

Roots in Ripon

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Chuck Roots

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Jordan Spieth: A Class Act

Admittedly, I am an inveterate golfer. And this past weekend was the holy grail of golf which is the British Open (also known as the Open Championship, or simply as, The Open), held this year at Royal Birkdale in England. This tournament is held each year at one of several golf courses within the British Isles. The most recognized, Saint Andrews in Scotland, is known as the "Home of Golf."

This four-day event is the desire of all professional golfers. But only those who have earned enough points, or have won certain tournaments are then invited to play at the Open. The very best golfers fly in from all over the world, dreaming of winning this coveted prize. To be the last man standing at the end of the tournament establishes the winner into golf immortality. Your name will be engraved on the claret jug alongside of past champions, such as, Bobby Jones, Arnold Palmer, Jack Nicklaus, Tom Watson, Tiger Woods, and now Jordan Spieth, the 2017 winner.

Spieth made a huge splash in the world of professional golf two years ago when he won two of the four major championships (The Masters, and the U.S. Open) at age twenty-one. His victory on Sunday at Royal Birkdale makes him the youngest American golfer to hoist the silver claret jug. And he's only twenty-three!

For a professional golfer to win even one of the annual four major tournaments (The Masters, the U.S. Open, the British Open, and the PGA) during their career puts them into a class of golfers that is practically deified. For a player to win multiple major tournaments means this player has gained a status unlike most any other in sport. For instance, the aforementioned Jack Nicklaus, arguably the greatest golfer of all time (the acronym G.O.A.T. is frequently bestowed on such an individual) won 18 major championships during his career. Only Tiger Woods has come anywhere near Jack's achievement, having won 14 majors.

The skills necessary to play at the professional level apparently deteriorate during a player's 30s, because only a handful of players have managed to win a major after turning 40. Jack won his last major at age 46. But then again, Jack is a god in the world of golf. Tiger is 41.

Back to Jordan Spieth. I have enjoyed watching this young man play for several reasons. He is much more like the average guy. He doesn't crush his drives, launching his tee shots ridiculous distances down the fairway. He has a phenomenal "short game," meaning his use of his wedges, and particularly his putter, have

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grown almost to legendary status. But it's his humble attitude that I appreciate the most about him.

Jordan took the lead at the Open on the first day, and played great golf for three days, holding the lead into Sunday. Well, because the tournament is in England, there's a bit of a time difference. So, the first players out on the final day were teeing off at 4:30 Sunday morning here on the west coast. I crawled out of bed about 4:45, made myself a cup of coffee and settled in for a few hours of enjoyment. Since it was Sunday, and I help lead singing in our worship services at church, I still had to shower and shave in time to make our 8:30 service. Jordan was in the final pairing with Matt Kuchar. When I left for church, these two were battling it out. They were almost at the turn (meaning they had finished the first nine holes and were about to play the second nine) when I walked out the door. Now, normally I will help lead in singing, and then sit in the pew with my wife to listen to the pastor deliver his sermon. Then it's off for coffee and donuts in the fellowship hall, followed by our adult Sunday school class. Then I help with the singing again in the 11:00 service.

Well, the way things were going with the tournament, I knew I'd miss the conclusion (yes, I was recording it!) if I attended things the way I normally did. So instead, I helped in singing in the first service, then left for home to watch the remainder of the tournament, which ended at 10:45. I then drove back to church to lead in singing for the second service and stayed to hear the sermon. Boy, am I glad I changed things up for this!

As it turned out, Jordan was having all sorts of difficulties with his game on the final day. Jordan hit the most horrific tee shot on the 13th hole. When they found his ball, it was not even playable, which meant he'd have to take a penalty stroke. He managed to minimize the damage, dropping only one stroke to Matt, putting Jordan one shot out of the lead for the first time after 67 holes. Only five holes remained, and Jordan's game was going south!

As the announcers rightly stated, Jordan seemed to "throw a switch". On the 14th tee, a par 3 hole, he hit his tee shot, nearly getting a hole-in-one. He settled for a birdie, bringing him even with Matt. On the 15th hole, a par 5, Jordan landed his second shot on the green and made the 48-foot putt for an eagle. On the 16th hole, a par 4, he birdied this as well, and also a birdie on the 17th, par 4. Going into the 18th and final hole, Jordan had a two-shot lead over Matt. He parred the hole and was declared the "Golf Champion of the Year".

For years to come, the golf world will be talking about the incredible finish Jordan had to win the Open. But, what makes this young man so enjoyable, is that Jordan is a class act. His comments after receiving the claret jug were not about himself at all. Instead, he thanked his caddie, Matt Kuchar, the fans, the groundskeepers, the more than fifteen hundred volunteers, and the officials. That's class!