

Return of the Roar

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“Tiger Woods will never be back” -Golf.com (2018)

In the not so distant past, most people believed that Tiger Woods might not ever play high-level competitive golf ever again, much less at a winning level. In fact, at the 2017 Masters Champion’s Dinner, he even stated himself that he was uncertain on if he’d ever be able to return to the game he dominated for so long. Flipping the script, today marks the long awaited conclusion of the greatest comeback in the history of golf. Collecting his first Major Championship since 2008, Tiger has made history once again with his victory at Augusta National in the 2019 Masters Tournament. Leaving all doubts behind, Eldrick ‘Tiger’ Woods has cemented himself as the Greatest Golfer of All-Time.

Just under two years ago, Tiger Woods was found unconscious with a mixture of five drugs in his system and was arrested with a DUI charge in Florida. Undergoing eight back procedures including a spinal fusion surgery, Woods was unable to even swing a club as recently as September of 2017. Finding himself at the rock bottom of a legendary legacy, Tiger had a long and challenging road back to tournament golf to say the least. That being said, if anyone was ever made for this journey, Tiger is the one.

Rising to the occasion as seen time and time again in his illustrious career, he endured a strenuous and unlikely rehab process throughout the course of several months in order to return to action on Tour in 2018. Kicking off his comeback season, Tiger returned to a familiar course at Torrey Pines, where he had won the Farmers Insurance Open seven times throughout his career. Although he posted a relatively boring string of scores (72-71-70-72), his finish at the event held a greater significance than the place he finished in. For the first time since 2015, Tiger proved he could still complete four consecutive rounds of golf on the highest stage.

Continuing on his unprecedented comeback trail, Tiger made major strides in the Florida swing of the PGA Tour tournaments trail, playing his best golf in years at the Valspar Championship and Arnold Palmer Invitational at Bay Hill. In this impressive stretch, he finished T2 and T5 respectively, and found some magic that stirred Sunday roars that hadn't come out in such a long time. The next handful of events in his lengthy 2018 schedule held less excitement than his early season successes yet served as developmental steps and proof of stability in his health.

Fast forwarding to July of 2018 at the Open Championship, Tiger catapulted up the leaderboard from a slow start on Thursday and Friday with a third round 66 in tough conditions. Going into Sunday 4 shots behind the leaders, Woods defied all odds and found himself with a Final Round lead on the Back Nine of a Major Championship. Though he wasn't able to ward off the astounding display of putting by Francesco Molinari, Tiger once again took another progressive step towards his climb back to the top. With a T6 finish at Carnoustie, Tiger Woods proved to the world of golf he still had the game to compete for a Major after all these years.

His journey didn't stop here however, as Tiger entered the final and most exciting leg of his 2018 campaign. A magnificent week of iron play and some Sunday drama earned him a solo 2nd finish at the PGA Championship. Carrying the momentum into the Fed Ex Cup Playoffs, Tiger progressively played better as each round went by, managing to stay inside the Top 30 and earn a trip to East Lake for the Tour Championship. After carding a brilliant 65 in his first round, he never looked back holding a 3-shot lead entering the final round. As seen all too many times, the windy conditions weren't enough to hinder Tiger's laser focus, and he strategically plotted his way around the course to win the last tournament of the 2018 season. Five years beyond his last tour victory, Tiger Woods found himself in the winner's circle once again.

The story doesn't end here however. Acknowledging the scope of his accomplishment, he held true to his personal expectations that he wouldn't truly be 'back' until he won another Major. A full offseason of restoring strength and momentum injected the once farfetched notion of Tiger winning Major No. 15 into the realm of possibility of every competitor and fan who follows the game. With his first opportunity to accomplish this feat at Augusta National, he certainly made the most of the situation he found himself in.

Entering the week as one of the favorites, some experts shockingly held doubts on Tiger's ability to card a low enough score to hang with the young guns. Seeking to prove them wrong, Tiger stuck to his methodical and patient approach, conservatively maneuvering his way around the course he knows so well. In his 21st appearance at the Masters, he once again found

himself in the hunt after playing the first two days at -6. Kicking it in to high gear on Saturday, Woods carded his lowest round of the week with a 5-under 67 and made his way into the last grouping on Sunday 2 shots behind the leader Francesco Molinari.

Making the turn still trailing by one, Tiger remained calm and played within himself as always. After Molinari's disaster at Ray's Creek, the leaderboard suddenly bunched up tight with six players all sharing the lead at one point. Heading into his final three holes, Tiger knew he needed another one of his signature moments in order to steal one more birdie to pull ahead of the field for good. In typical fashion, he saved his best iron shot of the week for crunch time and almost made an ace at Hole 16, where his magical chip in came in the final round of his 2005 win. Cruising to the finish, Tiger would go on to tap in on 18 and seal the deal to cap off the story book ending everyone had been waiting for.

Contrary to the past, Tiger seemed to be less machine and more human, as he displayed a presence of joy and ease throughout the entirety of tournament play, even interacting with the fans and giving high-fives in stressful moments. Some of his fellow competitors such as Rickie Fowler and Brooks Koepka have noted a change in his on course demeanor since his comeback, stating he is more engaging with his playing partners whereas he used to not even look them in the eyes in the past. This paradigm shift is representative of a new era of gratitude for his opportunity to be back on the course after his health limited him for so long. In his climb from rock bottom just a couple of years ago, he found some inner peace and not only reinvented his golf game but became a better father and person in the process.

As the crowd let out its final roar on 18 after Tiger clinched the Green Jacket, he returned with one of his own, signifying the completion of his climb back to the top. While walking off the back of the green, he was seen hugging his son Charlie in a heart-warming embrace, just as he did with his father Earl at the end of his 1st Masters win in 1997. In that moment, all eyes were on the world of golf, and the Game's Greatest Champion completed the Greatest Comeback in the History of Sports.