

Tiger V Nicklaus

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Who is the greatest of all time? And should we even be debating this given the very different eras each played in? Well for many, the fact that Jack has won 18 Majors to Tigers 15 ends the discussion right there, and given Golfs majors are the pinnacles of the sport, it may be a valid argument. After all, every other individual professional sport rates a player's career based on grand slams. Tennis is a great example. If Roger Federer had won twice as many ATP titles than Raffa Nadal, but less grand slams, Nadal would conclusively be considered the greater player.

So why is Golf judged differently?

Perhaps, because unlike other sports, Golf at its core is a competition with yourself. No other player physically has any bearing on how you play, and the game has been designed around being a cognitive contest rather than a combative one. If someone is simply playing better than you on any given week, they win. You cannot defensively combat this as you can in other sports.

Based on this, a fundamental benchmark of overall career status must be relative level of competition. Because of this, I believe Tiger is the best we have ever seen.

Both careers are incredible.

Jack has 73 PGA Tour Victories and 18 Majors.

Tiger has 82 PGA Tour Victories and 15 majors.

At their best both dominated, with Tiger winning 8 of his first 22 Majors, Jack won 7 out of his first 22.

In the 2000/2001 season Tiger won four Majors in a row 'The Tiger Slam' Nicklaus has won 2 consecutive Majors and in 1972 held 3 Major Titles at the same time.

The percentages.

Up until 2014 and taking into account Tigers extended injury layoff, his winning percentage is far superior at 25% compared to Jacks career 18%.

There is no doubt Jack Nicklaus played against some of the greats - Arnold Palmer, Lee Trevino, Tom Watson, Billy Casper and of course Gary Player, but after these 5 main opponents, there was a considerable drop off in playing field depth with these 5 winning 29% of Majors during Jacks prime winning years.

Tigers main competitors were Ernie Els, Retief Goosen, Phil Mickelson, Vijay Singh, and Jim Furyk who won just 22% during Tigers career. This illustrates that

on any given week, Tiger was playing against stronger and deeper fields with more players having legitimate chances to win. Jack was essentially playing against 5 top players who were a good distance above the next wave of players in the field. This would suggest there was far more parity in playing ability in Tigers era.

“In Your Life!”

In an era where the sport had never been more scrutinised and critiqued, Tiger changed the game dramatically. TV audiences skyrocketed and never before had so many people tuned into watch Golf. The Woods phenomenon single-handedly transformed the sport and because of this almost tripled Tour prize money and made a lot of his adversaries rich in the process. Fellow Tour Pros constantly reference playing with Tiger was like witnessing a completely new game. The sound off the clubface was like nothing they had heard before and his ability to make things happen at big moments seemed almost supernatural at times, e.g. the Masters “In Your Life!” chip-in on No. 16 in 2005. Arguably Tigers greatest shot of his career given the gravity of the moment.