

Tiger Woods' golf swing breaking down age and race barriers

While Tiger Woods' historic victory at the Masters in Augusta, Ga. last weekend may well be half a continent and a whole social order removed from the reality that is our town, there are some who would suggest the ripples will be felt even here.

First there is the obvious observation that the meteoric success of this 21-year-old whiz kid will attract more young people onto area golf courses. But more important from a social perspective is that the emergence of Woods, who is of black and Thai ori-

gin, may well open the fairways to members of minority groups who have felt reluctant to venture out in the past.

The bottom line, according to one area golf pro I spoke with this week, is that golf courses everywhere are going to find themselves frequented by more new players with a minority status based on either age or race. This can only be a good thing in that golf is a great form of recreation that combines exercise with relaxation and exposure to the wonders of nature in an age when stress-related illnesses are taking their toll.

While cost has always been a factor contributing to golf being a game for the elite, that is changing now as nationally acknowledged golf gurus like Stouffville's Ted Maude push for more and more public courses. Fewer people can afford to lay out \$5,000 or \$10,000 for golf club memberships these days, leading more and more golfers to pay-as-you-play facilities.

According to Darren Stalteri of the nearby Mill Run Golf Course in Siloam, cities in Europe and Australia are putting aside two or three acres for small, inexpensive pitch and putt golfing mini-courses to open up the game for people of all means. He believes Woods' big victory in Augusta will only serve to encourage North American urban centres to follow suite in an attempt to provide well rounded recreational programs for all their citizens.

Hopefully, another aspect of Woods' astounding achievement will be to instill in people of all ages, genders, social strata, and races that just because something has never been done before

is no reason not to chase after your dreams. An area pro summed it up when he told me that as much as he preferred to leave the racial aspect out of the Woods story, it would in fact serve as a stronger inspiration than the half million dollars the young golfer won at the Masters in terms of spurring him on to achieve even more greatness in the future.

Woods defied all odds in a game known for its old boys tradition. He now gets to carry the torch for people everywhere who have been denied access in sport, the job market or anywhere else due to the fact they don't fit traditional stereotypes. In an age when pro sport has become synonymous with big bucks, Tiger Woods has come along representing the higher plane, the nobler purpose and the notion that there isn't a barrier out there that can't be knocked down.

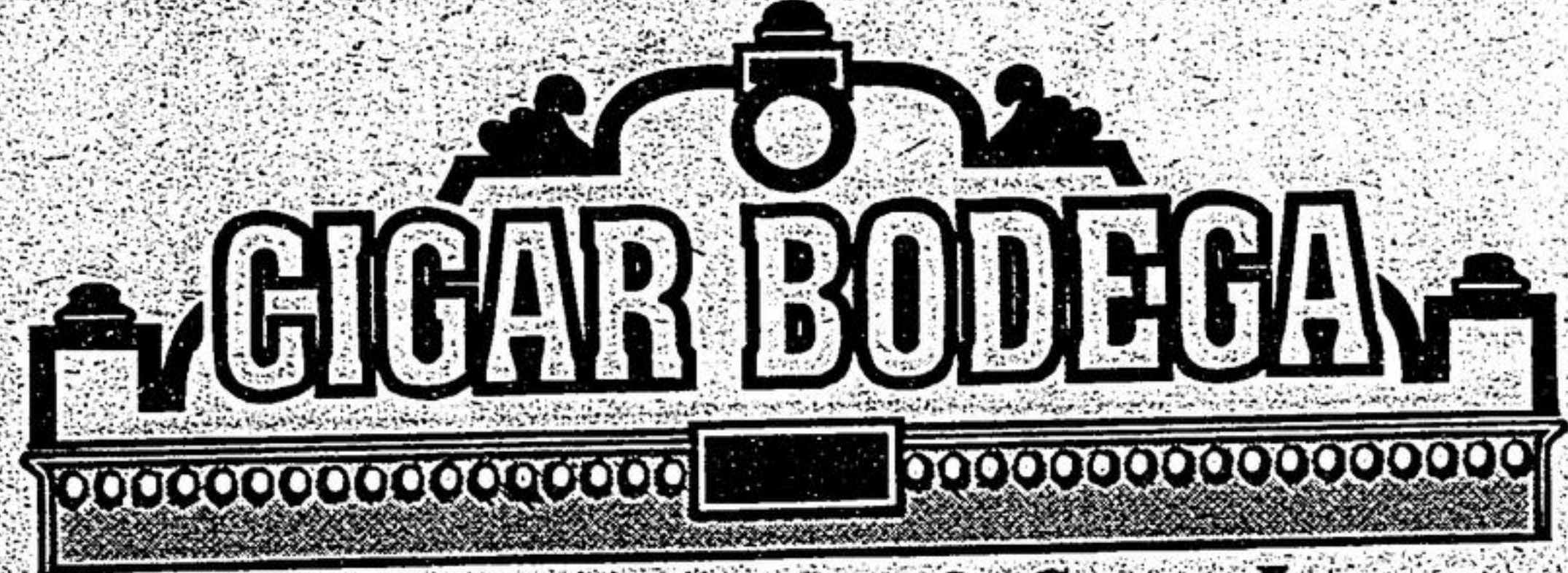
Now if I could only find a way to use the inspiration provided by Woods' Masters victory to elevate my own terminally hopeless golf game to a level of near acceptability. That would surely be a story to rank right up there with those laser-like 320 yard drives the Tiger uses to put him in position for a birdie or better every time he takes to the golf course.



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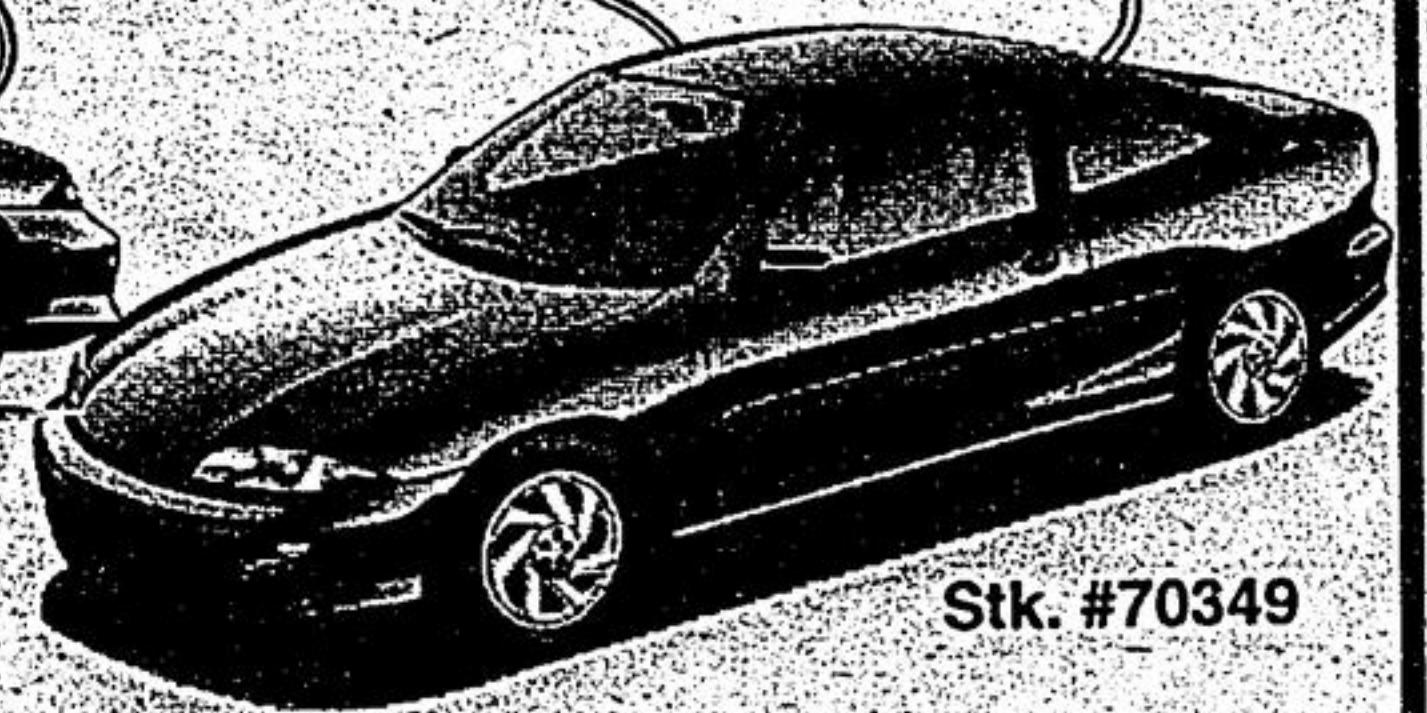
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