woods Foundation still exists today, and has grown substantially since its inception in 1997. Along with the Foundation, Tiger Woods also set up the Tiger Woods Learning Center in California. According to Lawrence Londino “the center will be an educational resource to young people of diverse backgrounds, aimed at improving reading, math, and science skills.” See Londino, 111



March of 1997, it could well have represented an attempt by the paper to bring Woods and his accomplishments to the attention of its readers. Although the U.S. Masters is not mentioned in the article, it could be considered part of the U.S. Masters build up as it drew attention to Woods days before he was scheduled to participate in the tournament. Surprisingly, over the next seventeen days, a period during which Tiger Woods won the Masters, the *Birmingham Times* did not have a single article on the events at the Augusta National. Instead, it covered the same sports as it had in the previous years, baseball, basketball, and boxing. As was mentioned previously, Jackie Robinson's fiftieth anniversary was covered extensively by the *Birmingham Times*. The articles were very gracious of Robinson and highlighted the day-to-day struggles that Robinson had to face in order to play his beloved game of baseball. In one article that stood out, Harry Taylor remembered his teammate for his class and courage. Taylor recounted that in some cities across the South Robinson was not allowed to room with his teammates, but highlights that Robinson never complained about this treatment.<sup>8</sup> Taylor said of Robinson, "he took one hell of a beating. You couldn't tell by his actions though, he never bought it up."<sup>9</sup>

The *Birmingham Times* did not try to draw any sort of parallels between Robinson's and Woods' achievements. Despite the large number of articles on Robinson and that Tiger Woods was accomplishing a "racial first" at the Augusta National that week, a comparison was not made. Perhaps, the paper did not see the two as being

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<sup>8</sup> Although Robinson did not initially bemoan his treatment, after several years of racism he did start to complain, and in several cities he was allowed to stay in the same hotel as his teammate, as long as he agreed not to use the swimming pool, loiter in the lobby, or use the dining room. See, Jules Tygiel. *Baseball's Great Experiment – Jackie Robinson and his Legacy*. (New York: Oxford University Press 1997), 312.

<sup>9</sup> "Robinson Teammate Remembers 1947 Rookie with Dodgers," *The Birmingham Times*, 27 March-3 April 1997.

synonymous. After all, the America that Robinson lived in was very different from the America Woods inhabits today.

Although the *Birmingham Times* did not mention Woods or the U.S. Masters once during March and April of 1994, 1995, or 1996, the paper covered Woods' inaugural Masters triumph extensively in April 1997. As with the *New Pittsburgh Courier*, the *Atlanta Voice*, and the *Chicago Defender*, Tiger Woods' Masters win was featured on the front-page of the *Birmingham Times*. However, unlike the three aforementioned papers that praised Woods for his victory, the *Birmingham Times* instead focused on the story of Woods not attending a Jackie Robinson memorial dinner hosted by President Clinton. The front-page headline in the *Birmingham Times* the week following Woods' Masters victory read "No Disrespect Intended," and argued that Woods, by not attending the banquet to honor Robinson, was not being disrespectful to Robinson's legacy as he was drained following his win at Augusta two days previously and needed to rest.<sup>10</sup> In order to defend Woods his management team argued "It's no disrespect by Tiger to Jackie Robinson, who is without question one of Tigers heroes."<sup>11</sup> The article went on to say that Tiger Woods was on a planned vacation at the time of the banquet as he needed some time to recuperate after his Masters triumph.

The "real" answer can be found in this article as to why Tiger Woods' and Jackie Robinson's achievements are not entwined by the paper. The paper reported that President Clinton had said at the banquet that "America owes a debt of gratitude to Jackie Robinson, who unlike Tiger Woods achieved his greatness in a much more hostile racial

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<sup>10</sup> "No Disrespect Intended," *The Birmingham Times*, 17-23 April 1997.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

climate.”<sup>12</sup> Perhaps President Clinton’s words offer a solution as to why Woods’ victory was not celebrated in a ‘racial first’ fashion by the *Birmingham Times*. Although the writers at the paper were no doubt overjoyed with what Woods accomplished, they obviously did not feel that Woods’ and Robinson’s ‘racial firsts’ were of the same magnitude. Which of course they are not, Robinson broke a color barrier in 1947, whereas Woods, although he was the first black winner of the Masters, did not break one. The golfer who did break a color barrier at the Masters was Lee Elder, not Tiger Woods. As such, the *Birmingham Times* did not categorize Woods in the same way as Robinson.

Strangely, the sports pages in the edition proceeding Woods’ Masters victory do not cover Woods or the Masters. Instead, the paper covered its usual sports of baseball, boxing, and football. There was, however, a story in the sports pages that reminded readers that a golf tournament was to start in Birmingham later that year where there would be a golf clinic put on for the amateur golfers in Birmingham.<sup>13</sup> The Masters coverage, and subsequently the reaction to Tiger Woods victory, is located not on the sports pages, but in the accompanying magazine that was released with each edition. Although the reaction to Woods’ victory is plenteous in the *Birmingham Times*, it was not as plentiful as has been seen in the other papers in this study.

The first article on Woods in the magazine did not focus on his golfing achievements but on the potential that he could become a Jordanesc figure in the African American community. What the unknown writer said was that Woods could essentially become as rich as Jordan because of his endorsement deals. The article went on to say

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> “Nicklaus/Flick Golf School Launches ‘Faults and Cures’ Program Series Nationwide in 1997,” *The Birmingham Times*, 17-23 April 1997.

that Woods “will do for golf what Michael Jordan did for basketball.”<sup>14</sup> Despite the article on the potential Woods had to earn money, the *Birmingham Times* switched its attention in later articles to the repercussions of Woods’ win and the pride that the black community took from watching his victory. The next article, “In Promotional Swing, Tiger Woods Shows Why he’s not Just a Golfer” recounted the twenty four-hours that followed his masters triumph. Woods, as part of an endorsement deal he signed, was obligated to open an All-Star Café in Myrtle Beach the Monday after his Masters win, yet instead of canceling, he duly obliged. Obviously Woods’ presence at the opening attracted a vast crowd and huge interest from journalists and television crews. An appreciative crowd that wanted to see their new hero greeted Woods. Donna Mason, a thirty six-year old woman recalled watching Woods win and said “I cried when he hugged his parents, I felt like his mother, I was so proud of him. He’s just a nice young man.”<sup>15</sup>

The comments from Mason are reminiscent of the comments made by the black golfer the *Chicago Defender’s* journalist interviewed following Woods’ Masters win. His win had made members of the black community across the country proud. Woods, in 1997, and to a large extent today, appeals to all generations. The older generation sees him in a paternal light, whereas the younger generation sees him as somebody that they can aspire to be. Woods seemed to greatly appreciate being a role model for the children

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<sup>14</sup> “Woods’ Runaway Masters Golf Win, Boosts Appeal for Advertisers,” *The Birmingham Times*, 27 March-3 April 1997.

<sup>15</sup> In A Promotional Swing, Woods Shows Why He’s Not Just a Golfer,” *The Birmingham Times*, 27 March - 3 April 1997.

and said “they look up to me in a positive light. If I can help them out I’ve done my job.”<sup>16</sup>

Although the *Birmingham Times* had been reporting on Woods’ Masters win in the previous articles, it was perhaps avoiding the issue of the racial history that he had made that Sunday afternoon in Augusta. In the center pages of the magazine that accompanied the *Birmingham Times* every week, there was full tribute to Woods and the African American golfers who made this win possible for him. The center page spread carries the headline of “Tiger Woods Sets Race, Age Landmarks in Masters Win.” Accompanying the article was the picture that was used on the front of the *Birmingham Times* a month beforehand of Woods helping a black child to grip a golf club correctly.<sup>17</sup> As has been documented earlier in this study, upon receiving his green jacket Woods paid tribute to those early African American golfers who were shut out of the Augusta National for so long. Because of his acknowledgment to the black golfing pioneers, Woods gained great support from the black press in general. That he was not so self-absorbed to forget the sacrifices that were made struck a chord with all the papers studied. The *Birmingham Times* was no different. The headline of the article reads “He was the first to get here. Not the first to try. Tiger Woods wanted to be clear about that. The men who preceded him had names like Teddy Rhodes, Charlie Sifford, and Lee Elder. He did not forget them. They had to play anywhere they could find a game. Because of them, he could play anywhere. Even here.”<sup>18</sup> This headline in the *Birmingham Times* leaves the reader in little doubt of the papers feelings towards the

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> In fact every black paper used that picture except the *Atlanta Voice*. Doug Ferguson, “Tiger Woods Sets Race, Age, Landmarks In Masters Win,” *The Birmingham Times*, 27 March-3 April 1997.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

Augusta National. It also answers exactly why the paper did not cover the event in the three previous years. As was speculated previously, the *Birmingham Times* was well aware of the racist past of the Augusta National. The exclusion from the event of Teddy Rhodes and Charlie Sifford had not been forgotten, or forgiven, hence the snubbing of the event.

This moving article not only commends Woods for his achievements and foresight to mention those African American golfers who were barred from the club, but it also includes interviews with those black golfers who never made it to Augusta. Of all the articles contained in the papers examined in this study, this one is perhaps the most humbling. Woods was quoted as saying, “I was thinking about them last night and what they’ve done for me and the game of golf. I was coming up 18 and I said a prayer; I said thanks to those guys, because these guys are the ones that did it.”<sup>19</sup> With these words, Woods gained support from the *Birmingham Times* and the black press in general. The author of the article, Doug Ferguson, was also a contributor to the *New Pittsburgh Courier*. In reference to the breathtaking golf Woods played, Ferguson argued that “Woods took a giant step towards unifying a sport once regarded as the most divided. Especially since he won his first major in a place whose very name, Augusta National, once served as a code words for exclusivity and whose Spartan clubhouse was once home to the owner of an indigo plantation.”<sup>20</sup> Ferguson’s went on to record Charlie Sifford’s and Lee Elder’s experiences on the Negro Tour. Ferguson offered several clues to the *Birmingham Times*’ ambivalence toward the Masters. In addition to the racial reasons discussed previously, Ferguson also stresses the exclusivity of the Augusta National and

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

the problems that African Americans have relating to golf, because it is essentially an elitist sport.<sup>21</sup>

Picking up from where the Ferguson article ended the previous week, a front-page story in the next edition of the *Birmingham Times* read “Tiger Woods: A Sign of Hope.” Although the article has a slightly different headline, it was exactly same article that appeared in the editorial section of the *New Pittsburgh Courier* following Woods’ Masters victory.<sup>22</sup> The article discussed Tiger Woods’ “racial first,” as well as the elitist element to the game that all too often excludes African Americans from participating. The writer of the story, Bernice Powell Jackson, stressed the difference between Robinson and Woods’ “racial first” and lamented the problems that African Americans face while trying to break into golf. Jackson, stated, as she did in the *New Pittsburgh Courier*, that, “Golf remains a game of the well-to-do and of European Americans for the most part. Business people of color, aware that deals are made on the golf course, have long lamented their lack of access to private clubs.”<sup>23</sup>

The Jackson article also discussed Tiger Woods’ racial and ethnic heritage, which until then had not been featured in the *Birmingham Times*’ coverage of Woods. The racial and ethnic heritage of Woods throughout this study has been a topic that has been debated and analyzed by the writers at the four black newspapers studied. As Woods stated after his Masters win that he was not African American, some papers, like the *New Pittsburgh Courier* thought he was shunning his heritage. The *Chicago Defender* instead warned its readers not to follow Woods’ example, as it could mean a cut in federal

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Bernice Powell Jackson. “Victory At Augusta A Sign of Hope,” *The New Pittsburgh Courier*, 23 April 1997.

<sup>23</sup> Bernice Powell Jackson. “Tiger Woods: A Sign of Hope,” *The Birmingham Times*, 27 March-3 April 1997.

funding for African Americans. The *Birmingham Times* simply reported on the story, but offers no analysis of its own. For example, in the story headlined “Woods Doesn’t Want to be Called an African American” the writer simply stated that Woods chose to be called a “cablinasian” because of his mother’s Thai heritage and his father’s African heritage. The paper did not criticize Woods for his stance, instead accepted his reasoning. In its larger context, more than likely it really does not matter if the *Birmingham Times* did not see Woods as “wholly” African American because the paper still included him as “black.”<sup>24</sup>

In the same issue there is a report on the comments that Fuzzy Zoeller made regarding Woods’ food choice for the champions dinner. Noted previously, Zoeller asked Woods not to serve fried chicken or collard greens at the champions dinner.<sup>25</sup> As was the case with the previous article on the ethnicity of Tiger Woods, the writers at the *Birmingham Times* simply reported on the story, but did not offer any sort of criticism.<sup>26</sup> This was unusual as in the three other papers Zoeller’s comments had cause widespread condemnation of racism and a certain degree of sympathy for Tiger Woods. Why the paper chose not to comment on Zoeller’s words is odd and contrary to the pattern of reporting in the *New Pittsburgh Courier*, the *Atlanta Voice*, and the *Chicago Defender*. Perhaps the *Birmingham Times* writers were simply content to let their readers draw their own conclusions from the article and felt no need to scrutinize what Zoeller had said, as his racist comments surely needed no analysis. The Zoeller story was the last Masters related story in the *Birmingham Times* that year.

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<sup>24</sup> “Woods Doesn’t Want To Be Called An African American,” *The Birmingham Times*, 24 April, 1 May 1997.

<sup>25</sup> “Zoeller Says Remarks Made About Woods Were In Jest,” *The Chicago Defender*, 23 April 1997.

<sup>26</sup> Harry Blauvelt. “Zoeller Say His Comments Were Made In Jest,” *The Birmingham Times*, 24 April – 1 May 1997.



The *Birmingham Times*' coverage of the Masters in 1998 proved similar to the coverage of the other papers studied, as in 1998 it covered Tiger Woods' defense of the Masters, albeit briefly. There were three articles on the Masters in the *Birmingham Times* in 1998, and all of them focused on Woods' defense of his title. For a paper that previously did not cover the Masters, with the exception of 1997, these articles represent a distinct shift in interest. That the paper only covered Tiger Woods demonstrates that it was still not interested in the U.S. Masters per se but only in Woods at the Masters. The first article, carried the headline "Woods Set to Defend Masters Title," and reported on Woods becoming the top attraction at Augusta. Given the racial past of the Augusta National, there was not a sense of irony in the writing of journalist Marcus Miller, but simply admiration. The article included interviews with former champions who recounted how they felt when they returned to Augusta to defend their titles.<sup>27</sup> The second article, written by Doug Ferguson and headlined "Tiger Woods: I'm Only Human," was essentially the same story he wrote for the *New Pittsburgh Courier* at the same time, which headlined "Woods Less Masterful This Year." Again, the article offered no substantial analysis of the tournament itself, and only made a passing reference to the winner that year, Mark O'Meara (and that was only because Woods had to present him with the green jacket).<sup>28</sup>

The *Birmingham Times* focused only on Woods that week and offered no commentary on any other player at Augusta. Had Woods not presented the green jacket to O'Meara, it would have been unlikely that the winner of the tournament would have even been noted. The Masters seems not to be a golf tournament to the writers at the

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<sup>27</sup> Marcus Miller, "Woods Set to Defend Masters Title," *The Birmingham Times*, 9 April – 15 April 1998.

<sup>28</sup> Doug Ferguson, "Tiger Woods: I'm Only Human," *The Birmingham Times*, 16 April 1998.

Birmingham Times, but instead an annual report of the fortunes of Tiger Woods. Yet, its pre-tournament coverage in 1998 was slight, as was its post tournament coverage. In each of the other three papers there was a long build up and a real sense of anticipation at the prospect of having Woods defend his title. Had Woods not been defending his title that year, the *Birmingham Times*' reporting would have been even less substantial than it actually was.

By 1999 it would be fair to say that the *Birmingham Times* had lost much of its interest in Woods and his Masters participation. Although Woods was not playing his best golf that year, he was still the top-ranked player in the world and was the favorite to win the tournament. Nevertheless, the *Birmingham Times* only carried one article on Woods and his chance to win the Masters. In response to Woods' stunning victory by twelve-strokes in 1997, Augusta National chairman, Hootie Johnson, sanctioned changes to the course in order to make it longer. This was not a popular step with the players, as the changes favored the long ball hitters. Much had been said in the press about the "Tiger proofing"<sup>29</sup> that occurred at the Augusta National that year. In some quarters it was seen as a way to stop Woods from winning, but in reality this probably was not true as Woods was the longest hitter on tour, and any changes to make the course longer favored him. Hootie Johnson claimed that the changes were simply made to keep up with the new technology that had come into the game.<sup>30</sup> It is more likely that Johnson sanctioned the changes not to stop Woods from winning, but to stop players from shooting such low scores at the Augusta National, a course that prides itself on its difficulty. The unknown writer is rather ambivalent about Johnson's actions and motives

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<sup>29</sup> "Will Changes at Golf Course Challenge Tiger Wood?," *The Birmingham Times*, 15 April 1999.

<sup>30</sup> Shipnuck, 57.

and simply reported on the displeasure of some of the players who do not hit the ball as far as Woods.<sup>31</sup>

That was the only article that appeared on Woods or the Masters in 1999. It is safe to say, considering the evidence, that the Masters, even with Tiger Woods in the field, was still not a high priority to the *Birmingham Times*. Despite Woods' victory in 1997, the *Birmingham Times* covered the Masters less and less with each passing year since his first victory. Perhaps the only time the Masters is worthy of substantial coverage in the *Birmingham Times* is when Woods actually wins.

In general the *Birmingham Times*' golf coverage seemed rather lacking in depth, even in 1997 when Woods won the Masters. The paper was pleased that he won, but compared to the *New Pittsburgh Courier*, *Atlanta Voice*, and *Chicago Defender* it did not offer much analysis or reporting. One would have thought that Woods' historic Masters win in 1997 would have had some column space devoted to it by the paper and not just a few articles in its accompanying magazine. The lack of coverage in the actual paper was probably a reflection of its larger ambivalence towards golf. As seen previously, several writers for the *Birmingham Times* drew attention to the exclusivity and elitism that exists in golf. Bernice Jackson argued that "Golf remains a game of the well-to-do and of European Americans." Ferguson, in each article he wrote for the paper stressed the exclusivity of golf and the lack of access that black people had to it. He contended that the "Augusta National, once served as a code words for exclusivity and whose simple clubhouse was once home to the owner of an indigo plantation." In the articles that accompanied the aforementioned extracts, the writers lambasted the game for its

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<sup>31</sup> "Will Changes at Golf Course Challenge Tiger Woods?," *The Birmingham Times*, 15 April 1999.

unavailability for African Americans and critiqued the Augusta National for its past racial policies.

Perhaps the writers at the *Birmingham Times*, at least in part, hold the Augusta National responsible for the exclusivity that exists in golf today in America. The Augusta National, despite having one or two black members, who were admitted only after the Shoal Creek incident, is still a place where black people are more likely to be employed at as opposed to being members. The way the Augusta National was managed no doubt influenced club policies at other private clubs across the nation. Being the most prestigious golf club in the United States, other clubs would have aspired to be like the Augusta National in order to convey that image of exclusivity to their members and communities. Had the Augusta National not had such a discriminatory past then perhaps other clubs would not have followed suit. Ferguson claimed that golf was the most “divided sport,” perhaps he is right. The Augusta National’s past policies on race and current policies on gender do not offer any sort of hope that things are likely to change. Golf, it seems, at least in the eyes of the *Birmingham Times* and their writers, is not a game that blacks are encouraged to play. It is an exclusive game that belongs to the wealthy white elite.

Jackie Robinson’s “racial first” was constantly referred to by the *Birmingham Times* in the analysis of the specified years, but the paper at no time tried to link Woods and Robinson together, the question is why? President Clinton’s said at the Jackie Robinson tribute dinner, “America owes a debt of gratitude to Jackie Robinson, who unlike Tiger Woods achieved his greatness in a much more hostile racial climate.” Clinton’s words offer an answer as to why the *Birmingham Times* did not try to

categorize Robinson's and Woods' achievements as being the same. The paper obviously thought that Robinson had achieved a true "racial first" in 1946 as the game of baseball at that time was seemingly impregnable to anyone of color, whereas Woods in 1997 did not truly achieve a "racial first" because golf was not segregated. Robinson was a racial pioneer, Woods was not. The pioneers in golf, as was stated by the *Birmingham Times* previously were Lee Elder and Charlie Sifford. Therefore, Tiger Woods did not achieve the same "racial first" as Robinson did fifty years previously and subsequently could not be put into the same category.

Baseball was described by George Will in Ken Burns' documentary series as being a "democratic" sport.<sup>32</sup> Therefore, Robinson's participation in 1946 proved that America was truly becoming a democratic nation. It would be foolish to say that golf is a democratic sport, even today, as participation in it requires a certain social status. If sport is a microcosm of society, then society's relationship with baseball and golf make interesting analysis. Baseball, being the "national pastime," reflected the changes that were occurring in the United States at the time Robinson joined the Major Leagues. Although in 1946 the nation was still operating under the "separate but equal" policy, Robinson's participation in baseball contributed, at least in part, to changing that rhetoric. Today baseball remains a "democratic" game that is open to all. The same still can not be said for golf. Golf in its very nature is exclusionary. Unlike baseball, which requires only a bat and ball, golf requires expensive equipment and a course on which to play, which discounts many people. It is not a democratic sport and perhaps never will be. If sport is a microcosm of society then the place golf has in it reflects a larger problem.

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<sup>32</sup> K. Burns., *Baseball. Third Innings. 1910-1920, the Faith of Fifty Million People* (Alexandra: PBS Adult Learning Satellite Service, 1994).

Golf can not shed its elitist, wealthy, and privileged stereotype. It is not a game open to many African American, but a game played predominantly by middle class whites in the United States. For that reason, it seems that the *Birmingham Times* could not muster much enthusiasm in its coverage as it excluded many of its readers.

Although Woods won at the Augusta National, the epicenter of discrimination and exclusion, he was still playing a sport that the majority blacks are unable to participate in. The *Birmingham Times* had little choice but to report on Woods' win, seeing as Woods was black. The paper was proud of him, which was reflected in its coverage, but the paper could not be too enthusiastic about his achievements as golf reflects a facet of American society that generally African American are excluded from. Golf is an elitist white man's game, and perhaps always will be. The *Birmingham Times* did not and probably still does not regard Woods a "racial pioneer" because he is not one, nor do they probably think that Woods' participation in golf will make it more available to African Americans. The *Birmingham Times* probably did not regard Woods as the first of many African American Masters winners but simply an anomaly who on his own can do little to change golf from an elitist white man's game to a truly democratic game.

## CHAPTER 7

### CONCLUSION

At the inception of this project I expected to see great variation in the way the Masters was covered by the *New Pittsburgh Courier*, the *Atlanta Voice*, the *Chicago Defender*, and the *Birmingham Times*. Instead, the aforementioned papers covered the Masters in much the same way. For example, excluding the *Chicago Defender*, who ran single articles on the Masters in 1994, 1995, and 1996, none of the other paper's in this study covered the Masters tournament during that time. Although the papers did not cover the Masters tournament per se, all covered Tiger Woods' amateur participation at the Masters. The lack of interest in the Masters from the black papers preceding Woods' debut was surprising, given that the Masters is one of the jewels in the American sporting calendar. Pre 1997 the four newspapers only covered Tiger Woods' participation at the Masters, not the Masters itself. None of the papers published reports on the winner of the tournament or anything else related to the tournament. Although the lack of Masters coverage was surprising, it can perhaps be understood given the past of the Augusta National and that this was a study of black newspapers. Why would a black newspaper cover an event in which black participation was minimal? A black newspaper reflects the lives of black people. The white winner of an elitist golf tournament would have been of no concern to the papers, which was reflected in their coverage.

Without exception the four papers covered Woods' 1997 Masters victory comprehensively which signified a shift in their coverage. For example, although all the papers except the *Birmingham Times* covered Woods amateur participation at Augusta, it was still only minimal reporting. Yet, when Woods won the Masters the papers carried

many stories on him. This was because Woods was black, or at least black looking, if not 100% African American. All the newspapers wanted to embrace him because he became a symbol of black progressiveness and triumph.

Coincidentally, Woods' 1997 Masters victory coincided with Jackie Robinson's Major League Baseball debut fifty years previously. This caused the writers at the four papers to speculate on the similarities and differences between Woods' Masters win and Robinson participation in a previously segregated baseball. The writers at all the papers grappled with the ideology of whether Woods' and Robinson's achievements were the same. In each case the writers at the four papers came to the conclusion that although both Woods and Robinson had achieved "racial firsts," Robinson's "racial first" was very different from Woods'. The four papers concluded that although Woods had achieved a "racial first" in terms of being the first black winner of the Masters, he was not a racial pioneer. Robinson was a true racial pioneer as he had essentially desegregated a sport. The true pioneers of African American golf were Charlie Sifford and Lee Elder, not Tiger Woods.

The four papers reported on the same stories regarding the Masters, albeit in different ways. For example, each paper in this study covered Woods' comments he made about wanting to be called a Cablinasian and not an African American. The *New Pittsburgh Courier* was the most critical of Woods' words. The writers argued that Woods was purposefully shunning his African American heritage, which he was not. Each paper also printed the same quotes that Woods gave after his 1997 victory and each paper was critical of Fuzzy Zoeller after his ill-advised quip about Woods' menu choice for the champions dinner.



The Tiger Woods and Masters coverage in the *New Pittsburgh Courier*, the *Atlanta Voice*, the *Chicago Defender*, and the *Birmingham Times* all faded in the years after Woods' win. This could have been because Woods was not winning as often as he had been or it could have been that the papers generally lost interest in golf. In each case it became apparent that for Woods to be reported on substantially in the papers he needed to win the Masters. Despite Woods victory in 1997 none of the four papers had any interest in any other golfer at the Augusta National. The post-tournament articles, such as they were, only reported on Tiger Woods' participation. In most cases the articles did not even include the name of the golfer who had won the tournament. The Masters, to all of the four papers was Tiger Woods.

Masters coverage was more plentiful in the *New Pittsburgh Courier* and the *Chicago Defender* than it was in the *Atlanta Voice* and the *Birmingham Times*. This could be because the two Northern papers had more space to fill as they there were published more often than the two Southern papers. Or it could be because the Southern papers were generally less interested in golf. I had expected there to be a distinct difference in the Masters coverage depending whether they were Northern or Southern papers. Yet, actually it was found that several journalists were publishing the same stories for both Northern and Southern newspapers. For example, Bernice Powell Jackson and Doug Ferguson had the same articles in the *New Pittsburgh Courier* and the *Birmingham Times*, albeit under a different headline. Obviously, there was no discrepancy between Northern and Southern reporting in this instance.

Despite the substantial coverage of Woods' Masters victory in 1997 by the four papers, it did not seem to inspire a tremendous amount of coverage over the next three

years. The Woods story was followed up in 1998 by all of the papers, but by 1999 and 2000, the papers were not giving much attention to Woods at the Augusta National. Woods, even in 1997, was quickly replaced on the sports pages by stories that related more to African Americans. For example, all of the papers examined in this study relied heavily on local sports in order to fill their sports pages. The local sports were predominantly boxing, basketball, and football. The aforementioned sports all have a high number of African Americans participants and were of interest to the papers. Golf, despite what Tiger Woods did at the Augusta National in 1997, could never be as popular as football, baseball, and boxing to the black press. It is not a game that is welcoming to minority groups, nor is it a game that is inexpensive. Despite being proud of Woods, the four papers were still aware that golf was a sport that excluded many of its readers.

Tiger Woods winning at the Augusta National, the very bastion of exclusivity and social segregation, did not receive the coverage that I thought it might. I was expecting the writers at the four papers to be far more vitriolic and condemnatory towards the golfing establishment. That they were not suggests that the papers either did not care about the Masters that much, despite the emergence of Woods, or that they were resigned to the fact that golf was a game for middle class whites and that Woods achievements would not change golf. Perhaps the papers were right. Woods' win in 1997 brought the lack of African American participation in golf to the forefront for a few weeks but it did not really change the image of the sport. It is almost ten years to the day since Tiger Woods won the Masters at the Augusta National, yet there is no sign of any other African Americans emerging on the PGA Tour. Golf today is still the same elitist and exclusive sport it was before Woods won. His victory at the Masters, in the eyes of the four papers,

was a sign of black triumph and progress, but perhaps they also know that Tiger Woods is probably an anomaly.

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