

Nathan Crace's

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When It Comes to Advertising Revenues, He's G-R-R-R-R-EAT!

By: Nathan Crace Date: August 21, 2001

You have to hand it to the sports executives of the major networks and cable television. They know a marketing juggernaut when they see one...and they see one in Tiger Woods. This is no secret to the golfing world, but the correlation between Woods' success and television ratings (and subsequently revenues) has been surprising to say the least in this year's four major tournaments. According to the Associated Press, CBS drew approximately 40.1 million viewers for the 2001 Masters and ratings 33 percent higher than the previous year—remember who won in 2000? Vijay Singh. In fact, in 46 years of Masters television on CBS, only Woods' 1997 record-setting victory for his first green jacket drew more viewers.

Now fast forward to this year's three other majors and the beginning of Woods' "major slump." Numbers from the 2001 U.S. Open and British Open show the connection between Woods' success on the course and TV's success in America's households. When Woods finished 12th in the U.S. Open in June, NBC's ratings dropped off 11 percent from the previous year when Tiger lapped the field at Pebble Beach. His less-than-Tiger-like play in July resulted in a tie for 25th at the British Open and the lowest television ratings in five years for that event—off 39% from the previous year when he won the claret jug at St. Andrews. After nearly missing the cut and finishing tied for 29th at the PGA Championship, CBS's Sunday ratings were anemic compared to 2000—nearly 40 percent lower! To be fair, we must consider that a lot of people may have tuned in last year to see if Tiger could possibly continue his streak, making some wonder if this year's numbers were actually more the norm and last year's the exception.

With such a strong connection between Woods' success and the number of viewers who tune in, it's no wonder the television decision-makers get Tiger on screen as much as possible. Sometimes, though, enough is enough and I wonder if Tiger gets tired of being the media's golf poster child? Case in point: as Jim Nantz reminded the viewing audience on Saturday of the time for Sunday's broadcast, CBS flashed a visual reminder on the screen for about five seconds—complete with Woods' million dollar smile! As I remember, Tiger scrambled to make the cut for the weekend and was thirteen strokes behind Toms at the end of day on Saturday. Doesn't anyone have a stock photo of Shingo Katayama?

Most people feel about Tiger the way basketball fans feel about former Indiana University coach Bobby Knight—they either like him or they don't. Not many people ride the fence on their opinion of Tiger and I would assume most who do not like Woods are either jealous of his success or maybe they are just tired of the ongoing media overkill some refer to as "Tigermania." There are those who go so far as to support their position by claiming that they do not like how he utters expletives when he hits a bad shot because he is a role model to so many kids. This is unfortunate, but trust me: your kid hears more on the bus ride to school in the morning than he'll ever hear slip from Tiger's mouth in a lifetime.

In the end, whether or not you are tired of seeing his face in commercials and other ads every time you turn around, Tiger has been good for the game of golf. If you don't think Tiger Woods has been good for the game, then you—to put it bluntly—are an idiot. Consider that more juniors are now drawn to the game instead of being glued to senseless cartoons and music videos every afternoon and all weekend long. Other people who might have never had any interest in golf are now being exposed to a game that they can enjoy for a lifetime. Even the other guys on Tour (the ones who kept getting beat up by Tiger on the course last year) have benefited from Woods' success. In addition to stepping up their games in order to compete, the purses are bigger for everyone as a result of the additional money advertisers and networks are pumping into television coverage and endorsements are more lucrative. In fact, the PGA Tour's deal with six networks for 2003 through 2006 is worth about 50 percent more than in previous deals—roughly \$850 million for the entire package. So even if Tiger is in a "slump" this year, advertisers will continue to spend money on the sport and viewers will tune in to see Woods play the game. But just in case he doesn't manage to shake his slump, there is always his 11 year-old niece Cheyenne, who should be making her professional debut in ten years or so!

Nathan Crace is the Senior Design Associate at Maxwell Golf Group in Jackson, Mississippi. His freelance "Lipouts" column is based on topics submitted to the author by readers like you. If you have a topic you would like to see discussed, log on to maxwellgolf.com/lipouts and let him know. Copyright 2001.