

The Day Star Rises

I've always been a lover of underdogs, dark horses, and people making amazing comebacks. I was a Jackie Robinson fan when I was in grade school in the 50's, I idolized Sandy Colfax the great strike-out artist, and I loved Slammin' Sammy Snead, the golfer with the straw hat, who, when he wasn't golfing, spent his time bass fishing. Those were all heroes of mine back in the 50's. Sam's swing was poetry in motion.

Back in 2015 I took a liking to an Aussie golfer by the name of Jason Day. He was winning matches all over the place, and he was making shots that boggled my mind. He ended that year ranked # 1 among all professional golfers, having won everything but The Masters' and Tiger Woods in his decline was so impressed with Jason's play that he was convinced Jason Day might just break some of his records.

Jason has a natural charisma. When he lines up a shot, he goes into a sort of momentary meditation--his eyes half close and his thick lashes flutter as if he were picturing the whole path of his shot in his mind before he even addresses the ball. He might have a little aborigine in his DNA because he seems to go into a stationary "walk about" trance before each shot. All of that ritual made him really fascinating to me. Truly his star was on the rise back in 2016.

But then, the unthinkable happened. Somehow, because of the tremendous power he unleashes in his swing, he tore or pulled some key muscles in his back, and the injury set him back almost to stay.

I said almost. Earlier this year he won, I think, The AT&T Byron Nelson tournament, and last week, when I tuned in The British Open hoping to see Jason's name somewhere on the leader board, whose name did I see sitting in 4th place tied with three others? Jason Day! I have been praying for his recovery often over the

last few years, praying he would learn to control his drives to prevent re-injuring his back. I think my prayers were answered, because many of the usual leaders were completely lost trying to contend with rain, soggy, wickedly hard to read greens and weird wind shifts.

All of that frustrated most of the field-many big names were out there whacking away and treading water. Most of their putts stopped well short of the hole. But with Jason, “Crocodile Day,” it was like watching a duck sentenced to the slough. He was knocking shots out of the scraggly rough and heather right up on the greens, and almost none of his putts stopped short; his misses were always just a hair off the edge of the cup. But on nearly every hole he was in position for a birdie.

He finished the meet in 2nd place behind an unknown named Harmon, who sustained a five shot lead over the whole pack for three days. (He’ll be worth keeping an eye on.) Only Jason Day advanced his position birdying the last hole to finish tied for second place.

It’s always fun to watch a sport if you’ve got ‘a horse in the race.’ That’s why singling out individual dark horses and praying for them will usually move you from a disinterested onlooker to an involved fan. I had some great spectator years watching Chip Kelly magically guide the Oregon Ducks almost to the national, championship.

The same went for Bud Grant almost leading the Vikings to national glory, till Hank Stram’s Chiefs stole their dream. And how often did Wilt Chamberlain, Jerry West and Elgin Baylor nearly lead The Lakers to victory until those nasty Celtics with Bill Russell and Bob Cousy stole the prize?

I’ve noticed that in pro sports, golf has been one of the slowest to be integrated. I’ve always considered it a rich man’s venue sort of like yachting and

polo. I finally saw a few Latinos started showing up, like Lee Travino, 'my man' back in the 60's, and it's taken even longer for African Americans to break in until, finally, Tiger Woods took the game by storm. Today, watching the 3M meet, it was good to see Tony Finau in 2nd battling to catch the leader. He won the 3M last year.

And other nationalities are beginning to show up too in the great melting pot of American golf. Among the women, Korean, Thai, and Chinese players now dominate the sport, while Japan's Hideki Matsuyama is now a high ranking contender among the men.

It has become great fun to watch the invitationals and opens, where golfers world wide compete nose-to-nose. Peter's words come to mind: Be patient and wait expectantly, "until the day dawns and the Day Star arises in your heart."(II Peter: 1:19) It's good to have a horse n the race. I think Jason Day's star is on the rise, and his best days may be still ahead.

Gene Pinkney Daily News 23-07-30-