

# The Washington Post

## On Leadership



LEGAL SCHOLAR

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### THE QUESTION

#### **Tiger, the reluctant leader?**

**Tiger Woods has reacted to recent revelations about his marital infidelity as a husband trying to protect his family and a celebrity trying to protect his "brand." Has he ignored his other de facto role as "CEO of Golf," and, if so, what response would that require?**

POSTED BY STEVE PEARLSTEIN AND RAJU NARISETTI ON DECEMBER 7, 2009 12:48 PM

#### **Paradise lost**

Tiger the athlete is supremely disciplined and smart. We thought the person was, too. Sadly, Tiger the person appears to be extraordinarily undisciplined and stupid.

Unlike athletes who threw the World Series, shaved points in basketball or took performance-enhancing drugs (and lied about it), Tiger's tumble off the pedestal relates to his now self-confessed marital (serial?) "transgressions," even though we don't know their full extent.

These transgressions do not call into question his unbelievable performance on the golf course. He is well on his way to being deservedly called the greatest golfer of all time (move over Bobby Jones, Ben Hogan and Jack Nicklaus). So why then should personal failings matter?

When there was powerful congruence between athlete and person, Tiger was accorded god-like status, which he encouraged and then parlayed into hundreds of millions of dollars in endorsements. He was a global public figure, the face of golf, its enduring icon, the symbol of the perfect athlete.

Let there be no mistake. He was not passive in the creation of this Tiger. His personal fall from grace is so precipitous, yet cloudy, that we are struggling to come to terms with the

fracturing of the professional and the personal in a super-star so deeply, indeed emotionally, admired by so many.

He has admitted serious failings in an abstract way---the tawdry "details" are coming from the untrustworthy-but not-always-wrong town-criers of our age: the internet, the blogs, the tabloids, cable. We don't know what to believe but even the most devoted Tiger fans suspect there is more grubby sleaze to the story than he has acknowledged.

So, for the moment, he is Janus-faced. When the supremely confident, self-controlled superstar---probably the greatest athlete in the world today---turns his head after hitting a six iron stiff we see an out-of-control, self-indulgent reckless boy who, by his own admission, hasn't become a man capable of acting responsibly towards a wife and two very young children.

For golf, he can do only two things:

1. Continue to play at a level few can imagine, and none can achieve; and,
2. Somehow grow up as a person so he is not seen as a cheating hypocrite.

The latter is not a good image for "the World's Number 1" as the golf broadcasters are constantly proclaiming, especially when the game prides itself on the honor and integrity of its competitors. If Tiger had cheated in his chosen sport, it would have been an unforgivable, mortal golf sin.

He is 33. There is time for him to grow and change as a person off the course. This will have to be done in private for now. Oprah can't help.

But, at some point, he will have give up his privacy and his attempts to control his image---and show, beyond messages on his website, that he is a person who has failed badly, like so many of us do in one way or another, and who has somehow found redemption. He can spare us the details, but he has to be authentic.

For golf, he can do no more. But he also can do no less

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