

An illustration of a golfer's legs and feet on a green field. The golfer is wearing white pants and white sneakers with pink laces and yellow accents. The background is a green field with a brown tree trunk on the left and a brown path or hole in the foreground. The text is overlaid on the green field.

# The Weight of Rory

One of the great events  
in golf sports history.

Kyle Porter  
& Jason Page





Copyright ©2026 Whistleharp Publishing

All rights reserved.

[normalsport.com](http://normalsport.com)

Digital ISBN: 979-8-9854298-8-6

Physical ISBN: 979-8-9854298-9-3

Whistleharp Publishing is a privately held LLC  
created by Kyle Porter, Jason Page, Jeff Smith and David Hill.

Its name has absolutely nothing to do with golf.  
It's actually an ode to the Wingfeather Saga,  
which everyone—no matter their age—should read.

Printed in Canada.

---

# The Weight of Rory

On one of the great events  
in golf sports history.

For Jude  
My favorite experience of  
the 2025 Masters happened when  
I stopped watching the 2025 Masters.  
I love you.



## Thank You

This book would not have been possible to write without the following Normal Sport sponsors. We are grateful to all of them for taking a chance on us and providing us with the space we need to try and make something memorable for all of you.

—  
Holderness and Bourne  
Precision Pro Golf  
Meridian Putters  
the Ryder Cup  
Charlie Golf Co.  
Sap's Original  
Ship Sticks  
Seed Golf  
Turtlebox  
Erin Hills  
Garmin  
OGIO

And of course ... all 1, 010 esteemed members of the Normal Club, who have, for reasons beyond us, paid actual money to read about grown men sitting next to trees in the woods and multimillionaire athletes walking around fields with sticks.

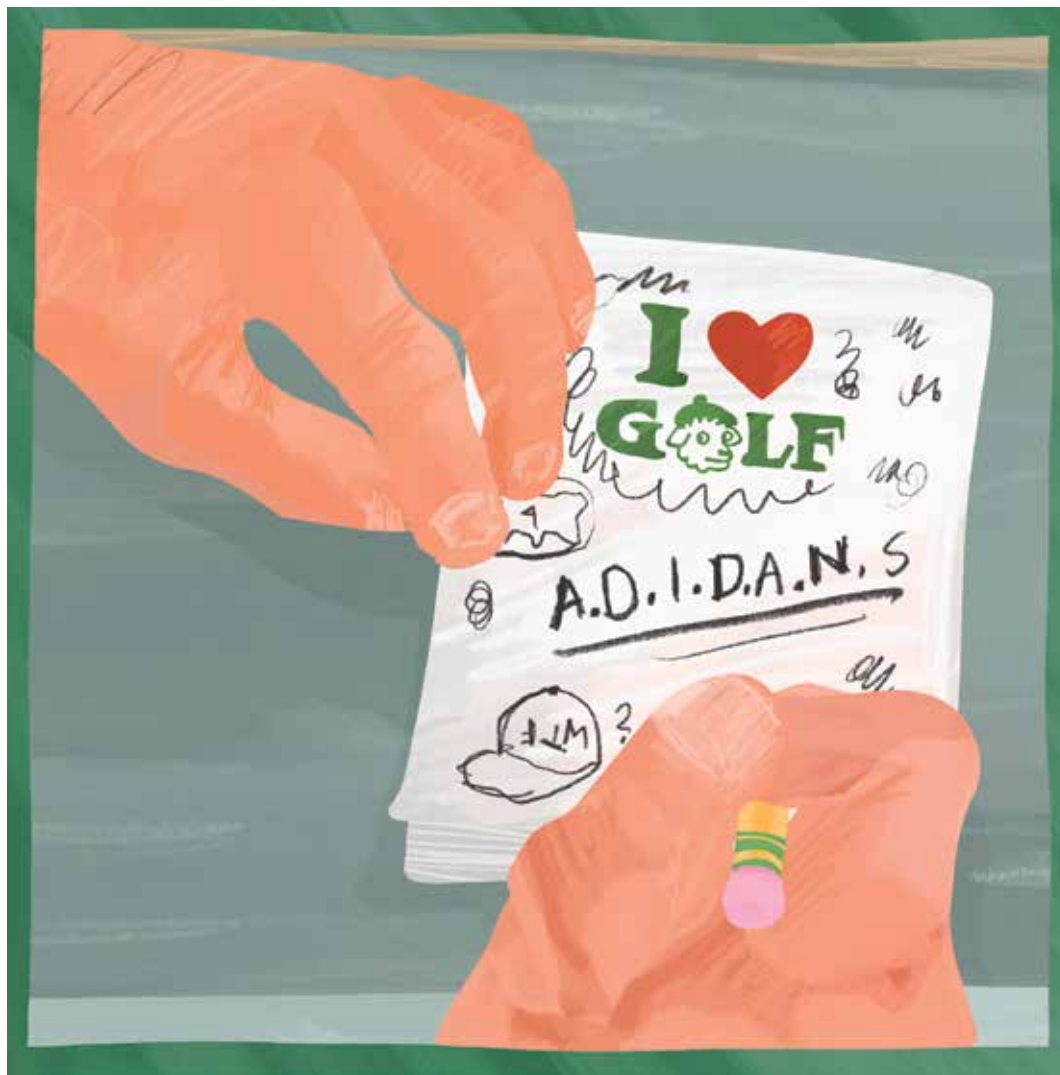
We create for ourselves,  
but we publish for you.

Words: Kyle Porter  
Illustrations: Jason Page  
Design: Greig Anderson  
Disbelief: Everyone

©Normal Sport 2026.  
NormalSport.com

# Contents

Expectations	9
The Weeks Before	13
Masters Week Arrives – Monday, April 7, 2025	27
Essay 01: This Wonderfully Terrible Place	29
Between Two Worlds, April 8, 2025	34
Some (Possibly Unhinged) Masters Eve Thoughts, April 9, 2025	42
Essay 02: Give Your Heart to No One	44
Round 1 – I Would Do It Again, April 10, 2025	60
Round 2 – A Vinyasa on Pink Dogwood, April 11, 2025	76
Round 3 – There Is No Going Back, April 12, 2025	92
Final Round – The Future and the Past, April 13, 2025	110
Essay 03: The Future and the Past	112
The Aftermath – The Stuff of Dreams, April 15, 2025	125
The Aftermath – The Weight of Time, April 17, 2025	142
Notes and Thoughts	155
The Great Unburdening, April 19, 2025	169
Appendix A / B	173
Something from Our Readers	178
The Scoring Hut	182



## Expectations

It's all about expectations. Marriage, kids, golf, life, all of it. And for you, dear reader, I want to set them up front. The way we put this book together – which was not even an idea until about three days after Rory dented Holly's green with both knees and his face – was by going back and pulling all of our writing and illustrating in the lead up to, during and in the aftermath of the Masters.

This includes tweets, essays, newsletters and even some correspondence we had with other readers. It also includes some transcripts of podcasts I did following that Masters week as well as a few lists we felt like we needed to put together. We pulled it all, spliced it together, annotated it with thoughts we had on the writing and the week since it all happened, touched it up to make it feel like it all flows better and added a few new bits and pieces.

It is an odd way to write a book, but again, not sure what you expected from a company whose logo was inspired by a monkey meme.

There is some original writing, but a lot of it we already published somewhere. It is republished here as I originally wrote it. What I know to be true is that not everyone reads everything I write.<sup>1</sup>

We won't do this for every major championship, but for possibly the best Masters<sup>2</sup> of my lifetime?

Oh yeah, we're going to do it for that.

<sup>1</sup> Or in the case of my wife, sometimes nobody reads anything I write.

<sup>2</sup> We'll get to that.

## Preface

One of the very few downsides of this job is just how fast our work loses juice. It doesn't matter how good the idea is, how strong the writing is or how much the illustrations make people laugh, an essay about the second round – even at the Masters – doesn't hold a ton of interest by the following Tuesday.

But we wanted to put a stake in the ground and collect all of it to publish in one place. Publishing this book says, *This week mattered more than almost any week of the last 10 years in terms of the history of the sport.* In that sense, it is as much for us as it is for anyone else. We are so proud of the work we did during that week at ANGC.

This is also an experiment for us. Jason and I have now published four books, all of them different and a little bit strange. Perhaps this one most of all. We wanted to try some different ideas out, see how they land. Not to go full Bryson, but we never want to lose this spirit of discovery and innovation.

If you're reading digitally, there are links to some of what we discuss. If you're holding

the non-digital version, congratulations. That's the one we dream about building. Unfortunately (or fortunately!) we have not yet figured out how to holograph Rory dumping one in the water on No. 13 into your living room. Maybe someday. Hopefully not. Though we did include QR codes in the text that link to some of the footage from this particular event.

Regardless, we have never loved covering an event more than we loved covering this one. Part of that is because it was the first one we've done on our own – as the Normal Sport organization – in the exact unique way we wanted to cover it. Part of it is because of the history. And, of course, part of it is because Rory is my muse, the one whose golf and disposition bring out the best in me and in us.

That is subjective of course, but I got this DM three years ago that I think about almost all the time. It – along with many other events – served as inspiration for the rest of this book.

'Mr. Porter,<sup>3</sup> as someone who's a sports fan and a writer, I'd like to urge you to write a book on Rory McIlroy. You have written so beautifully about him in these past few years – he brings out the best in you – and his story has become intertwined with the most compelling stories in golf.'

[Reader on X, 7.22am, October 27, 2022]

<sup>3</sup> Always tuff.



# The Weeks Before



Kyle's backyard is officially in tournament mode.

## Same Movie, Different Year

I have to say this off the top ... but I just never saw it coming. Of course I wanted it all to be true, but as soon as Rory added Sawgrass to Pebble back in March, I definitely thought, *Oh yeah, we have seen all of this before*. Dominates Tour events (all of them), but mentally and emotionally at majors – and especially at *this* major – he's just on permanent tilt. I am not afraid to admit that I did not believe Rory McIlroy would ever win a Masters. I'm on record!

This obviously didn't stop me from picking him every other year,<sup>4</sup> but gun to my head, I would have said, *No, it's never going to happen*.

I needed to get that out in the open before we move on to everything else.

Now let's get to some of what I wrote in the weeks leading into this Masters. Remember, all of this is being published as I originally wrote it in March and April of 2025. We view them like little journal entries we're looking back on with footnotes serving as commentary on the writing and the week.

## Rory and ... Jock Hutchison?

Here's a fun Masters stat I like to dust off every year: In Gary Player's first Masters, he played against Jock Hutchison, who was born in 1884. In Gary Player's last Masters, he played against Rory McIlroy, who was born in 1989 ... 105 years after Hutchison was born.

A truly remarkable game.<sup>5</sup>

## The 1.7 Club

Here is one of my favorite Masters stats: 10 of the last 12 Masters winners leading into the 2025 edition were at 1.7 SG<sup>6</sup> tee to green or better in the three months leading into Masters month.<sup>7</sup> Only Reed in 2018 and Hideki in 2021 were not, although both were close.

Here are the 2025 qualifiers.

Player	SG	Player	SG
Collin Morikawa	2.6	Joaquin Niemann	1.9
Rory McIlroy	2.2	Shane Lowry	1.8
Scottie Scheffler	2.1	Laurie Canter	1.8

<sup>4</sup> There is no hedging like sportwriter hedging.

<sup>5</sup> As was pointed out to me by a reader, if GP had played in this Masters, he honestly may have beaten Nick Dunlap in the first round.

<sup>6</sup> If you're confused about SG, see Appendix A.

<sup>7</sup> The Willett number in 2016 is a little questionable, tbh, because he only had a handful of measured rounds, but he was still pretty close.

This elicited some comments similar to the following.

**“Wow! 10 of 12 Masters winners were hitting the ball very well heading into the Tournament? Imagine that ...”**

[@PeterKostis, 1.18am, March 25, 2025]

This is not an unexpected response. However, it misses the point of how exclusive that 1.7 tee to green number is. This year, only six guys are in it.<sup>8</sup> Let’s pick three other years and see how many players met the threshold.

2022	7 (Inc. Scottie Scheffler)
2019	7 (Inc. Tiger Woods)
2017	10 (Inc. Sergio Garcia)

The point is, you could spend your time looking at a pool of 20 players who you think could win the tournament. OR ... you could spend your time looking at a much smaller pool from which the winner has almost always emerged over the last 12 years.

It’s no guarantee, of course — nothing is — but it’s a winnowing of the true contenders in a reasonable way.

There is no true lead in to a major like there is Augusta — all the stars more or less play the same schedule and there becomes a bit of a rhythm to how all of it happens.

I haven’t pulled these numbers for other major championships, but I would trust them less because schedules change and differ quite a bit between post-Masters and the end of the Open Championship.

<sup>8</sup> Justin Rose, by the way, was more than a stroke outside of it at 0.61.

<sup>9</sup> I actually kind of do.

<sup>10</sup> Number of players who beat even one of them: 2

<sup>11</sup> Update: It wasn't.

## Hogan’s Invite to ANGC

Here’s a Normal Sport thing: Michael Kim shot 69 in the final round at Houston and immediately tweeted at someone who goes by the name Nosferatu to see if he did enough to get into the top 50 in the world and thus into the most prestigious golf tournament of the year

Just how Hogan found out he was in the first few Masters he played.

## The Rory-Scottie Masters

I don’t make the rules.<sup>9</sup> Here are their numbers between the 2024 Masters and 2025 Masters.

- 42 starts
- 11 wins
- 24 top 5s
- 37 top 25s
- 1 MC
- ~5.4 SG/round combined

If you beat both of them, you will probably win the Masters.<sup>10</sup>

Other than Morikawa, nobody else has been close to the numbers they’re putting up so far this year.

But here’s the interesting part: Morikawa has quietly been better than both of them in terms of SG tee to green and SG overall this year. I don’t think you trust him as much as you do Rory or Scottie, but getting a two-time major champ who’s been better than Rory/Scottie from tee to green at 14-1 is theft!<sup>11</sup>

Custom Range	Jan 1, 2025 – Apr 1, 2025						
Minimum Rounds	0						
Player Name	Rounds (Shotlink)	Putt	Arg	App	Ott	T2G	Total
Collin Morikawa	20 (20)	+0.33	+0.37	+1.47	+0.75	+2.60	+2.93
Rory McIlroy	24 (24)	+0.66	+0.38	+0.73	+1.09	+2.20	+2.87
Scottie Scheffler	24 (24)	+0.42	+0.27	+1.08	+0.79	+2.13	+2.55
Joaquin Niemann	16 (12)	+0.41	+0.20	+0.67	+1.02	+1.88	+2.22
Russell Henley	28 (28)	+0.62	+0.43	+0.77	+0.21	+1.42	+2.04
Justin Thomas	32 (30)	+0.44	+0.35	+1.05	+0.13	+1.53	+2.00

## First-Time Winners

Here's a chart of how many attempts it took each first-time Masters champion to win.

Attempt	Winners	Attempt	Winners
1	3	11	1 (Tommy Aaron) <sup>12</sup>
2	5	12	3 (Phil)
3	8	13	1 (Crenshaw)
4	8	14	1 (Casper)
5	5	15	1 (O'Meara)
6	5	16	0
7	4	17	0
8	2	18	0
9	2	19	1 (Sergio)
10	6	20	0

This is meaningful because ... Sergio. But also because this is Rory's 17th (!!) attempt. How is this Rory's 17th Masters?! As was pointed out, it's extremely difficult to play in that many Masters without winning one because it means you've been good enough to remain one of the best players in the world for nearly two decades but not good enough to have won a Masters. That's a strange and pretty rare group.

The second thing that stands out on this list is that Phil didn't win his first until his 12th attempt, and then he won two more. Crenshaw won his first at 13 attempts and went on to win another (in his 24th attempt!).

One of the sickest stats in the Masters media guide is number of attempts at time of sixth Masters ...

1. Nicklaus (28)
2. —

<sup>12</sup> Tommy Aaron is also famous (infamous?) for putting Roberto De Vincenzo down for a 4 instead of a 3 on the 17th hole in the final round of the 1968 Masters. RDV signed an incorrect card and missed out on a playoff. Normal sport.

## Career Masters Scoring

Here's a fun one on lowest career scoring average.<sup>13</sup>

- With 100+ rounds Tiger Woods (71.30)
- From 75–99 rounds Hale Irwin (72.18)
- From 50–74 rounds Rory McIlroy (71.60)
- From 25–49 rounds Jordan Spieth (70.95)
- Less than 25 rounds Scottie Scheffler<sup>14</sup> (70.40)

The most remarkable career scoring number I found? Jack Nicklaus is still under 72.0 (71.98) despite playing 163 rounds. That number was better than Bryson DeChambeau, Bubba Watson, Adam Scott and Viktor Hovland (among others) going into the 2025 Masters.

One other note: Phil's scoring average (71.39) was better going into this year's event at age 54 than Rory's (71.60) was at 35. That's wild.<sup>15</sup>

## Why I Love(d) Morikawa

One guy I'm big on this year is Morikawa. A lot of scoffing when you start throwing that name around, but he ...

- Is No. 1 in the world in 2025 in SG approach, ball-striking and tee to green and total.
- Is one of two players to finish in the top 10 at the Masters in each of the last three years (Scottie).
- Played in the final pairing last year.
- Is a two-time major champion.

It seems wild to me that he's still 14–1 or 16–1 at some places. He has literally been the best scorer in the world in 2025, and he crushes at ANGC!

"But the wind ..." is a reasonable take regarding Morikawa. However, remember when it howled last year on Friday, and he shot 70? I feel like that (understandably) doesn't get brought up when discussing him.

Only three players have made the cut at the Masters in each of the last three years *and also* have an aggregate score under par.

- Scottie: -25
- Morikawa: -12
- Cam Smith: -3

I'm not saying he's going to win (though I am going to pick him), but I'm saying he should not be ignored. Not when Scottie and Rory are doing what they're doing and Morikawa has arguably been ... better.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>13</sup> This was leading into 2025. Scottie and Rory both lowered their numbers.

<sup>14</sup> Presumably, ANGC doesn't keep this as an official stat.

<sup>15</sup> According to my math, they left the 2025 Masters averaging exactly 71.4 strokes per round at ANGC.

<sup>16</sup> This aged well.

## Jack = Tiger... and Phil?

I'm not sure we have appreciated what Phil + Tiger have done at ANGK, which means I'm almost certain we have not appreciated what Nicklaus did.

Here's the tale of the tape going into 2025.

	Tiger + Phil	Jack
Starts	57	45
Missed Cuts	4	8
Top 25s	37	29
Top 10s	30	22
Top 5s	24	15
Avg. Score	71.30 and 71.39	71.98
Wins	8	6

This is crazy!

Tiger and Phil have played in 12 more Masters than Nicklaus with just eight more top 10s (and not likely to add to that list). Nicklaus went 1 for his last 13 in top 10s, too, which means at one point he had 21 top 10s in 32 starts. Lol!

## Always Birdie the Last

Six humans have ever made a birdie on the 72nd hole to win the Masters, and only two have done it since 1988. Here they are.<sup>17</sup>

- Art Wall, 1959
- Arnold Palmer, 1960
- Gary Player, 1978
- Sandy Lyle, 1988
- Mark O'Meara, 1998
- Phil Mickelson, 2004

Here are four of them in a video where CBS claims this feat has only happened four times.<sup>18</sup>



WATCH >>>  
'Birdie to win'  
©CBS YouTube.

<sup>17</sup> Rory barely missed, making birdie at the 73rd instead.

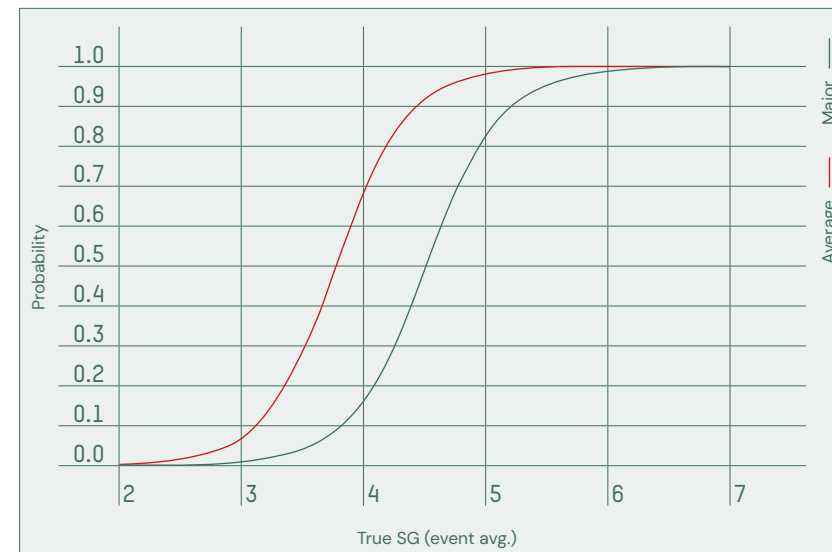
<sup>18</sup> ANGK says six, and Wikipedia agrees with ANGK. If I have learned anything in life, it's that you don't argue against an ANGK/Wikipedia combo.

<sup>19</sup> This is a pretty normal major-winning number.

<sup>20</sup> We'll get to it, but the exact same number he was at this year!

## Strokes Gained by Winners

This is one I have a hard time reconciling. You guys know how I feel about strokes gained. I've talked about this 100 times, but if you're at 5+ SG per round at a major, you have an 80 percent chance (or better) of winning that major.



So here are the true strokes gained of the last eight Masters winners.

- Scottie: 5.1/round
- Rahm: 4.6
- Scottie: 4.9<sup>19</sup>
- Hideki: 4.1
- DJ: 5.4
- Tiger: 3.4
- Reed: 4.9
- Sergio: 4.4

Here's what's infuriating as a player ... I can give you a dozen numbers better than Tiger's winning number in 2019.

Off the top of my head:

- Rickie in 2018 (4.6)
- Rory in 2022 (4.2)<sup>20</sup>
- Ludvig in 2024 (4.1)
- Cam Smith in 2020 (4.1)
- Brooks in 2023 (3.6)

Even though they all played the course and the field better in those years than Tiger did in 2019, they have a combined 0 green jackets. Some of that is how tournaments played out. Tiger probably could have shot a better score, but he was more conservative than Ted Cruz coming down the stretch in 2019. Some of it, though, is luck. And probably more than anyone wants to admit.

## High-Low Scores at ANGC

High:

9-10-8-8-8-7-8-12-8-9-9-13-13-8-13-11-7-8 = 169

Low:

2-2-2-1-2-1-2-2-2-2-2-1-2-2-2-1-2-2 = 32

Notables ...

- Ernie Els' 6-putt at the first for a 9 back in 2016. A hole in which he took so many strokes that the Masters mis-counted and had to reissue the number he made on the hole!
- Making a 12 on No. 8 seems quite difficult. Shout out Frank Walsh in the 1935 Masters. He shot 82 that day in the second round and finished T43.

- Most holes had multiple of the lowest score. The only ones that didn't are pretty famous. Oosthuizen's 2 at 2. Sluman's 1 at 4. Devlin's 2 at 8 (didn't know about that one). Maggert's 2 at 13. And of course Sarazen's 2 at 15.
- There hasn't been a 1 at No. 12 since Curtis Strange in 1988.
- The 13 on No. 12 was Tom Weiskopf. Though I'm not sure how he holds the record after Spieth made a 22 there back in 2016.



<sup>21</sup> Credit: That Sports Blog 1980

Here's how one blogger<sup>21</sup> wrote up the Weiskopf 13. I found the whole situation and documentation of it completely fascinating:

*We'll pick it up just after Weiskopf hit his first in the water and is about to play his third. [He] hit a sand wedge, but his 3rd shot went straight into the water. The 5th shot was basically a rerun of his first attempt, the ball landing on the fringe and finding its way back into the watery grave. Another ball came out of the bag, but Weiskopf chipped his 7th shot into Rae's Creek without threatening the putting surface.*

*"When you screw up like I was doing, you just stand there until you do it right," Weiskopf informed journalists, his struggles providing a big talking point after day one. Famously the 37-year-old had a reputation for being volatile - given the tags *The Towering Inferno* and *Terrible Tom* - and on a few occasions he had walked off courses mid-round when the going got tough.*

*But he was not going to give up at the 12th, even if he remained unable to find his range. For a bit of variety, Weiskopf hit his 9th*

*shot short of the water and watched his ball barely trickle in. Finally, shot 11 found grass on the right side of Rae's Creek. Ironic cheers followed. "There must have been a lot of English blood out there," Weiskopf said. "That's what they call 'sympathy applause.'"*

*Writing in the Washington Post, Dave Kindred explained the reaction of the spectators.*

*"The gallery was giggling. Galleries at the Masters are the aristocrats of sports customers. They don't run, they don't boo, they don't litter. But these people were giggling in the face of Weiskopf's tragedy, to say nothing of the poor fish."*

*A full 19 shots behind leader Seve Ballesteros, Weiskopf admitted that on walking to the 14th tee he was thinking of pulling out of the tournament, after dropping eleven shots in two holes.*

*"But then I thought, 'That won't do any good.' I thought, 'I'm just trying not to shoot too high up in the '80s.'"*

He bogeyed 13 but birdied 14, which is the most golf thing ever.

**"But then I thought, 'That won't do any good.' I thought, 'I'm just trying not to shoot too high up in the 80s.'"**

**That 1980s Sports Blog**

## The Nicklaus Riddle

In 1995, Jack Nicklaus played the par-4 5th hole in 3 under for the week but did not make a birdie, which feels impossible! His scores.

- R1: 2
- R2: 5
- R3: 2
- R4: 4

There have been nine 2s in the history of that hole, and Nicklaus had two of them in the same tournament in 1995 ... when he was 55 years old.

More fun with single hole scores over the course of a tournament: Three players have made 1-2-3-4 on a hole in a tournament before.<sup>21</sup>

- Curtis Strange on No. 12 in 1988
- Corey Pavin on No. 16 in 1992
- Ian Poulter on No. 16 in 2008

## Chefs Only

The list of players with the most birdies in tournament history is hilarious and amazing.

Here it is.

Career: Jack Nicklaus (506)

Round: Anthony Kim (11 in 2009)<sup>22</sup>

Two rounds: Tiger and AK tied (16)

Three rounds: Spieth (22)

Tournament: Spieth (28 in 2015)

Four of the biggest chefs in major championship history.

<sup>21</sup> Shout out to the Rocket Mortgage 3-1-3 challenge.

<sup>22</sup> Rose (10) nearly tied this ... in the final round ... to win the tournament.



# Masters Week Arrives

Monday, April 7, 2025

## Prioritize Having Fun

I find myself extremely stressed leading into the Masters: Like “we need to change the font size on tablet view of the website!” levels of stress. Just trying to control anything I can get my hands on and constantly worried about things like

**“what if the business doesn’t grow during Masters week THAT SURELY MEANS WE’RE COOKED DOESN’T IT?”**

I realize how insane this sounds because I see how insane it looks on paper. But it still feels real, which means I have not really been enjoying the fact that, you know, this ridiculous company that I built out of a Twitter joke, is credentialed by the Augusta National Golf

Club to cover the most meaningful golf tournament in the world.

So maybe that’s a confession. Maybe you run a business and you needed to hear that somebody else is crazy just like you are. I don’t know. What I do know is that our technology guy, Jeff, said something to me last week that I have written down on my daily task list.<sup>23</sup>

Here’s what he said: *Prioritize having fun. People are attracted to and compelled by other people having fun, and whatever fun you have at the Masters will be infectious*, he added.

Jeff barely knows what the Masters is (see below), but I thought that was so insightful and helpful and something I will be attempting to remember often this week.

Jason - at some point you should add your "what does the masters mean to you" quote on that page.

[Jeff Smith, 8.43am]

What's the Masters?

[Jason Page, 8.43am]

I feel seen.

[Jeff Smith, 8.44am]

<sup>23</sup> Yeah, I use paper and pen. Nbd.

## Essay 01 – This Wonderfully Terrible Place

Manila, Philippines is a strange place to begin when talking about the 2025 Masters. The capital of this small country in the western Pacific is roughly 14 million yards (or a couple of Bryson drives) from the first tee at Augusta National. But it was in Manila, exactly 50 years ago this year, where one of the great pieces in sportswriting history was produced

And it is there that we must go to read Mark Kram on Ali-Frazier III, the Thrilla in Manila, my favorite recap of a sporting event maybe ever.

Let’s pick it up halfway through Kram’s article as he really starts to get into the rhythm of describing their fight.

*Came the sixth<sup>24</sup>, and here it was, that one special moment that you always look for when Joe Frazier is in a fight. Most of his fights have shown this: you can go so far into that desolate and dark place where the heart of Frazier pounds, you can waste his perimeters, you can see his head hanging in the public square, may even believe that you have him, but then suddenly you learn that you have not.*

Whew.

*May even believe that you have him, but then suddenly you learn that you have not.*

<sup>24</sup> I always loved this line because it’s not how anybody would ever teach you to write it, but also you might actually talk like that, and I think everyone should write more like they normally talk.

How many times have we seen that exact phrase on the faces of golfers both younger and older than Ali and Frazier were at that time?

How many times have we seen its implications etched into the weather-worn eyes of men who hit golf balls instead of hitting men?

How many times on a Saturday or a Sunday at the Augusta National Golf Club have golf’s version of Ali and Frazier thought that they had him, just before learning that cold and cruel truth that befalls nearly everyone at ANGK ... that they in fact did not.

*What does the Masters mean to you?*

As my friend Chris Solomon (known by some now as Soly Solomon) pointed out a few years ago following the Shota Hayafuji bow to the course after Hideki’s win, this tournament is the one event that means something to everyone involved.

One frustration I have had in recent years with, well, a lot of what’s gone on in the golf world is the idea that more golf is always good. This is like saying more housing is always good or more salmon is always good.

I mean ... maybe this is true.

What could be said instead, though, is that more *meaningful* golf is always good. And that is the beauty of the majors, but specifically of the Masters. From the college kid selling pimento cheese sandwiches off the side of the 3rd fairway to Jim Nantz directing traffic in Butler Cabin, everyone involved has their own story. From the first person in the gates on Monday morning until the champ drives down Magnolia Lane on Sunday evening, every minute means something.

The Masters means a lot of different things to me. My grandfather held badges for three decades, until he died a few years ago.

For all of my conscious life, I never knew a day that did not include my grandfather being tethered to the Masters. My first trip there was in 2007 with my father. Then I went with both my parents. And then with a few college friends. Eventually, my girlfriend-now-wife and I started taking various couple friends to the event.

People joke that the Masters should be a holiday, but the truth is a little more profound than that. The truth is that the Masters represents a holiday because holidays take us back to the same place and have us doing the same things and remembering exactly who we were and what we were doing the year before that and the year before that.

The passage of time.

Remember the scene from *Interstellar* when McConaughey is on that planet for like two hours and he checks back in on Earth and it's been 23 years and his kids are adults. No moment in any movie I've ever seen is more powerful than the split second you see the heartbreak in his eyes as they reflect the images of his grown children on that screen.

That is how I feel on Saturday and Sunday evenings at Augusta National.

When I walk to the little trampled down area by the big leaderboard with the colorful flags just a few yards to the right of the first fairway, I think about the first time I went to Augusta National and how my oldest daughter wouldn't be born for six more years after that. Then I blinked, and somehow she'll be 12 next week. For many of us, the Masters is a golf-shaped mirror that we hold up every year to take stock of where we're at, where

we've been and where we're going.

It sounds like an absolutely maniacal thing to say about a golf tournament, but that doesn't mean it's not true.

*What does the Masters mean to you?*

I left my long-time job at CBS Sports in October, which means this will be my first major championship to cover on my own. I feel ... freedom? I also feel a little bit naked and a little bit scared and a little bit joyful and a little bit rebellious. All of those at once.

I have this one golf memory. It's of Brian Harman. Maybe it was the year he won the Open, maybe not. He was asked a Very Serious Question about the tournament or a shot or something else, and his response (which we have heard from so many players so many times) was,

"I don't know, man [shrugs] ... it's just golf."

Except that it's not, is it? That's why we started this newsletter, isn't it?

Because golf is never really about ... just golf. In fact, it sometimes feels like golf is *barely* about just golf.

What was it that Scottie Scheffler said recently?

"I feel like every time you're playing golf you're kind of looking into a mirror and learning more and more about yourself."

If the best player on the planet for the last three years is saying that, then I'm listening, I'm drinking it in.

We started this company because we believe all of this is not really about just golf.

*What does the Masters mean to you?*

To me, it means a lot of things, but one of my favorites is that I find it to be a crevice into



which I can look to see what these men I cover are truly all about. The Masters is somehow both grandiose and intimate. The entrance to the biggest stage in the world is also just another sidestreet in a broken down old town. Because of this juxtaposition, the tournament seems to compress its contestants' souls in ways we rarely see in sports.

Why do we love dramas? Because they (artificially) take people to the very end of themselves and let you take a look at how they react, what they're made of.<sup>25</sup> They also provide an opportunity for you to think about how you would react and what you are made of because, of course, everyone's favorite thing to think about is themselves.

The Masters does this, too, but all of it is real.

It's the place where I want to see Spieth walk off the 11th green with a two-shot lead on Sunday and stare at his own ghost for as long as time allows. Where I want to see Phil make 3 on 15 on Saturday with that "you never know" smirk on his face and his name on top of the board 34 years after his first appearance here.

Sometimes, if I'm being honest, I barely even care about the outcome. I want to see Brooks forget that he's not supposed to care. And I want to see somebody – an amateur, a first timer, anybody – look around with a lead on the weekend and the world come crashing down.

I want to see what it does to a person to believe that he has him, and then I want to

see what it does to that person when he realizes that he very much does not.

The Masters may mean something different to us all, but it is nearly undeniable that to everyone, it means the most of anything in golf.

For something constructed out of thin air – just the dream of two titans and a nursery that looks like it fell out of Scotland – nothing in sports has ever really disclosed the emotion and the makeup of men quite like the Masters.

I want Rory to birdie the 9th on Sunday to go up four on Scottie and Bryson with just nine holes between him and the immortal slam and nothing but terror in his eyes.<sup>26</sup> Because where else can someone who has the entire world feel such fear about obtaining what he has not?

Time passes, opportunities elude, the entire thing was smoke. For minutes, though, maybe even seconds, golf gives us – the Masters provides us – what we know we want the most.

Competition matters. Beautifully struck shots are great. But in the end, when the week is cracked open and everyone is bare, it is the humanity this event engenders – all the fear and joy and sorrow and elation we can possibly contain – that is truly undefeated.

Sometimes you get it all in the same round. Sometimes on the very same hole. Nowhere more so than every spring at this wonderfully terrible place.



<sup>25</sup> This idea brought some real gravity to Rory's reaction for me.

<sup>26</sup> Wait ... what?!

## Between Two Worlds

It is true of me — and probably many of you reading my work — that I have begun to think about the Masters, not from the perspective of the 27- and 31-year-old players but rather from the perspective of their parents.

I'm sort of in between those two worlds right now, but one of them is ahead of me and the other is behind. Which is why I thought the photos of Scottie Scheffler and his mom playing Augusta National on Sunday were so lovely.

You guys know how I feel about my own mom (scan code below) as it relates to golf and life, which is the Scottie side of that equation. But when I see photos of Scottie playing with his mom I think, *What must it be like for your son to be the (two-time) Masters champ?*



READ >>>  
Q&A My Mom  
©Normal Sport.

That must be a mostly odd but sometimes wonderful reality.

You spent all this time feeding and bathing and disciplining and raising this child, this boy. You have seen every facet of him. At his worst among his sisters, at his best in front of the world. You know things about him that he doesn't yet know about himself.

You have to watch him grapple with what it means to be No. 1, what it means to carry the burden of being the best in the world and everything that entails. For so long, your family insulated him and formed him and shaped him, as all parents attempt to do, to become an independent, productive member of society.

I think often of what Scottie's dad said to him after he won Match Play and became the No. 1 golfer in the world:

**"I love you, Scott. I'm more proud of who you are than your golf. You're a wonderful young man."**

### [Scott Scheffler Senior]

Now he's one of the most famous athletes in the world.

Somebody from whom everyone wants a slice of time, a piece of something [raises hand]. How strange and unsettling that must be at times and how nice and peaceful it must be to just play a round of golf with him at this place where it is calm and you're just his mom again and he's just your son again.

Nobody really wants to be famous.

We all just want to be loved and cared for and to love and care for others. Fame is just a byproduct of those desires. A path we think will lead to the outcomes we want and need.

So for all the hoopla and nonsense the last several years have brought to Scottie and his family, I would imagine a four-hour reprieve at this place — of all places — was the most wonderful thing in the world.

## 5/16 of an Inch

As always, the grass heights at ANGC get a shout out. Totally normal press release.



Jordan Spieth's options at the local Augusta barber. Subject to weather conditions and growth.

## People Love People

Here is a question I have been giving some thought to recently: We all say we love watching great golf shots, so why is it that we feel nothing when — this is going to sound absurd — a machine like Iron Byron hits high draws or perfect fades? Is it not the actual shot we love, but the truth that there is a human on the other end of it?

I was considering this on my drive to Augusta while listening to a podcast with Patreon CEO, Jack Conte.

Here's what he said about AI.

**“I think people love people. When I listen to a Kendrick Lamar album, it's not that I care about the output, the work that he has created so much as I care that I am hearing the experience of another conscious being who lived through some serious sh-- and suffering and like pain and life experience.**

**And I think a lot of great art and work – the really good stuff – is stemming from that feeling of connection to another human being. So maybe all that to say, I think the craftsmanship of [content] creation is going to change, but I think for a very long time, longer than most people think, I believe humans will be at the core of creation.”**

[Jack Conte, CEO, Patreon]

It is the same reason why I can watch Viktor Hovland and a Korn Ferry Tour player hit the exact same shot — like, Trackman can tell me that they were identical shots with the same launch angle and spin rate and smash factor — and yet I feel something when Hovland hits that I don't when KFT Guy hits it because I have a connection to Hovland's backstory and his struggle and his near misses and on and on we go.

This is probably intuitive and maybe even obvious, but the idea that I could watch a machine hit it farther and straighter than a person but not enjoy it half as much is something that struck me as incredibly interesting. Also, maybe I've been traveling for too long.



WATCH>>>  
How to Make it on  
YouTube in 2025  
©Colin and Samir.

## Tiger... and Now Rory

In the last 20 Masters, only one player has come from outside the top 10 after the first round to win the tournament. That person is exactly who you think it is, and he did it twice.

First, in 2005 when he opened with 74 and sat T33. Then he shot 66–65–71 to beat Chris DiMarco, after making That Shot on 16. Oh, and that 131 is the record for lowest middle two rounds of the tournament.

In 2019, Tiger did it again. This time he shot 70 in the first round and was just outside the top 10. He went on to shoot 68–67–70 to beat DJ, Xander and Brooks by one each.

A reminder: Tiger should not have won the 2019 Masters given that he only gained 3.43 strokes per round on the field, a number normally nowhere good enough to win a major.<sup>27</sup> In retrospect, that week feels more and more and more like destiny.

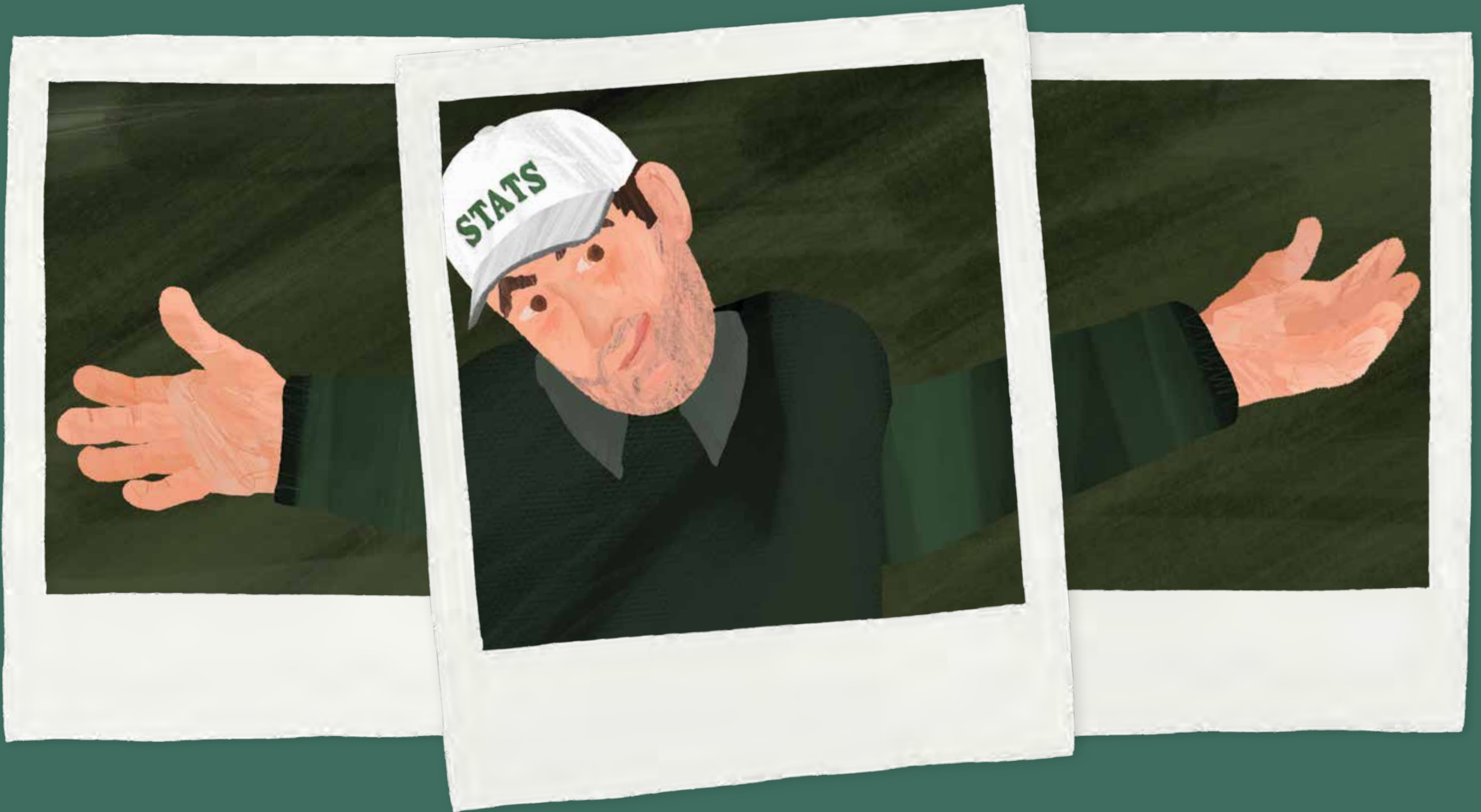
Here is where everyone else who went on to win stood after Round 1.

2024	Scottie Scheffler	2nd
2023	Jon Rahm	2nd
2022	Scottie Scheffler	3rd
2021	Hideki Matsuyama	2nd
2020	Dustin Johnson	1st
2019	Tiger Woods	11th
2018	Patrick Reed	4th
2017	Sergio Garcia	4th
2016	Danny Willett (!!!)	9th
2015	Jordan Spieth	1st
2014	Bubba Watson	2nd
2013	Adam Scott	10th
2012	Bubba Watson	4th
2011	Charl Schwartzel	7th
2010	Phil Mickelson	2nd
2009	Angel Cabrera	6th
2008	Trevor Immelman	1st
2007	Zach Johnson	5th
2006	Phil Mickelson	4th
2005	Tiger Woods	33rd

What's even crazier to me is that seven of the last eight winners (everyone but Tiger) and nine of the last 11 (everyone but Tiger and that fake Willett Masters) have been inside the top *four* after the first round.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>27</sup> See: Strokes Gained by Winners above.

<sup>28</sup> Update: Gonna have to amend this stat. Rory was T27 after Round 1.



## This Little White Ball

During a bit of research, I found this little nugget on Byron Nelson from the 2001 Masters (which, you may remember, was a decent one).

Nelson was stepping down from his role as an honorary starter and discussing his last tee shot at Augusta.

**“I've been coming to this tournament since 1935, and I've enjoyed all of it,” said Nelson, who plans to keep attending the Masters as a spectator. “Now I'm delighted to try and hit this little white ball.”**

[Byron Nelson, NYT]

Nelson was 89 at the time.

I love how much dignity and joy and simplicity he still maintained when it came to his relationship to golf. I thought that statement – “Now I’m delighted to try and hit this little white ball” – was so lovely.



READ>>>  
A legend's  
Last Tee Shot  
©The New York Times.

## Normol Sport

Last Thursday, I went to an elementary school open house and saw this on my second grader’s desk...



## Porter Family Draft

We had our annual Porter family draft on Sunday with a pint of ice cream at stake. It was a snake draft, and this is exactly the order in which players were drafted.

	Mom (Mrs. Normal)	Jack (Age: 8)	Jude (Age: 11)	Sadie (Age: 5)	Dad (Me)
R1	Scottie	Rory	Morikawa	Dr. Chipinski	Rahm
R2	Fleetwood	Michael Kim	JT	Sergio	Ludvig
R3	Lowry	Niemann	Cantlay	Henley	Bryson
R4	Spieth	Hideki	Akshay	Hatton	Xander
R5	English	Brooks	Tom Kim	Keegan	Zalatoris
R6	Straka	Hovland	Sahith	Finau	Cam Smith

Some notes.

- The 8-year-old, yes, is addicted to chaos.
- So is the 5-year-old. Min Woo, Sergio, Hatton, Keegan, Henley and Finau is truly the wildest six-player grouping I can imagine. We're a Si Woo away from the cycle.
- I was convinced Mrs. Normal was going to take Ludvig No. 1 overall.
- I was so busy sorting through reigning major champs in the third and fourth round that I honestly forgot about Spieth, which is devastating.
- I hate to admit this, but my wife's team is excellent. Extremely high floor. And Spieth.
- I'm not as confident about my team's floor, but the ceiling is insane. I also have four guys who might miss the cut by five.

**“I’m not as confident about my team’s floor, but the ceiling is insane. I also have four guys who might miss the cut by five.”**

## The Reckoning

Here in Augusta, Rory admitted he is reading a book called ... wait ... The Reckoning. During Masters week? And the synopsis of the book is that everyone in it needlessly suffers because of one man's ill-advised and emotional choices at a place he seems to truly love? This seems a bit ... too on the nose!

## Greatest Showman

I walked a mostly empty ANGC on Tuesday evening, and stumbled into a terrific moment with the high king of content. Bryson, playing the back by himself at around 6 p.m., walked to the tee on 16 with patrons hollering normal things like, “break 50 this week, Bryson!”

He responded to every person who yelled at him and dapped up most of the folks gathered around 16 tee. They begged him to skip one, and he did to theatrical applause.

It's the kind of environment where Bryson has thrived in recent years.

The HKOC has become the Greatest Showman, and his one-act play on Tuesday evening was one of a thousand tiny moments that makes the Masters great.

**“break 50 this week, Bryson!”**

## 20 Humans in 10 Years

Can we have a conversation about Jack Nicklaus' record at the Masters in the 1970s? He lost to 25 golfers that decade. Like, across all 10 Masters.

Year	Finished	Behind
1970	8th	Casper, Littler, Player, Yancey, Aaron, Hill, Stockton
1971	T2nd	Coody
1972	1st	Nobody
1973	T3rd	Aaron, Snead (J.C., not Sam)
1974	T4th	Player, Stockton, Weiskopf
1975	1st	Nobody
1976	T3rd	Floyd, Crenshaw
1977	2nd	Watson
1978	7th	Player, Funseth, Green, Watson, Armstrong, Kratzert
1979	4th	Snead, Watson, Zoeller

So that's 20 unique humans. Player and Watson did it 3x and Tommy Aaron and Dave (not John) Stockton did it twice. Also, two different guys named Snead/Snead did it as well.

Simply one of the great 10-year runs in Masters (or any major's) history, although somehow not even Nicklaus' best 10-year run ... at a major ... in the 1970s.

Jack Nicklaus in The Open Championship 1970s									
1	T5	2	4	3	T3	T2	2	1	T2

## Essay 02 – Give Your Heart to No One

OK, I guess we need to talk about it. I've mostly avoided engaging with it up to now, but after the quote he gave on Tuesday, I know my efforts to dodge the discussion are futile.

So ... let's discuss.

Rory was asked the following: You made a comment when you left the Players that you have to be willing to get your heart broken, and you had a spell where you just didn't want to do that. Why do you think that was, and what have you figured out about that?

Here's what he said.

**“I think it's a self-preservation mechanism. It's just more of a thing where you're trying to not put 100 percent of yourself out there because of that. It happens in all walks of life. At a certain point in someone's life, someone doesn't want to fall in love because they don't want to get their heart broken**

**People, I think, instinctually as human beings we hold back sometimes because of the fear of getting hurt, whether that's a conscious decision or subconscious decision, and I think I was doing that on the golf course a little bit for a few years.”**

[Rory McIlroy]

Sometimes people ask why I enjoy covering Rory or why he's easy to root for. I mean ... [gestures at above quote]. This quote actually mirrors something I wrote at St. Andrews in 2022.

**The greatest risk of romance is tremendous heartbreak, and rarely has that ever been more apparent in golf than it was Sunday evening on the Old Course at St. Andrews as the 150th Open Championship came to a close.**

[CBS Sports]

I guess the follow up I would have for Rory — I wasn't in the presser on Tuesday because I was jamming with friends I haven't seen in nearly a year — would be, “How exactly does a golfer ‘put himself out there?’” That sounds like a non-golf and even non-sports thing to say.

I will ask it if he does a presser later this week,<sup>29</sup> but here's a version of the answer I imagine he would give. It's what I wrote about the vulnerability of golf after he won the Players and gave the quote above.

*If you've ever played golf, you understand the emotions roiling inside of you when that stupid thing doesn't go where you thought it would. And if you've been at a high level tournament late on a Sunday, you know it's about as raw as sport gets. About as unfettered and breathless as an arena can be.*

*There's not much like it because in no other sport do you have that much time to think*

*about how you are, indeed, very much alone on the stage.*

*It is, I presume, a bit like stand up comedy.*

*In stand up, you can play it safe, but you will probably never get anywhere. Or you can go for the joke or the bit — we all probably have our own examples of seeing comedians do this — and you may get the moon, but a lot of times you'll get a mouth full of gravel. We have all been in uncomfortable situations, stand up comedy or not, and we can feel our bodies fighting against those situations.*

*Now put a 7 iron in your hands and see what happens. Tournament golfers, maybe unknowingly, often fight against the discomfort of being the lead horse*

*This is what Rory means by being OK with getting your heart broken. It's an internal choice (almost an acceptance) to go for it, to put yourself out there, to hit the shots and try to do the thing. There are no statistics for this, and I realize all of it may sound a bit insane. But if you've watched pro golf at all, you can — because golf is such a mental and emotional game — almost see it playing out.*

[Normal Sport Newsletter | Issue 171]



READ >>>

10 Thoughts on Rory  
and the 2025 Players  
©Normal Sport.

In his Masters presser, Rory gave a good synopsis of how he has begun to view all of this over the last few years.

**“But I think once you go through that, once you go through those heartbreaks... you get to a place where you remember how it feels and you wake up the next day and you're like, yeah, ‘Life goes on, it's not as bad as I thought it was going to be.”**

**“... it's going through those times, especially in recent memory, where the last few years I've had chances to win some of the biggest golf tournaments in the world and it hasn't quite happened. But life moves on. You dust yourself off and you go again. I think that's why I've become a little more comfortable in laying everything out there and being somewhat vulnerable at times.”**

[Rory McIlroy]

<sup>29</sup> You cannot fathom how many times I raised my hand to ask this question but did not get called on. Maybe more than Nick Dunlap's shot count on Thursday.

My friend, Brad, who has been helping us on the marketing side, sent me this C.S. Lewis quote after Rory's presser.

**C.S. Lewis, in his book *The Four Loves*, puts it this way:**

**“To love at all is to be vulnerable. Love anything, and your heart will certainly be wrung and possibly be broken. If you want to make sure of keeping it intact, you must give it to no one, not even an animal.**

**Wrap it carefully round with hobbies and little luxuries; avoid all entanglements. Lock it up safe in the casket or coffin of your selfishness. But in that casket — safe, dark, motionless, airless — it will change. It will not be broken; it will become unbreakable, impenetrable, irredeemable.”**

[C.S. Lewis]

Sure, you can live your life guarded and reserved in self-preservation mode — but what does that do to the human condition or soul?

Lewis would say your heart becomes “resistant to all good and joy.”

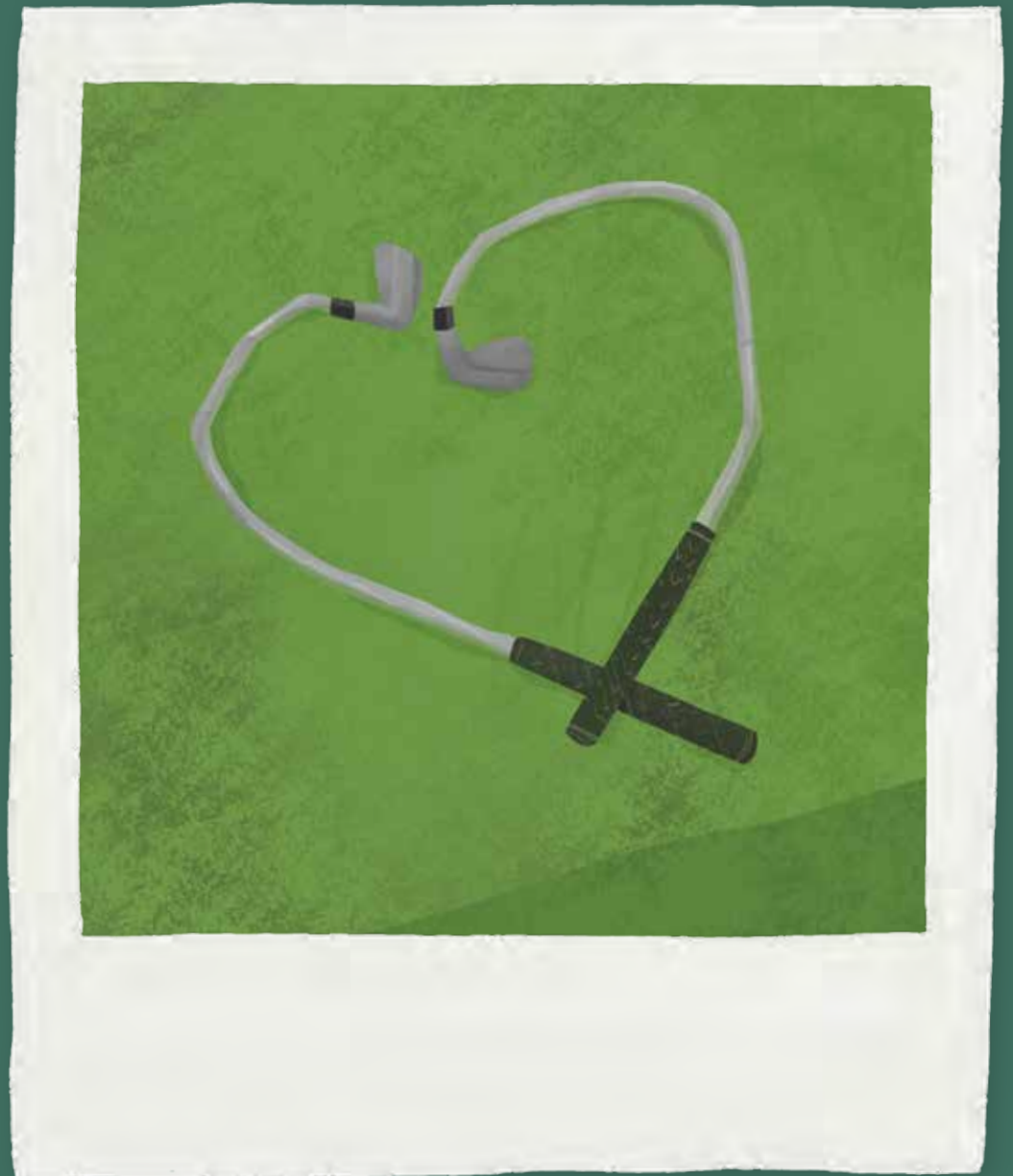
So many golfers — even (and maybe especially) the greats — seem like robots. They don't engage the emotional side of the game, and if they do then it's only to discuss the highs they get from roaring.

But that's not how we internalize fandom, is it? We enjoy the highs, sure, but we also commiserate the lows. And sometimes the latter can be more galvanizing for fans.

Rory, for whatever you want to say about his ability to talk himself into a pretzel or to play his way out of major championships, is a fan of the game. This is unusual! His experience of golf is closer to our experience of golf than almost any other pro. And he also happens to be the best golfer of the last 15 years.

I wrote on Monday about how humanity reigns at this place, and no all-time great has ever felt more human more often than Rory McIlroy.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>30</sup> Alley ooping myself for Sunday.





## Tie Knots

Let's talk about that Champions Dinner photo. I have some takes. Though none were quite as good as this one.



LOOK >>>  
The Masters 2025  
Champions Dinner Photo  
©The Masters.

Everyone just wants to know if Cabrera and Scottie swapped prison stories.

[@Reecepiecey, 1.23pm, 9 April, 2025]

1. I'm always amused at how much attention this singular photo gets every year. People are obsessed with it ... says the guy who is about to write 300 words on tie knots.
2. Speaking of! Scottie's tie knot is a tough scene. Maybe not the actual knot but how loose it is against his shirt. Not becoming of a champion golfer!

3. Craig Stadler's black shirt-green tie color combo is appalling! As my guy Mike Gundy once stated, where are we at in society?!
4. I am shocked (shocked!) to learn that Spieth has a lot going on with his outfit.
5. Fred Ridley ... perfect hair. Immaculate shirt-tie combo. Incredible look
6. Faldo remains an absolute unit. Somebody told me to look at Woosie (far left) and then look back at Faldo. Faldo looks like two Woosies!
7. Both Watsons look like they dressed for Easter dinner. We cannot have a yellow shirt-pink tie-green jacket combo. Expectations are not high for someone without enough sense to play Spieth and Reed at a Ryder Cup where they shot a best ball 55, but still.
8. Phil. Incredible stuff. Also, incredible placement, as Soly pointed out.

## SG, Last Decade

I went and looked at the best strokes gained numbers at the Masters over the last 10 years. Here's how to interpret the following numbers: Last year, Scottie had the most strokes gained (obviously, since he won).

Over the last two years, Scottie has the best SG/round numbers of everyone who has played each of the last two Masters. He also has the best SG/round numbers of anyone who has played five Masters over the last five years.

Here are your across the board leaders.

- 1 year – Scottie
- 2 years – Scottie
- 3 years – Scottie
- 4 years – Scottie
- 5 years – Scottie
- 6 years – Rahm<sup>31</sup>
- 7 years – Rahm
- 8 years – Rahm
- 9 years – Rory
- 10 years – Spieth

This is perhaps intuitive, but it still intrigued me. Rahm has had an underrated Masters career. His finishes: T27-4-T9-T7-T5-T27-Win-T45. No missed cuts, gained strokes every year and five top 10s in eight starts.

<sup>31</sup> Scottie has only played five Masters.



If Scottie's handiwork matched his footwork.

## Sprouts After Crossfit

On Tuesday, after getting the Bryson Experience on the back nine, I walked up to the big tree up by the clubhouse as the Champions Dinner started to unfold. I was unaware that there are festivities for the spouses of the players involved, and was surprised to see Rahm's wife taking photos with the 2023 champ and Mark O'Meara and his wife talking to Annie Spieth.

As I wandered around, all the players looked dapper in their jackets, ready for one of the more exclusive, special evenings in all of sports. Some normal sport vibes — men in jackets eating french fry burgers to celebrate perhaps the toughest achievement in their profession! — but all in all, a very cool scene.

I kept looking around, kept observing. Augusta National is such a vast and sweeping place but it's also so familiar and intimate. Both things are true, which provides evenings like this one with the right amount of pomp and circumstance.

And then my eyes found him. There, among these legends in green jackets who were telling tales of yesteryear, reminiscing about their past and projecting the future upon the still-20- and 30-somethings, was Jordan Spieth.

Except he wasn't wearing a green jacket. He wasn't wearing a jacket at all. He looked disheveled, in full workout gear, tennis shoes and shorts. There, right there in the middle of all these fabulous champions and their beautiful wives, was this crazy looking dad of two looking like he was more likely going to Sprouts after a Crossfit workout than heading to a dinner club where Hogan, Palmer and Nelson once sat.

**Our king.  
I wouldn't have expected anything different.**



## The Shots You Never Hit

On Tuesday's Shotgun Start episode, Andy said something that really resonated with me.

**“The beauty of Augusta is that it plays on these guys’ egos for 18 holes. That ability to have a game plan, stick with it, understand that when you’re in position that you’re able to shift those targets a little bit over because you have some helping contours or not that bad of a miss in one spot versus the dance of ‘I’m in the fairway, I’m in a perfect lie, I could shade this over but knowing this isn’t the spot to get ... aggressive.’”**

[Andy Johnson, SGS]

Golf is a game of humility, Augusta is a test of humility and humility, as it turns out, is Scottie's superpower.

As Andy noted, there is a lot of “just because you can do something doesn't mean you should” happening at this golf course. And of all the greats over the last 25 years, I think only Tiger has showed as much restraint with his lines and his decisions as Scottie.

I asked Scottie on Tuesday about how he thinks about attacking ANGC.

**“I think a lot of it's pretty fluid around the way you play the course because, depending on the firmness of the greens,**

**there's certain pins you can try to attack and there's certain pins you've got to steer clear of. There's certain spots that are really good when it's soft, and there are certain spots that are a little bit harder when it's soft. There's certain spots when it's firm where you know you have to be, and then the reverse, as well.”**

[Scottie Scheffler, 2025 Masters]

Scottie is at the middle of this Venn diagram.

1. Has all the shots.
2. Thinks through options in tremendous detail.
3. Applies restraint in how he plays (which LKD broke down in detail here).



WATCH >>>

Scottie Scheffler  
Dominated Golf Doing This  
©Golf Digest.

All pro golfers have one of the three. If you have two of them, you're probably a terrific champion. And all three? Well, that's for the all timers. Golf tournaments like this are often won not with an attacking mindset but a restrained one.

They are won as much with the shots you do not try as they are with the ones you pull off. Scottie is great at restraint and remains so disciplined.

It is the most underrated part of his game.



This spread is presented by Turtlebox.

## A Lot to Learn

Speaking of humility! Here is Scottie on what he's learned from Rory (and others) while out on Tour.

**“I think when you look at a lot of the players out here on Tour, I think there's a lot we can learn from each other.**

Rory, I feel like has always been someone who's played really freely. All the times I've played with him, he swings it really hard off the tee, and I feel like he does a really good job of playing free and playing loose at times.

I think there's a lot that I can learn from a lot of the guys out here. That was one of the things that impressed me the most and inspired me a bit when I first came out is I felt like there was so much I could learn by watching people do things.

Even though somebody may be ranked the best and doing this sort of certain thing, let's say I'm the best iron player and Rory is the best driver, in golf I feel like there's always somebody that's a little bit better at doing something than you are that you can learn from.

**There's a lot that I can learn from a lot of the guys out here.”**

[Scottie Scheffler]

Says the guy who has lost to nine golfers here over the last three years and won nine tournaments in 2024. Humility, I'm telling you, is a superpower.

## 34 Years

I stumbled into this leaderboard from 1995. I think it's so crazy that Phil Mickelson appeared on it and finished T2 at the same tournament two years ago.

CBS Sports	Score	Thru
Davis Love III	-13	17
Ben Crenshaw	-13	14
Greg Norman	-11	17
Jay Haas	-10	16
David Frost	-9	17
Phil Mickelson	-8	15
Steve Elkington	-8	14

I think a lot of golf fans generally underrate him and his career. I have him borderline top 10 ever, and if he wins another big event like this<sup>32</sup> I'll have to consider moving him into single digits.



High Flyer since 2004

## Friendship > This Dumb Game

As I'm sure everyone knows by now, Max and his caddie, Joe Greiner, split recently. There is some backstory there that is not salacious but is also not mine to tell. But the front-facing story is actually the more interesting one to me anyway

Here's what Max said on Tuesday.

**“I mean, it was not my choice so it sucked, but we always had a deal that we're friends first and friendship mattered more than the work thing, and he was wise enough to do what he did. But I was happy that he did it, because I would rather -- you know, at the end of my days we continue to be great friends than one of us resent the other for how hard this game can be on a relationship.**

**So it sucks because I just pictured always walking fairways with Joe. But again ... that was not the deal.**

**I would rather walk [through] life with Joe forever than this dumb game. So it's been hard to process, but also good in a way, because friendship does matter more than any of this stuff.”**

[Max Homa]

If I am interpreting that quote correctly, it seems like Joe ended things with Max because he cared more about their friendship than their professional relationship, and the latter was taking a toll on the former.

That takes a little wisdom and a lot of long-term love to leave the bag of someone who has made you a lot of money (and may make you a lot more).<sup>33</sup> I find the preservation of friendship over career achievement to be admirable.

<sup>32</sup> Or perhaps even LIV Bolingbrook.

<sup>33</sup> Max made \$462,000 at the 2025 tournament alone, which -- at 5 percent for a non top 10 -- is \$23,000 for a caddie.

## Bryson vs. Viktor

Who had a more unhinged presser on Tuesday between Viktor and Bryson? Here's the tale of the tape.

In one corner ...

**Things Viktor Hovland mentioned in his presser today: the movie 8 Mile, radial wrist flexion, researching aliens, sand types, swapping driver two days ago, viewing the world as a scientist, mowing directions at Augusta and “the beliefs you hold the most deeply can obfuscate you.”**

[Jamie Kennedy on X]

In the other ...

Bryson talked about testing different heads to see how they feel in his hands, which is a wild way to talk about swinging a golf club.

He also discussed microns and “the ends of parameters” as in “I think I'm looking at it in a much different lens than I have in the past where I'm tinkering, tinkering, tinkering, trying to find the ends of the parameters and go one extreme to the next extreme.”

Totally insane stuff all the way around. Need them duking it out in a pre-Ryder Cup presser together.

I actually really loved this quote from Bryson and find it to be excellent golf parent advice.



Spotted in player parking.

## Do They Love It?

**“I think for anybody... for any parent out there that wants to get their kids into golf, first off, you've got to make sure that they have fun doing it, but go put them in tournament competitions and see if they love it. Because I certainly fell in love with the competitive side of it. I love practicing, I love hitting golf balls, but I love competing as well, seeing how low I could go.”**

[Bryson DeChambeau]

I think “Do they love it?” is a tremendous starting point when it comes to being a youth sports parent. A close second — even at the expense of helping them get better — is “... how can I help them love it more?”

Shout-out Pádraig Harrington.

## My Official Pick<sup>34</sup>

OK, the pick.

Give me the multiple-time major champion  
Who has some real scars at this place ...  
But has been playing unbelievable golf  
this year ...

Even though his numbers suggest he  
hasn't won as much as he should.

Rory?

No.

Though I'll take it on Sunday.

Collin?

Yes. Dog booties and all.

<sup>34</sup> I have some regrets.



# Round 1

I Would Do It Again  
April 10, 2025

## Every Shot Means Something

My only disappointment in covering the Masters is that I wish every round had a day of buffer on either side so that we could sit with it, think about it, break it down and dissect it even more.

Every round at the Masters is like 5x more meaningful than most entire PGA Tour events, but we still only get 8 or 10 or 12 hours until we turn it back over to the next. So much happens, though, so many micro moments with macro implications. Every shot is meaningful, all 20,000 of them, from beginning to end.

## Leak in the Creek

Let's start with one of the most normal sport moments in recent major history (and maybe ever). One I could not have dreamed up even if I'd tried (which ... I would not have).

Q. At 13 there was an issue. Did you have an emergency? Obviously they cheered. Can you tell us what happened there?

JOSE LUIS BALLESTER: *Well, I completely forgot that we had those restrooms to the left of the tee box.*

Wait ... surely not. What?

Q. On the 13th tee?

JOSE LUIS BALLESTER: *Correct, and then I'm like, I really need to pee. Didn't really know where to go, and since JT had an issue on the green, I'm like, I'm just going to sneak here in the river and probably people would not see me that much, and then they clapped for me.*

*Probably one of the claps that I really got today real loud, so that was kind of funny.*

WHAT?!

Q. Were you concerned that there might be any blowback from that at all? Obviously they did see you, right?

JOSE LUIS BALLESTER: *They saw me. They saw me. It was not embarrassing at all for me. If I had to do it again, I would do it again.*

I would do it again?!

That's the choice there?

Not, "Oh, yeah I probably shouldn't have taken a leak in the most famous body of water in all of golf with 73,000 cameras in sight but I really had to go."

Instead, you're going with, Dare me to do it again!

Some real "what are you going to do stab me" vibes from JLB.

**Not, "Oh, yeah I probably shouldn't have taken a leak in the most famous body of water in all of golf with 73,000 cameras in sight but I really had to go."**

**I for one am shocked a kid from Arizona State with an upside down script hat peed in Rae's Creek.**

[@JoelMBeall, 3:15pm, 10 April, 2025]

I was actually out there for this round, which I don't think I've mentioned anywhere yet. I was watching JT, and I heard the applause for JLB but couldn't see what was going on because he was up the fairway and there were a lot of folks in the gallery.

I got back to the press building, and one of the British writers said, "What a normal sport moment!" which made me look up what happened, and I could not stop laughing.<sup>35</sup>



The grounds crew has replaced all of the water in Rae's Creek.

<sup>35</sup> And it's somehow even crazier in retrospect!

## The Boy Who Never Got to Grow Up

Just before the round started, the Masters dropped this incredible 2-minute video on what it's like to drive up Magnolia Lane, what it's like to start a Masters. They pulled in John Legend, and the entire thing is incredible. But there's a moment starting at 1:46 that rocked me a little bit.



WATCH >>>  
'Nerves'  
©The Masters.

It's Tiger talking about how meaningful it was to him to have Charlie there at his win in 2019. His voice cracks and then falters altogether.

Then he tries to collect himself before squeaking out, "Sorry ..."

That single "Sorry ..." is — I am not trying to overstate this for effect — the most human moment I have ever seen or heard from Tiger Woods.

How many hours and hours and hours has he been on our screens, our TVs, our iPads, our computers and our phones? All of it as this buttoned-up machine who gives only the most curated version of his heart.

Here, though? He kinda gives it all.

And when they throw Legend back into the foreground and fade away from Cat, you can hear the little boy who never got to grow up.

It's heartbreaking.

The strangest life and not worthy of emulation in so many ways. But everybody has a story behind the story, and I found it amazing that Tiger let us into his, even if just for a couple seconds.

## Those Weathered Hands

[Illustrator Jason here] I'm not a big ceremonial tee shot guy.<sup>36</sup> So I did not expect to cry on Thursday morning while watching the Masters honorary starters. Gary Player gives a familiar kick, and Jack Nicklaus follows with self-deprecating quips about just trying not to fall over when he puts the tee in the ground.

He manages to tee it up and his weathered hands interlock into position like they were made to hold a club. And the crowd quiets. Jack finds his stance, checks the target, waggles. His old age and jokes are far behind him.

The slight head turn going back just before the takeaway is what gets me. It's the same determined place I would see my grandfather go to after barely making it onto the tee box. As if to say, *I once was a player too*. And then he stripes it.

How can you not be romantic about the Masters?

**I'm not a big ceremonial tee shot guy so I did not expect to cry on Thursday morning while watching the Masters honorary starters.**

<sup>36</sup> Unless we're talking the RBC cannon.



I asked Gary Player when the last time he ate fast food. His answer included the following sentence: "I have a new girlfriend and I'm 90 years old! Tom (Watson) showed me the way." My work here is done.

@KVanValkenburg, 1:44 pm, 10 Apr, 2025

## Nicklaus, Palmer... Rose?

Here's an incredible Justin Rose stat. He has now led or co-led after one of the first three rounds of the Masters *eight times*. The only players ahead of him are Arnold Palmer (14) and Jack Nicklaus (13).

Rose is tied for third with Raymond Floyd, Gary Player and Jordan Spieth. All three have led or co-led after one of the first three rounds eight times.

Combined jackets for Palmer, Nicklaus, Floyd, Player, Spieth: 15

Jackets for Rose: 0

This feels impossible.

I'm also not totally sure what to do with it.

Tiger has never led or co-led after 18 holes and only once led or co-led after 36, and he has five victories here. So has Rose just been unlucky in his near misses, or has he done a bad job of finding the rhythm of the tournament and peaking at the right moment (at the end of 72 holes)?

I don't totally know. Though the answer is usually a bit of both. He led after three rounds in 2017 and could have easily won.

He led after two rounds in 2004 and shot 81 on Saturday.

What I do know is that I find myself rooting for him these days in ways I probably didn't before. I'm not totally sure why that is. I respect the career. Admire the fact that he's not only enduring at age 44 but thriving. Would it be difficult to take Bryson or Ludvig finishing second to him? Yes.<sup>37</sup> Would it be cool to see him win after this run at ANGC and his almost-Open at Troon last year?

Also absolutely yes.

The Masters	Finished
2010	-
2011	T11
2012	T8
2013	T25
2014	T14
2015	T2
2016	T10
2017	2
2018	T12

**“What I do know is that I find myself rooting for him these days in ways I probably didn't before.”**

<sup>37</sup> Little did I know just how difficult it would have been given who he nearly beat!

## A Hat Discussion

We need to come together as a country and have a discussion about hats. A hat discussion. Perhaps Pat Cantlay can mediate. But we cannot be doing this, any of it.

Why can we not just wear normal hats? Am I the old here?

Are we the baddies?



**“I have no shortage of bad (but likely) hat ideas.”**

[Jason Page]

## Top 10 After Round 1

You've all seen it by now. Many are saying Normal Sport invented it.<sup>38</sup> The "only Tiger has come from outside the top 10 after Round 1 in the last 20 years" stat. If that holds, that means your winner will almost certainly be one of the following ...

- Rose
- Scottie
- Conners
- Ludvig
- Hatton
- Bryson
- Rai
- English
- Day
- Bhatia

Scottie — who may hold the real lead — was asked about this specific stat after his round, and he didn't bite.

**“It's funny because this is a golf course where there's a lot of opportunities. There's a lot of opportunity over the weekend. There's a lot of opportunity on Sunday with where they put the pins. I'm a bit surprised that it's like that, but I wouldn't say that it can't be done.”**

[Scottie Scheffler]

Here's what I think: Yes, it's a golf course that has a lot of opportunity, but what makes it a perfect major championship course is the risk-reward nature of those opportunities.

So what happens — and the Fried Egg boys have talked about this a lot — is that you can go try to make 10 birdies and chase from behind, but the odds start stacking against you, and taking on pins and shots will inevitably lead to a 6 or 7 at some point and suddenly you're cooked again.

On the flip side, it's a course where it's "easy" to play away from pins and make pars.

That's why chasing is difficult but protecting or playing conservatively — especially when the stars are at the top after Round 1 — is a bit easier. And it's why it's incredibly likely that for the 19th time in the last 21 years, the winner will come from inside the top 10 after Round 1.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>38</sup> Nobody is saying this.

<sup>39</sup> Spoiler: NOPE!

## My Experience of Thursday

I walked on Thursday with Brendan Porath for most of the afternoon. We chased Scottie and Spieth around the back nine. It was wonderful.

I told Porath I can't remember the weather being this good for an entire Masters week. It's been absolute perfection the last three days.

Some thoughts...

- This will be unsurprising to those of you who listen to SGS, but Porath is a terrific hang. We have been friends for a long time and talked about pretty much everything, golf and otherwise, on Thursday. I feel more like a fan this year than I have over most of the last decade, which is awesome and hopefully comes through in the writing.
- Tom Kim is unimaginably slow. Unfathomably slow! "Tom Kim is slower than TV makes him seem" is the new "it's darker outside than it appears on our cameras!"
- Spieth hit his approach on No. 13 into the bushes, and as Greller climbed the hill to start looking for it, Spieth turned around and started hollering, "Don't look yet!" so his timer wouldn't start. The way he said it amused me — honestly, the way he does anything amuses me.

- No. 13 was hard today, by the way. Here's Data Golf from their Masters blog (which rules): *13th hole ended up playing over par (5.03), just the 10th time that's happened since 1983.*

- I heard someone say, "Jaeger just dropped off the lead. I told you he didn't have what it takes." Very brave take.

- We watched the Xander-Hovland-Scott group play No. 7 when all of a sudden, Phil (who was not in their group) is standing on the green with them, walking around while they were lining up putts. Wait, what is Phil doing staring at the sky like Bryson wearing those eclipse shades last year?

Turns out, he was looking past the 7th green at the huge scoreboard beyond. Phil had hit his tee shot on 17 so far off line, he was playing from *in front of the 7th green* back to 17 green. Incredibly, he actually hit the shot he was trying to hit, it missed all the trees as well as the board, and went on to make 5.

Total lunatic play, but also not unexpected. These are the kind of weird, fun moments you get all the time out on that course.

It is the best.

**This will be unsurprising to those of you who listen to SGS, but Porath is a terrific hang. We have been friends for a long time and talked about pretty much everything, golf and otherwise, on Thursday.**

## Scottie as Steve Jobs

When the NLU boys were discussing earlier this week how Scottie ran back his same Champions Dinner menu this year because “why change what’s working?” I thought of an interesting comp for him: Steve Jobs.

Scottie, at least professionally, almost never puts his energy into things that do not deserve his energy. And anything in his golf life that is not helping him work toward making perfect decisions in an attempt to win world class golf tournaments falls outside the bounds of what he gives his time, effort and energy to.

He reduces the noise better than any superstar in recent memory to the point that he can come off as a tad robotic or unengaged. At this point, I’m honestly surprised Scottie doesn’t wear the exact same thing to play in every day.

To be clear, none of this helps me with my job. I often want more from him because I believe there is more there. However, I admire his focus immensely. I think a lot of him as a craftsman.

Maybe the ultimate pro.

**Scottie, at least professionally, almost never puts his energy into things that do not deserve his energy. And anything in his golf life that is not helping him work toward making perfect decisions in an attempt to win world class golf tournaments falls outside the bounds of what he gives his time, effort and energy to.**



WATCH >>>  
'Happy Hour:  
2025 Augusta'  
©No Laying Up

## Fred Couples Beat Rory

Fred Couples, who is 65 years old, beat Rory McIlroy, who won Pebble and the Players this year. Golf is so so dumb.

Where do we begin with Rory?

I’ll walk you through what I was feeling.

I’m walking off the course and back to the press building as he’s playing No. 9. He hits that spinny, hold-y shot on 9 to go out in 33, and I’m thinking (but definitely not saying),

*Dude, he solved it. That’s his worse nine on this course (by far). He’s playing adult golf. He’s playing Scottie golf. They may do two laps around this field together this weekend!*

Great up and down on 10, played 11 perfectly, driving the absolute piss out of it. Easy 4 on 13. Hits that held off three-quarter shot into 14 to 9 feet and has that putt to get within three of the lead at the time and into solo second.

It ... went poorly from there.

I do wonder — legitimately — if anyone has ever touched the green with their second shot on 15 and gone on to finish +4 on the final four holes.

I’m sure it’s happened, but it can’t have happened very many times.

Two things are easy to say now.

1. Scottie doesn’t make 7 on 15 from behind the green. I get all the slope and speed and all of it. Just can’t make 7 there.

40 All of this is amusing to look back on. It did not feel amusing in the moment, though.

Not in this field. It is reductive to say that Scottie wins Masters because he doesn’t make the mistake Rory made on 15, but it’s not really *that* reductive.<sup>40</sup> Counterpoint: Scottie doubled 10 on Saturday last year with a horrible approach long. Counter to the counter: He did not also make another double two holes later. In fact, he made an eagle just three holes later.

2. Jack said Rory walked him through his game plan shot by shot by shot and he agreed with it all. “I didn’t open my mouth! I wouldn’t change a thing!”

Then he said this:

*“The discipline is what Rory has lacked in my opinion. He’s got all the shots. He’s got all the game. He certainly is as talented as anybody in the game. But if you look, go back and see his history the last few years, he gets to a place, a lot of times an 8 or a 7 pops up, and that keeps you from getting to where he needs to go.”*

Prescient.

Was hitting that pitch on 15 a bad and undisciplined decision? I don’t know. The outcome was bad, which doesn’t necessarily mean the decision was poor, but it just seems like a bit of a dodgy place on the course where — you’re playing great! — you need to just get out of there with 5 and get to the house in the 60s.

As has been pointed out, 17 was worse (!) because 17 just seemed less committed overall. Just a lot sillier. That’s the time to grit your teeth and get a 70 on the card. Compounding errors lead to T27 finishes.

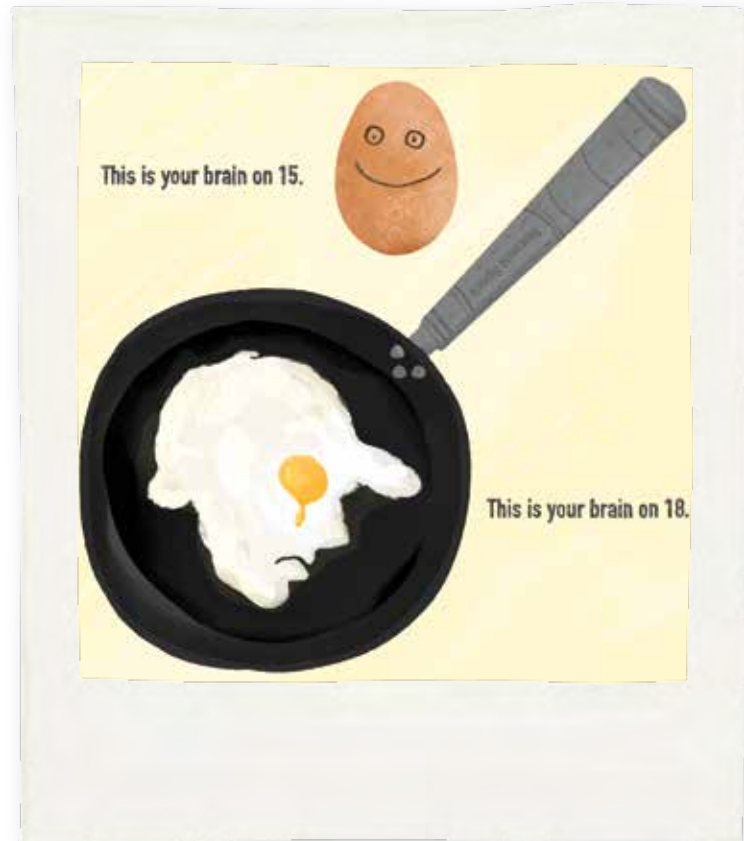
It's all infuriating obviously, but that's also what makes this place great. Because it's not really about the golf, is it? It's never really been about the golf with Rory and Augusta, has it? If it was, he'd have four jackets in his closet.

I wrote about this on Monday, but the Masters is often barely about the golf, which is why it remains so elusive, so maddening and such a place of ghosts for one of the best to ever do it.

We will for sure talk ourselves into a 67-66-68 finish <sup>41</sup> or something silly like that,

but the truth is that rebounding from seven down here (and four to the guy who's won two of the last three) just doesn't happen. And I don't think it'll happen again this year either. <sup>42</sup>

It was all right there. Adult decision after adult decision for 14 holes. Golf shot after golf shot. He had it. And then he did not. Augusta is nothing if not mentally and emotionally taxing, and he has proven over and over that this challenge is the one he struggles with the most.



<sup>41</sup> 66-66-73

<sup>42</sup> This wasn't exactly KVV writing off JT at Southern Hills, but also not that far away! It was also all fair. It makes his win that much more extraordinary. That this is how he did it is truly outrageous.

## Nick Dunlap

Justin Rose beat Nick Dunlap by 25 shots on Thursday. Let that sink in.

The final numbers on Dunlap.

Nick Dunlap	SG
Driving	-4.87
Approach	-6.70
Around Green	-3.36
Putting	-1.48
Overall	-16.41

I ... don't know that I've ever seen that overall number before. Also, if you didn't see it, you should go watch his tee shot on No. 3. It made me gasp.

## One Round in the 60s

OK, I'm not done on Rory. Here are his last seven first rounds at the Masters.

72 / 71 / 72 / 73 / 76 / 75 / 73

One round under par. One!

He has one (ONE) first round in the 60s out of his last 14. Sometimes we talk about this stuff and you're like "oh ... yeah ... hmm" but then you see it on paper, and you're like "holy crap!"

**“Tough day for Nick Dunlap, who carded a 90. Dunlap is the third player in Masters history under the age of 50 to shoot 90 or higher in a round.**

**Charlie Kunkle, Jr. shot 95 in 1956. Frank Souchak shot 90 in 1954”**

[Justin Ray on X]

## Random Nuggies...

- I love how the greens flow into tee boxes at ANGC, even on holes that do not lead into each other. See JT's approach on No. 7, which he did not hit that far off line. He's nearly on top of the guys hitting off No. 3! Augusta National feels like a golf playground in this very specific way.
- One of the most amusing things — at least to me — is being out on the course without my phone and nobody has changed Spieth's score on the leaderboard for a while, and all you're thinking about are the most unimaginable spots he ended up. Like, you expect them to put an 11 up on No. 7 or something. True theater.
- I loved this quote from Freddie on how much ANGC inspires him.
- I went on the Masters podcast with Marty Smith on Thursday. We had a wonderful convo about Round 1 but also about what the Masters has meant to us over the years. A trio of generational athletes made appearances on Thursday: Tom Watson, Aidan Hutchison and ... me.
- The Fireballs logo / colors remain ridiculous.
- This got me.

“Are you sure?.”

“Yeah Johnson, we are. We need you to go piss in Rae's Creek.”

[@ANTIFAIldo, 6:48pm, 10 April, 2025]

**“I think about it all the time. You know, if I could have won it one more time it would be the greatest upset in the world of golf, but I didn't. But that was really my goal. But still, 65, still get to come back. It's a fight. It really is a fight.”**

[Freddie Couples]

Describe golf better than, “It's a fight. It really is a fight.” You can't!





# Round 2

A Vinyasa on Pink Dogwood  
April 11, 2025

## Believe?

Just beyond lunch on Friday afternoon, I paced Amen Corner as the tournament started to take on its form. Men in the exact same logos as every other man, each of them thinking they are unique. Women in small dresses and large hats. Children scurrying about as the sun began to pound. Right up next to the rope stood a family of three, two of them in black hats with white block letters. They were not logoed. I had never seen the hats before.

As they turned around, I took a peek.

All they said was "Believe."

Rory McIlroy took his stance on 12.

I don't know if I can.

## A Vinyasa on Pink Dogwood

We started Thursday with the very normal moment of an amateur golfer taking a pee in a creek right out in the middle of the most famous golf course on the planet, and we got a version of that — a much different version, but a version nonetheless — early on Friday morning when the tournament leader started walking down No. 2.

I looked up at the TV in the press building as Rose stretched to the sky and then ... wait ... he ... got on his hands and knees with his face pointed back toward the first tee box like he was going to do a vinyasa in the fairway of a sliver of land somebody once entitled "pink dogwood."

Ostensibly, Rose was removing the sunscreen from his hands, though eschewing the traditional method of using ... you know ... a towel.

An amusing moment in a week overflowing with them, and it led to one of the great tweets of the tournament.

**"He's praying towards Royal Greens golf & Country Club in King Abdullah Economic City."**

[@ANTIFAIdo, 9:30am, 11 April, 2025]

**We started Thursday with the very normal moment of an amateur golfer taking a pee in a creek right out in the middle of the most famous golf course on the planet ...**

## The Best 71 in Golf History?

Nick Dunlap followed his 90 on Thursday with a 71 on Friday that could have been better. He had it all the way to 4 under on the day before making bogey at the last three holes. I was desperate for him to get it to the house in the 60s, mostly because it would have amused me to see somebody miss the cut without a single round in the 70s or 80s.

That cannot have ever happened.

Dunlap had some incredible quotes afterward about how his trainer went and bought balls from Target that he hit into the woods at his rental house, but the one that got me was this.

**"I had more of a knot in my stomach today than I've ever had starting a round of golf."**

[Nick Dunlap]



Overheard at Moe's, "That Nick dun lapped hisself."

Biggest stage in the sport, and you go out believing you're going to bomb. Imagine doing a set as a musician or a comedian — the biggest crowd you've ever had — with no clue how it's going to go but all the belief in the world that you're going to end up on your face.

That's brutal, and I respect him for showing up and grinding something — really, anything — today at ANGC.

This also begged the question of whether you would rather get to 160 by shooting 90-70 or 80-80. In a poll I put out, the overwhelming majority said 90-70, which is insane to me. Insane!

Sure, you shot 70, but you *also* shot 90 at a major.

## The LeBron Effect

You know how everybody on ESPN redefines LeBron's legacy after every quarter of every big game? I find it to be absolutely preposterous, and yet I find myself doing the exact same thing with every Masters.

Rory shot 72 yesterday with all the momentum in the world? *He's cooked! No juice. Doesn't have it!* Rory shot 66 today on a day when he absolutely had to have it? *I honestly think he could end up as one of the 12 best players of all time.*

This plays out with so many different players in so many different ways, and while I think it's pretty unjustified after the second quarter of Lakers-Warriors Game 3 of the Western semis, it actually might be at least a little bit more justified here at ANGC.

The biggest event, once a year, and you may only play in one or three of them or maybe six or eight if you're really lucky and great. So yeah, it does feel fair to change the legacy traj of different guys on a day to day basis, although we still probably do it a bit too often and with more conclusiveness than we ought.

## 40 Years

Bernie, man. I didn't think the most emotional moment I would have on Friday would be a 67-year-old man walking between two green lines over to a little shingled hut where you write numbers on a piece of paper.

Langer won the Masters the year I was born. I was three weeks old when he put on his first green jacket. I just turned 40 last month.

And so, in literally seeing the passing of time in his life and knowing that he would never do again what he once was able to do, I could feel it in myself. That is a heavy thing, one I rarely pause to grapple with but that always leaves me wobbly.

**Langer won the Masters the year I was born. I was three weeks old when he put on his first green jacket. I just turned 40 last month.**



## The Most Important Shot of Rory's Career<sup>43</sup>

The second into No. 13 could feasibly end up being the most important shot of Rory's career. Is that hyperbole? Maybe, he might lose by seven. Also maybe not, he might win the next three majors.

Here's the thing I'm having trouble reconciling after two days: Do we trust the decisions he's made at this course through 36 holes?<sup>44</sup>

Obviously, the decision on 15 on Thursday was dicey, and 17 in that same first round was rife with uncommitted shots. But are we positive he made great decisions on Friday, or did he just get good outcomes?

Here's what he said about the shot into 13.

**“When the ball was in the air, I was like, 'You idiot, what did you do?' It's a pin that even if you do hit it into the hazard, it's ... not a routine up-and-down, but it's a little easier than, say, where the pin was yesterday in that front section. Yeah, I rode my luck a little bit with that second shot, but was nice to take advantage of it.”**

[Rory McIlroy]<sup>45</sup>

That is ... concerning and something to watch over the next two days. A harbinger of what's to come, or the twist of luck he needs to finally snap the last part of the Rubik's cube in place?

His golf has been extraordinary this week. Full stop. Even with the gaffes on Thursday, he's first in ball-striking and third from tee to green. Arguably as good and (mostly) as smart as he's ever been at Augusta National through the first two days.

He uses the word “resilience” all the time, and he did it again in his presser to describe his bounce back from yesterday's disappointment. He is a different golfer than he used to be. More shots, more grit, more of everything.

He has the aura of a champion right now. It feels different than before (I am for sure talking myself into this ... and also it does feel different). And honestly, there is a silver lining to Thursday's finish. Because it's probably for the best that he doesn't lead outright at this point.

It might all get to be a little much.

Maybe it already is.

<sup>43</sup> And also, like, the fifth-most important of the week.

<sup>44</sup> I tried to ask him about this, but I was never called on in the presser.

<sup>45</sup> I think I heard him use the term “rode my luck” about 39 times throughout the week, which I guess is always how it was going to go.

## Even if You Know You Shouldn't

Oh yeah, we're just getting started on Rory. Here's as honest a take as I can give you: Of course I want Rory to win the Masters. Of course.

Yes. That would be the coolest.

I am a fan of golf, golf history and of Rory McIlroy. However, I struggled to find the emotion of him and this place on Friday because I had mostly given up the narrative on Thursday after the 72. I wrote on Friday morning about how he was probably cooked at this tournament. And just as much as I want to enjoy who wins these events, I also want to be correct about my takes.

Those takes ...

In the short term: Nobody comes from outside the top 10 to win here after the first round, and Rory was outside the top 25 after Thursday's clunker. In the long term: I have mostly stopped believing that he can win this tournament and have started to buy into the fact that, 10 years from now, he will give a depressing interview like Ernie Els once gave about this place.

Again, in my position covering the golf, it is sometimes difficult to reconcile what you know you want with what your takes have been.

In the end, though, what the heart desires will always win out, and the heart desires to believe in something despite the possibility (perhaps the probability) that this will go down as the most crushing one of them all.

I am, for the record, ready to get blindsided and absolutely obliterated by what's to come this weekend. You can put that on a hat in block letters!

Why would anyone choose this? Why would anyone choose to engage in such painful and avoidable behavior? Well, the first answer to that is when you grow up on Spieth, everything else feels much less self-destructive than it really is.

The second answer is actually one I think Rory gave before the tournament started.

**“At a certain point in someone's life, someone doesn't want to fall in love because they don't want to get their heart broken. People, I think, instinctually as human beings we hold back sometimes because of the fear of getting hurt, whether that's a conscious decision or subconscious decision, and I think I was doing that on the golf course a little bit for a few years.”**

[Rory McIlroy]

Is he talking about himself ... or about us?!

Is this time actually different?

I don't know. It sure didn't seem that way on Thursday night!

What I do know is that Rory is trying to stare down predictions by Jack Nicklaus, Gary Player and Tom Watson that he was going to win this week, sweep aside an opening 72 that dropped him seven back of the lead and carry around the burden of these expectations (these borderline *presumptions*) of everyone in golf.

If he's able to do all of that and finally put a dagger in the demons that have plagued him for so long here ... if *this* is actually the major he finally wins after all this hoopla and all this prognostication and all the ways he has had his soul crushed here (even this week!), well, that will have been worth all the hoping, all the waiting, all the dream dashing that's been done.

A 66-68-68 finish at this place with this board at this stage of his career, with the U-Haul of baggage he drags down Magnolia Lane every second week in April?

How can you not feel a nervous thrill about this weekend?

Even if you know the ending will most likely leave you wondering why you did it.

## “Believe.”

Even if you know you shouldn't.

## A Brief Corey Conners Take

SMartin, KVV and I had a conversation earlier this week about which top 50 player we would bet our lives on would never win a major. I said Corey Conners. It's not personal at all. He just doesn't have it. Great ball-striker, but not a dog, not somebody who's going to go take a major championship away from Bryson, Rory and Scottie. That will be the entirety of my Corey Conners coverage this week.

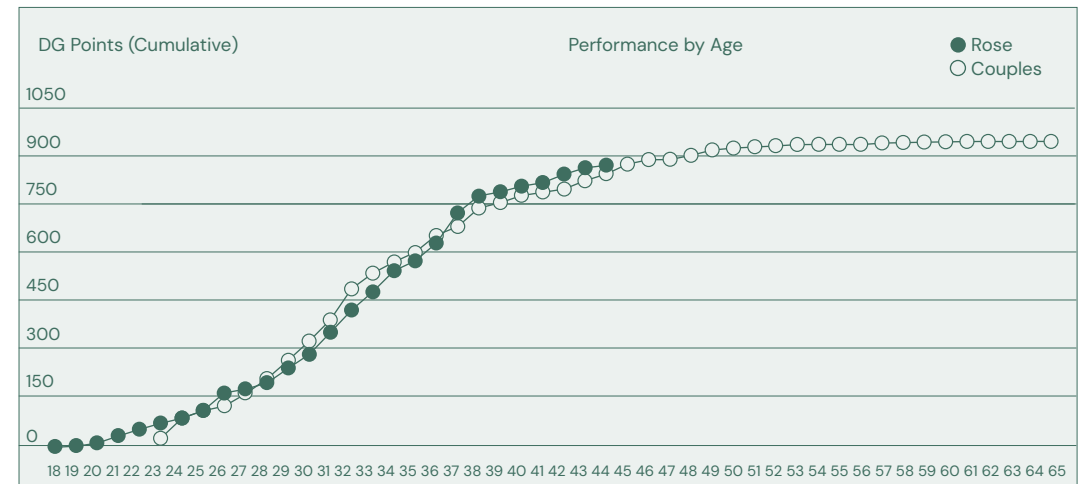
## Justin Rose = ... Fred Couples?

Two great Justin Rose comps today: The first came from Data Golf when they compared Rose to Fred Couples. One major, double-digit PGA Tour wins. They tracked the Data Golf points by age, and the two lines are basically one line.

The other one came from the No Laying Up boys, who asked whether Rose or Adam Scott has had a better career. Again, one major, double digit Tour wins for both. Obviously

Rose has the Ryder Cup advantage since Scott can't play in them.

Post-Masters update: I would probably take Rose over both of them. Partly because of the longevity – he's been in our lives for nearly 30 years now (which is wild) and nearly won the last two majors – and partly because of the Ryder Cup stuff, which is maybe unfair to Scott but it kind of is what it is.<sup>46</sup>



<sup>46</sup> This did lead to the idea from someone that the U.S. team and European team should both get to select one international player every year to play for their team in the Ryder Cup. They don't have to play, but once they're selected they can't ever play for a different side.

## The Eventual Winner Will Be...

Here's the second round version of my "only Tiger has won from outside the first round top 10 in the last 20 years" stat.

**“37 of the last 38 Masters winners have been in the top 10 through 36 holes. Average 36-hole position of last 20 champions is 3.6 and 27 of the last 30 Masters winners have been within four of the lead entering Round 3.”**

[Justin Ray on X]

If that last stat holds, your 2025 winner will be one of the following.

- Rose
- Bryson
- Rory
- Connors
- McCarty
- Lowry
- Scottie
- Hatton
- Rasmus
- Hovland
- Day

That looks right.

I don't think anybody is coming from outside of that group to win the Masters.



## ANGC is Exhausting

This is not an original take but more of a reminder. Rory said it after his round, and Michael Kim noted it on Twitter.

Here's his quote.

“Shane Lowry mentioned how pumped he is to get here and then when you play the tournament, you realize how brutally demanding this place can be haha.”

[@Mike\_kim714, 2:14pm, 11 April, 2025]

It is difficult to describe if you haven't been but easy to understand if you have. Even when it's not hot from a temperature standpoint, the place just sucks everything out of you. You are bone tired and soul weary when you leave every evening, whether you played in the tournament or not.

Now stack five hours of intense decision-making on top of that, and the physical + mental + emotional test is incomprehensible.

Bryson talked about trying to balance all of this in probably my favorite quote of his this week.

**“[Not getting ahead of yourself] definitely can be tough at times when you're thinking about it. I think grounding yourself is super important, realizing where you're at, knowing how many holes you have left, knowing there's a lot of golf left.**

**Not getting too far ahead of yourself is important, and that's something that you have to learn over the course of time with a lot of experience.**

**You have to put yourself in position. You have to fail. You have to lose. You have to win. You have to come from behind. You have to hold the lead. All those expectations and feelings have to get conquered in your mind.**

**That's why this game is played between your ears.”**

[Bryson DeChambeau]

## 13 + 15

I'll say it, I think the new 13 and 15 are kind of sick. We don't see the roars we got used to seeing, but they are truer from a risk/reward standpoint than before. Depending on the wind, it can actually be difficult to give yourself a putt for 3 on 13, and 15 is straight up a beast.

I'm still a bit undecided if I like them as much as before, but they have been good so far this year. There have been just three eagles on 15 and four on 13 so far through 36 holes. That feels more testing than those holes playing basically as a combined par 9 like they used to.



ANGC home viewing experience.

## Watching on Sunday

Langer and Couples — combined age: 132 — grinding to make the cut on Friday was tremendous. Both of them missed it by one, and both gave exceptional quotes afterward.

Langer told SVP that Augusta National feels like his living room. It feels like home to him. What a wonderful way to put it. Here's what Couples said.

**“But for me, when I get in Saturday night, everything starts to spin in a good direction. It's not any tournament -- the British Open is very fun. Other people can say, 'Hey, I'm from Scotland, the British Open is the greatest.' The Masters is the greatest tournament of all time. It's just so unique. Unfortunately I'm going to come out and watch a little bit tomorrow. I don't know who I'm going to watch, but I just -- I'd like to say I wasn't good enough. That's really kind of -- I just came up short. 77 was not a great score.”**

[Fred Couples]

Where else do the folks who just lost stay to watch who wins? What a unique and fascinating event this is. Something that all sporting events aspire to but none ever achieve.

Imagine somebody missing the cut on Friday at Bay Hill and just staying around all weekend, maybe going to Harry Potter Land for a few days, then returning just to walk around and watch who wins on Sunday.

## The Playground



The broadcast was an electric factory for the last 45 minutes on Friday. Here are the last three things that happened.

- The best player alive sat on his butt in the woods next to a tree and his ball while waiting for a ruling about whether he could get relief (I think) from some wires running parallel to the 18th fairway.
- The most explosive player in the field who also has stated his disdain for ANGK in the past, dropped out of third place by missing a 1-foot putt on No. 17.
- The 2015 champion, who was laboring to make the cut, yelled f-bombs about losing a stroke to the trees on 18 and his beleaguered caddie told him, "Get over it."

If you made me choose, I would say Scottie sitting inside of an overhanging tree on No. 18 made me laugh the hardest.

This is not only a professional golfer playing a four-day event for like \$20 million, but also one of the best golfers of the last 25 years who also has won two of the last three of these things!

**He looks like my 5-year-old after a tough day on the playground!**

## Scottie, the Dog

Speaking of Scheffler, he had himself a pretty bonkers back nine when it came to the actual golf as well. Here's a full list of things that happened.

- He hit a shank (maybe semi-shank) on 11.
- He hit a ball long that disappeared into the azaleas on 12.
- He hit a ball into Rae's Creek on 13.

He somehow played those three holes in even par before plunging ahead with another birdie at 14. There is such a doggedness there, that is perhaps even more obvious when he doesn't have his best stuff (which, at 25th in ball-striking, he does not this week).

There have been Fridays in the past — Spieth in 2015 and Scottie in 2022 come to mind —

when it felt like we were watching the end of the tournament. Sure, you didn't know exactly how it was going to go ... but also you kinda did.

This year? That's not the case. And while watching history like we saw in those years is fun, it's probably even more fun to have the best player of the last three years right in the middle of a loaded top of the board going into Saturday.

The tournament doesn't run through Scottie right now because he's a half step slower than he was a year ago, but the even better news is that the tournament doesn't run through anyone, which means the next 36 should be absolutely incredible.<sup>47</sup>



<sup>47</sup> I somehow undersold this.

To: The azalea bush behind No. 12. From: Golf Twitter



# Round 3

There Is No Going Back  
April 12, 2025

## The Shot of His Life<sup>48</sup>

When I was in college, my father and I used to come to this tournament and sit next to the massive pine on No. 16 quite close to the spot where Tiger chipped in at the end of his win in 2005.

I loved craning my neck to look at the leaderboard on No. 6. I loved trying to figure out what the leaders were doing and if anyone would make a charge. I loved watching everyone play through No. 16 and doing the math on what it would take to win.

But most of all, I loved squinting up the hill on No. 15 as player after player stared down into this roiling nook of the property. Where a 3-3 run might win you a jacket or at least give you a chance. There was nothing like watching Tiger or Phil or Ernie pace the top of that hill, asking themselves what they needed and if they had what it took.

On Saturday, many years after those college trips with dad, I walked up the left side of 15 because I wanted to remember what it felt like to look back at the hill, at the last time in a round when players feel like they have control of the board.

There are levels to the silence at the Masters for sure, and "the crowd favorite is over the ball with at least a handful of legacies hanging on every swing and the tournament rumbling toward its natural end" is a special kind.

It sounds like you are thinking through a megaphone. You barely want to breathe.

I never saw it land, but I certainly saw him walk. I looked toward the middle of the green, but I could have closed my eyes.

The explosion said it all. Another 3 in play.

"It's over," I said out loud to nobody but myself.

That feeling, that magical feeling of galleries trying to will someone home and that same person hitting a shot like that, well, it certainly makes it feel like it's over. Even if it's not.

"The shot of the fu\*\*\*\*\* tournament," gasped the gentleman in front of me. "No," I thought. "That was the shot of his entire life."<sup>49</sup>

## There Will be Tears

We know one thing on Sunday with Rory is irrefutable: There will be tears. We just don't know why. I once told Rory that he reminds me so much of Federer. Every tournament, he said to me, he absorbs the crowd, receives everything from those around him, but he doesn't give them much. Then, at the very end — like Fed collapsing at Wimbledon and crying on the grass — it all comes pouring out.

That will happen again on Sunday.

Either 11 years of frustration and fear and fury will flow and sink down forever into these hills, or he will weep his eyes out at the best chance he'll ever have to do the only thing he ever wanted.

We are at the point of no return.

You know it. I know it. Most importantly, he knows it. The question: Is everyone ready to hang on for five hours while all of that teeters just above the void?

<sup>48</sup> Until Sunday, of course.

<sup>49</sup> LOLLOL





The hats are inevitable.

## The Best He's Been Here

This is, almost without question, the most complete he's ever been. He's driving it like an absolute monster — his first two drives on Saturday were a combined 700 yards — but it's that 75 percent hold-y wedge that's going to help him win the tournament. It's the shot we used to scream about from 125 and in. He figured it out, though, and I've never seen him hit it better.

Is this really happening?

## Does He Want The Fight?

The answer through 54 is a resounding, "hell yes." One person fairly close to Rory told me this week is the most relaxed he's ever seen him in his career. I don't know why that's the case, but it does undoubtedly seem to be the case.

It's also the case that he is hitting championship golf shots.

No. 1, No. 4, No. 5, No. 9, No. 11, No. 12, No. 15 (!!) and No. 17 come to mind from his round on Saturday. All just proper big boy championship shots.

You know Bryson's going to brawl, all hopped up on nothing but driver shafts and desire.

Current strokes gained ranks this week.

Rory McIlroy	SG
Driving	2nd
Ball Striking	1st
Tee to Green	1st
Overall	1st

He's going to walk to the first like Tyson in his prime. Punching the air, dancing as he goes. He must be a nightmare to play against, to have on your hip for 18 holes.

Rory said on Saturday night that he would stay in his own world. With Bryson off doing whatever Bryson does, Rory said he would be in a cocoon throughout the day.

Rory wanted the whole damn world on Saturday afternoon. Will he bring that same energy to Round 12 with somebody who already cleaned his clock?

**You know Bryson's going to brawl, all hopped up on nothing but driver shafts and desire. He's going to walk to the first like Tyson in his prime.**

## The Hardest Round of His Life

How difficult all of this will be. Bryson has so little to lose. He's already playing with house money, with nothing but time ahead. Rory knows his chances are waning and that this one is the best he's ever had. How mentally difficult it will be to get through 18 holes with the burden of your own dreams, not to mention everyone else's.

One of the most difficult things Rory has to contend with every second week in April is how desperate ANGC's membership is for

him to join their ranks. For him to win a jacket that matches all their own.

Scottie talked before the tournament about how much freedom Rory plays with. How flow-y he is. That will never, ever feel tougher than it does on Sunday afternoon.<sup>50</sup>

On Monday, I wrote about how this week is so good because it sometimes feels like it's barely about the golf. It's about what happens when your mind is mush and your emotions are on fire ...

**To me, [the Masters] means a lot of things, but one of my favorites is that I find it to be a crevice into which I can look to see what these men I cover are truly all about.**

**The Masters is somehow both grandiose and intimate. The entrance to the biggest stage in the world is also just another side street in a broken down old town. Because of this juxtaposition, the tournament seems to compress its contestants' souls in ways we rarely see in sports.**

**I want Rory to birdie the 9th on Sunday to go up four on Scottie and Bryson with just nine holes between him and the immortal slam and nothing but terror in his eyes. Because where else can someone who has the entire world feel such fear about obtaining what he has not?**

<sup>50</sup> Somehow, I still wildly underestimated how true this turned out to be!

**Time passes, opportunities elude, the entire thing was smoke.**

**For minutes, though, maybe even seconds, golf gives us – the Masters provides us – what we know we want the most.**

**Competition matters. Beautifully struck shots are great. But in the end, when the week is cracked open and everyone is bare, it is the humanity this event engenders – all the fear and joy and sorrow and elation we can possibly contain – that is truly undefeated.**

**Sometimes you get it all in the same round. Sometimes on the very same hole.**

**Nowhere more so than every spring at this wonderfully terrible place.**

[What Does the Masters Mean to You? Normal Sport]

And now that exact scenario — Rory making birdie at No. 9 to go up four on Bryson and Scottie — may somehow actually happen? <sup>51</sup>

<sup>51</sup> And then it did.

## The Antagonist

Bryson is the greatest character. Almost cartoon-like. Whipping up the fans on 16 and 18, running up the crosswalk to scoring, slapping hands like Cal Ripken making the rounds at Camden after he broke Lou Gehrig's consecutive games played streak.

Hitting balls under a full moon. Pounding bags and bags of balls, nearing quadruple digits for the week.

Individual sports are constructed with a universe of characters, and there have been few better ones over the last decade than Bryson. He is easy to hate and has also somehow become almost endearingly easy to love.

Mostly though?

I appreciate his absurdity and how it helps my own personal chess board as I move pieces around and think about how they compare and contrast, and about how brilliant it is when everyone's not the same.



**He is easy to hate and has also somehow become almost endearingly easy to love.**

## Zootopia

Both players were surprisingly subdued in their pressers. Rory's reminded me of the opposite of 2018 when he got within three of Pat Reed and immediately said on national television that all the pressure was on Reed.

The implication at the time was clear: *The tournament runs through me.*

There was none of that today. Not even close. He talked about watching Zootopia with his daughter and what he's trying to do on Sunday.

**"I've talked about trying to chase a feeling out there, you know, if I can have that feeling. And if I can go home tonight and look in the mirror before I go to bed and be like, 'That's the way I want to feel when I play golf.' That, to me, is a victory."**

[Rory McIlroy]

Hopefully, not the only one.

There will be a moment, though, before that 2:30 p.m. reckoning on Sunday, when it hits him. This happens to everyone, whether you want it to or not.

Scottie wept, not believing he was enough.

What Rory does with that 2x4 of emotion that hits him between the eyes will determine how the rest of his career goes. He has preached resilience throughout the week, but we haven't even reached the difficult part yet.

<sup>52</sup> Allegedly.

<sup>53</sup> Update: Nooooope!

## 18 Holes of History

So much golf history hinges on Sunday. If Rory wins, he becomes the second player since 1968 to win the career grand slam.

Men who have walked on the moon<sup>52</sup> since 1968: 12

Men who have won the career slam since 1968: 1

He also ties Brooks with five major championships and immediately becomes the best European golfer of all time. He ends any questions about who the best player of his generation is. He probably makes a leap up into the top 15 golfers of all time with a lot of runway ahead and a 9,000-pound gorilla off his back.

So nothing much.

If Bryson wins, he ties Spieth with three majors and suddenly, he is the Brooks to Scottie's Rory in their generation. Two U.S. Opens are nice — especially at Pinehurst and Winged Foot, big boy courses — but a Masters is a different thing altogether, and this will reclassify him when we talk about legacies.

Also: Rory might win three majors this year, if he wins this one. Take the lid off the hoop, and start watching 'em go in from all over the yard.<sup>53</sup>



## When Does it Feel Over?

Speaking of watching ‘em go in, I always go back to the 2014 Masters. Bubba went ham on Thursday and Friday, and it truly felt — I can remember feeling in the moment — like we were watching the end of the tournament in real time. It took two more days for it to play out, but that is exactly what happened.

That’s how Rory’s 3-3-3-3-3-3 barrage felt on Saturday. A run of 3s that I’m not even sure Steph would have believed.

That run, too, was a reminder of why Rory gets all the adulation when it comes to golf. “Glazing,” is I believe what the kids and LIV stans call it.

I’m sorry, but nobody cooks like Rory cooks, and we got the full menu on Saturday afternoon. With apologies to Min Woo, Rory is the preeminent chef in the game, and nobody is close.

You want to know why he’s un-quittable? Sure, some of it is the self-awareness stuff and the humanity, but some of it is because he’s the ultimate supernova.

One tell on this, by the way, is when he starts looking around quickly, like, “Wait, did you guys see that? Did you see what I’m doing?” Watch this video from the Ryder Cup.



WATCH >>>  
 'Rory McIlroy Pulled Off This  
 Chip Shot | 2023 Ryder Cup'  
 © Ryder Cup

He doesn’t give you much, but the message is unmistakable ...

I’m F’n here, and I’m not going anywhere.

**[Jason here]:** The best part about this is that Bryson literally said the same about getting the crowd going on 16: “Rory was kind of moving forward. He was at 12 under, and I was kind of chasing a bit. When I made that [putt on 16], I looked up and I said, kind of as a statement, like, ‘You know what, I’m still here. I’m going to keep going. I’m not going to back down.’”



Somewhere in the Crow’s Nest.

## Rors-chach Test

I asked on Saturday why you love (or hate) Rory. So many responses and messages and emails. I loved reading them all.

KVV, unsurprisingly, said it best.

**“Flaws are more interesting than perfection when it comes to transcendent athletes. Rory's talent is prodigious, but the fact that he's also made mistakes, said/done things he's regretted, cried and strutted, laughed and lashed out, makes it feel like an actual human was blessed with unreal golf talent.**

**Like in stories when a god would fall for a human and the result would be a child with remarkable gifts but the same flaws and emotions as a normal person.**

**Wrestling with that conflict is a story as old as storytelling.”**

[Kevin Van Valkenburg]

Whew, art. And it gets at the reasons I hold as well. The humanity, the flaws, all of it. I wrote about this very thing in our book, Normal Sport 1, back in 2021 after the Ryder Cup that made him weep.

*“There's a tremendous moment from Rory's Chronicles of a Champion Golfer that you might view as filler or a throwaway but that I think about a lot as it relates to his life now. It's a home video of him at Christmas. He's opening presents with his parents, and he's just tearing into gift after gift that delights him. The usual stuff men our age now desired at that age then. He's probably nine years old at the time. A CD player, maybe a Sega game, a Nike box with something in it. For a nine-year-old boy in 1998, it might as well have been Blackbeard's treasure.*

*And then at the very end of the clip, there's a moment where he just starts crying and wiping his eyes with his shirt, and then he runs over to hug his dad. As a dad of kids this age myself, I was struck by how overwhelmed he was.*

*I think at the center of Rory McIlroy there is an enviable tenderheartedness and a well of gratitude that has almost always exceeded his ability to understand it or even his desire to accept it. Life, and especially that life, normally quells all of this, but for some reason – perhaps even unbeknownst to him – the flicker remains.”*

[Normal Sport 1]

Rory is perhaps the ultimate golf Rorschach test. He is a bit like KD in that way. The reasons you love him are the exact same reasons your buddy hates him. Someone changing his mind with more information is wise to some and a flip flopper to others. Skipping media is passion to you and petulance to another. The amusing shots at LIV are leadership to one contingent and immaturity to a different one.

He can kind of be whatever you want him to be, but to hate him because he's flawed, because maybe you expect the human being to match the level of golf is to expect something that nobody is capable of, that no one would even expect of themselves.

**“He's probably nine years old at the time. A CD player, maybe a Sega game, a Nike box with something in it. For a nine-year-old boy in 1998, it might as well have been Blackbeard's treasure.”**

## Not This One

I want Bryson to win more majors. I just don't really want him to win *this* major. If you want Rory to win: You should look at Bryson's approach play. It's currently 45th. He hit just nine greens on Saturday. If that happens again, it's game, blouses.

If you want Bryson to win: He got his bad round out the way, kept himself in it, and he's a much better closer than Rory is. Rory will care more. Bryson will care the right amount. That's the path for him. I can't believe we actually have to watch this play out.

## Wait ... What?!

As Jason pointed out to me, this is the opening page of *The Reckoning*, which is the book Rory is reading this week. Feels insane!

**“On a cold morning in early October of 1946, Pete Banning awoke before sunrise and had no thoughts of going back to sleep. For a long time he lay in the center of his bed, stared at the dark ceiling, and asked himself for the thousandth time if he had the courage. Finally, as the first trace of dawn peeked through a window, he accepted the solemn reality that it was time for the killing.**

**The need for it had become so overwhelming that he could not continue with his daily routines. He could not remain the man he**

**was until the deed was done. Its planning was simple, yet difficult to imagine. Its aftershocks would rattle on for decades and change the lives of those he loved and many of those he didn't. Its notoriety would create a legend, though he certainly wanted no fame.**

**Indeed, as was his nature, he wished to avoid the attention, but that would not be possible. He had no choice. The truth had slowly been revealed, and once he had the full grasp of it, the killing became as inevitable as the sunrise.”**

[*The Reckoning*]

## Four for Five<sup>54</sup>

According to Justin Ray, Rory has led five times outright at the 54-hole mark of a major championship. He has won four of those, but they all happened over 10 years ago.

2011 Masters — Lost  
2011 U.S. Open — Won  
2012 PGA — Won  
2014 Open — Won  
2014 PGA — Won  
2025 Masters — ?

<sup>54</sup> But the one he missed is, uh, a big one.

## The Carrot of His Career

I thought on Saturday about how this wouldn't have meant as much to him in 2011 as it does right now. How, in a lot of ways, this carrot of the Masters has perhaps preserved the ambition of his career. KVV and I got to talking about (personal) paths not taken on Saturday morning, and as happens at tournaments like this, we begin to tie our lives to what's playing out on the course.

During our chat, I was reminded of this quote from Rory about La La Land.

**“I cried so much, like when they [Ryan Gosling and Emma Stone] do those two scenarios of what might have been—life with him or life without him—I was like phhhhhhhh! And I'm watching it with Erica thinking, Jeeze! What if things had been different for us? But the music ... all of it ... it's just great.”**

[Rory McIlroy | *Golf Digest*]

If he wins that 2011 Masters, maybe he's the same complete player he is now, but also maybe not. Paths not taken are paths not taken, but I suspect he's grateful for how it all turned out and how much winning a 5th major — this major — would now mean.

<sup>55</sup> But Team Rose nearly did, even though he was seven back (!) after he and Rory both completed the 10th hole.

## There Is No Going Back

And now we're at the end. There is no going back. Saturday felt like Sunday. How do we recover?

It has already been the best Masters maybe since I started covering golf, and its closing act somehow portends to be the greatest of them all. The implications are staggering.

There are only two options: Rory is either going to win the Masters or have his heart shredded (again) by Bryson. Those are the only two scenarios. Corey Connors is not walking through that door. Neither is Scottie. Or Ludvig. Nobody.<sup>55</sup>

It's Rory or Bryson. That's it.

It feels like Phil at Kiawah. You reached the point of no return in the third round where it was like, *Well, this is going to be historic either way, and I have no idea how it's going to go!*

After Rory birdied No. 5 on Saturday, I started feeling that way. He's either going to win the Masters and restart the chase, or he's going to have his soul stomped on by the YouTube Golfer in front of a world that's partly desperate for that very thing.

## Dreams

I walked the last eight holes with Rory's group on Saturday. There were backups on 16, 17 and 18. Rory leaned on his club, the solo Masters leader, staring up in space.

What could he have been thinking?

What could he have been *feeling*?

Was he considering the nervous child who clearly had the full suite of skills from a preposterous age? Was he thinking about the 8-year-old version of himself who chipped into the washing machine?

Was he thinking about the 21-year-old who lost it all?

Or the 3-year-old with the finish of a future champ?

Dreams don't really come true.

Not the ones we have as kids.

Everyone grew up dreaming of being a big leaguer, of making the winning putt at the Masters. It doesn't actually happen, though.

But sometimes it does. Very rarely. Almost never. But sometimes.

Why do you love him? Why does this matter to you?

Why does this matter to me? Why do I care?

Everyone has a different answer.

I think for me it's the ways he wrestles with his dreams. It's the almost embarrassment that he was given all the gifts.

It's that he has recognized that the preservation of his own humanity was more important than these gifts all along, but also ... he still wants all the spoils. That's a difficult truth. The toughest reconciliation.

Perhaps because of this, he has, as KVV pointed out, warred and failed. Stumbled and fallen. Triumphed and trusted. Lost his cool and lost his way. He has rarely (maybe never), though, lost himself.

And on Sunday, when he gets to the first tee with the Large YouTube Golfer at his back and No. 5 within his grasp, you know that he will know everything that's at stake.

And that it will be more difficult for him than maybe any golfer in recent memory to quiet all the noise, to quell all the voices.

He is not a robot.

This is why you love him.

He is the most human superstar in sport.

The washing machine was full of dreams.

On Sunday, no matter what happens, the water will flow.





# Final Round

The Future and the Past  
April 13, 2025

## Essay 03 – The Future and the Past

It was August 2023. We met for dinner at the Four Seasons in Atlanta. I do not know if I'm supposed to tell this story, but it is important — perhaps paramount — to help explain just who Rory is.

He ordered a steak. I ordered a salad. We talked for three hours.

At one point, he told me that he'd read parts of *Normal Sport 2*, the second book we published. When he got to the part about St Andrews, the 150th Open that left him reeling in disbelief, he looked down and then back up.

"I wept," he whispered.

I could barely hear him. I leaned in, and he said it again.

"I ... wept."

Rory cries a lot. All the time, it seems. It is his greatest trait, the one that makes him whole. I think it's why we love him, why he's meant the most.

The boy who bawled his eyes out 14 years ago after kicking away the best chance he thought he'd ever have is now a man. Time has rolled on, but deep down he hasn't changed. He remained a boy who dreamed. The preservation of his own humanity.

On Sunday, all those dreams came true.

Rory lived a thousand lives in a single afternoon.

So many shots made the slam feel like it was within his grasp. Then the very next one somehow made it disappear. It was a round in which golf history seemed to shift with every

strike. A day that forced even those who have been on the Spieth rollercoaster for a decade to beg for some relief.

We picked him up on 10 when a birdie made it five. I looked at Jamie Weir and said, almost matter-of-factly, "That's it. It's over."

It was not.

I should have known. I wrote the whole thing on Monday! You think that you have a Masters, until it slips between your fingers. That's what this place does, and it would never be a rout.

It felt as if it would, though, and so I walked up to the phone. I quivered as I dialed the only number that I know.

My wife answered. "Could you ... put Jude on the phone," I barely could get out. "I want to tell him something."

My 11 year old's voice nearly broke my heart.

He sounded so young. Like the boy that Rory was when he watched Tiger win the 1997 Masters with his own dad.

"Hey buddy," I choked.

"I wanted to make sure you were watching. This one will be special."

"I'm watching, dad. I think Rory's gonna win."

I'll never forget that line for as long as I will live.

I don't remember what I said after that, but I wanted him to know that even in the midst of all the chaos, I was thinking just of him.

He will have his own dreams someday, and he won't remember much. But the greatest

Masters of his lifetime at an age when the Masters means a lot. That one he will remember.

And when he's 21 or 31, I want him to carry around the memory that I loved him enough to try and share the moment from 1,000 miles away.

My hands shook as I hung up the phone just as Rory's hands would shake for the next hour and a half.

I never thought that he would do it, if we are being honest. The mountain seemed too tall. The task beyond belief.

"You know, you've had Jack, Gary, Tom, Tiger, you name it, come through here, and all say that I'll win the Masters one day," said Rory. "That's a hard load to carry, it is. It really is."

Four doubles in a week, and he kept on bouncing back? How is it possible to have that much resilience at a place that has crushed your heart, one that you have learned to fear?

What shot will you remember?

I walked with my friends throughout the final nine. On 14, with too many feet for par,

I looked up at Porath. "If he misses this I don't know that he can recover," he noted.

I think that I agreed. I didn't know if I could either.

Behind the tree on 15, KVV and Neil were just a few feet away. KVV hugged me as I told him that I had called my son. We are emotional basket cases so much of the time. Brothers in that sense, we have cried some tears together.

"Is he going for it," I asked him, before Rory wailed away.

As we listened for a noise that would determine the rest of his career, KVV closed his eyes. The world seemed to pause for an extra beat or two. When he opened them, all he found was me screaming in his face.

The shot of his life.

Surely — after all these years — *this* was it.

He must have played 100 holes today. It could not have just been 19. Did any of this happen, or will we wake up on Monday with another round to go?



LISTEN >>>

Sounds of the Masters

Episode 989

©No Laying Up

**"Hey buddy," I choked.**

**"I wanted to make sure you were watching.  
This one will be special."**

**"I'm watching, dad. I think Rory's gonna win."  
I'll never forget that line for as long as I will live.**



He stood on 18, never knowing that he would need to play it more than once. The roar just up ahead was so loud that we thought that Pat Reed had somehow holed out.<sup>56</sup> That wasn't it, though. They had just put Rory's red 12 on the massive board.

The patrons lost their minds.

And then Rory may have lost his from 125 away.

Did you think that it would be easy?

That 11 years would turn to vapor at the snap of his fingers? That the second man to win the slam in the last 55 years would be straightforward and simple?

Surely you did not.

It ended in a flash with the ghosts all gone for good.

Masters champion, grand slam winner, greatest European of all time, the best day of his extraordinary golf life.

The euphoria was expected, but it was more primal than I imagined.

The weight of the world is heavy.

Expectation has a price.

The kid caught his dream, though, once he became a man. And then the boy cried into his young girl's face and told her that he loved her. The shots on 15 were great, but remember that forever.

"What is it you love about Rory McIlroy?" is a question I have been asking and considering throughout this entire week.

I guess the bad but truthful answer is that there isn't just one thing.

Those last two approach shots into 15 — of all the holes! — I'll think about those for a long time. The one on Saturday was great, but the one on Sunday belongs in a museum. Of course he missed the putt.

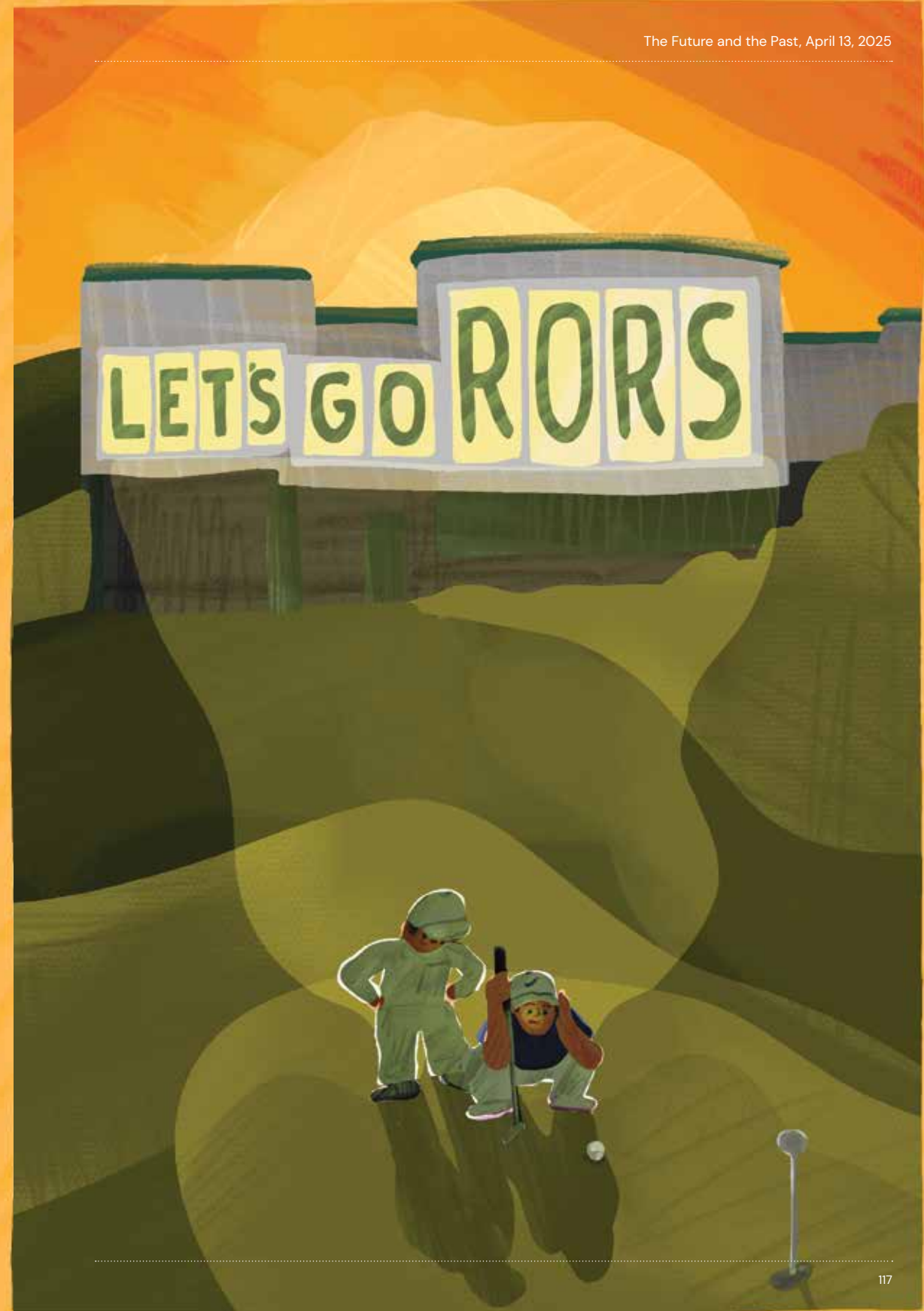
That was always how it would go.

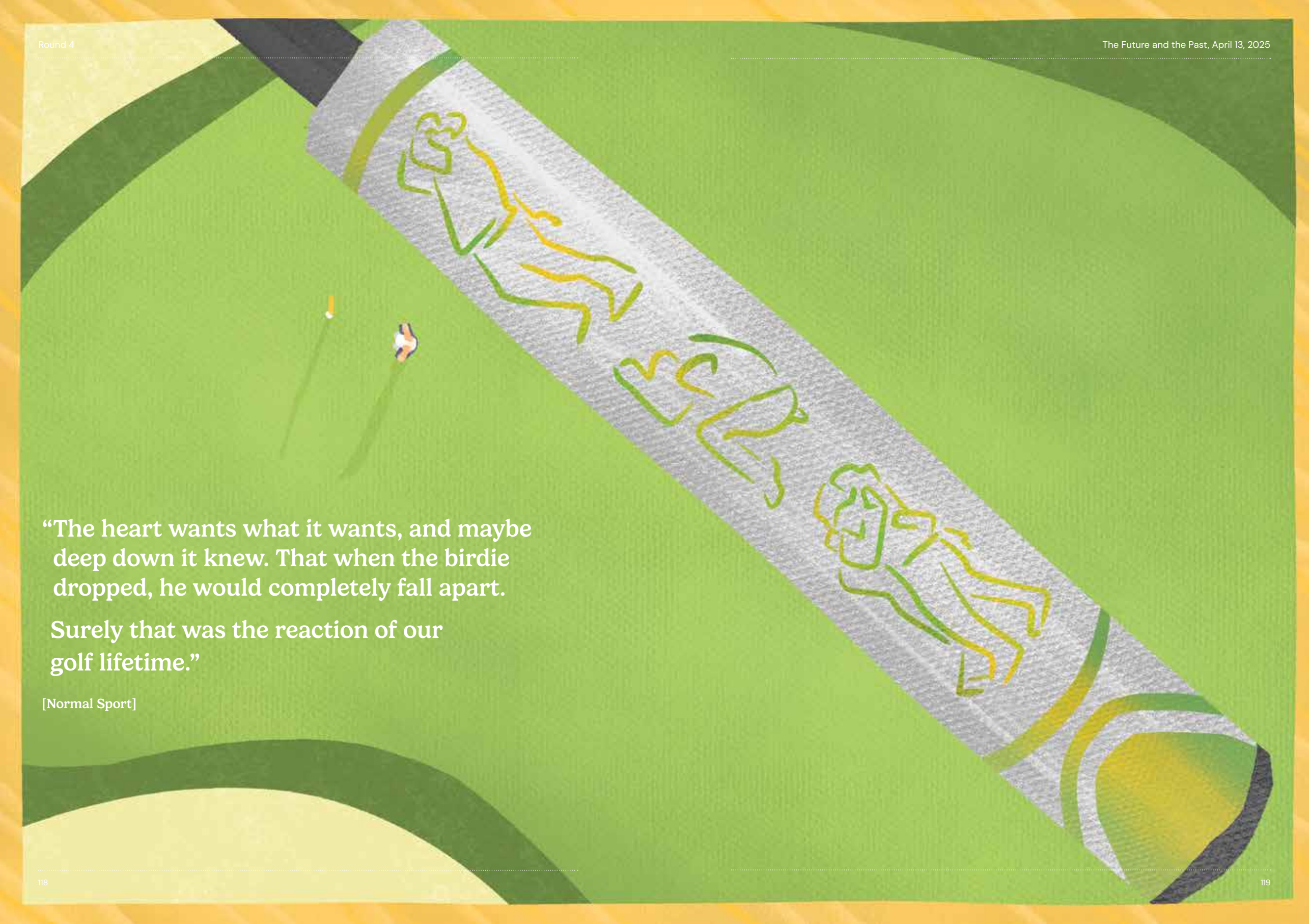
I have never felt this way about a stupid round of golf. Desirous of an outcome, yes, but why? Why do I care about this kid from Northern Ireland who was given all the gifts? It should not mean this much.

But the heart wants what it wants, and maybe deep down it knew. That when the birdie dropped, he would completely fall apart.

Surely that was the reaction of our golf lifetime.

56 Again.



The background is a stylized illustration of a golf course. It features a large green area representing the fairway and a smaller green area representing the green. A golfer is shown in mid-swing on the green. A path of footprints, drawn in yellow and green, winds across the scene. The overall style is modern and graphic.

**“The heart wants what it wants, and maybe deep down it knew. That when the birdie dropped, he would completely fall apart. Surely that was the reaction of our golf lifetime.”**

[Normal Sport]

The burden gone forever, the demons  
in the dirt.

At the jacket ceremony with Scottie, he  
choked up once again. As he addressed  
his daughter, he couldn't continue on.

"Never give up on your dreams," he  
squeaked out. Nobody could speak.

Finally, at the presser, he had to take a pause.

**"I've known Harry since I was seven years old,"  
he breathed out. "I met him on the putting  
green at Holywood Golf Club. We've had so  
many good times together. He's been like a big  
brother to me the whole way through my life."**

[Rory McIlroy]

The greatest of his generation. It's  
indisputable now. One of the best to ever  
play. Up until the very end, it was difficult  
to believe.

Then his face hit the ground and the shape  
of golf changed.

It is unlikely that he will change with it.  
Because the most unique and admirable thing  
about Rory McIlroy is not about the slam.

It's that he embraces his own heart.

Professional golf is a meat grinder. It will jade  
you and wear you down until you have nothing  
left. Superstars of sport most — not least, but  
*most* — of all.

He somehow has preserved not only a joy  
for the game, but a vulnerability that's unique.

In a different world, he is watching somebody  
*he* admires, calling his own kid from a landline  
on the other side of the country, delighting  
in the day.

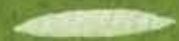
In this world, though, he got it all.

He's in the pantheon.

With the golf gods now.

And among them, surely, he must be  
the most human.







# The Aftermath

The Stuff of Dreams and  
The Weight of Time

April 15 - 17, 2025

## Opening a Vein

Here is a vulnerable truth: On some days, I think, *Wow, I am the best writer in the world. There has never been another like me!* And on other days, I think, *Wow, I am so unqualified to string together sentences that I should not be hired to teach a kindergarten class on the topic!*

And there's really no in between. I'm never in the middle of that, which, I suspect, is probably how a lot of us live in our respective professions, even if we would never want to say it out loud. Basically our version of Rory's back nine on that Sunday.

I say all that to say that the above essay – The Future and the Past – wasn't even writing. It doesn't count as writing. It was something else altogether.

Here's how things work at the Masters. On Sunday, once everyone has finished their paragraphs and sent their work in to editors and bosses, one by one, they pack up to leave a building so ostentatious by golf standards that it makes every other media center at every other event look like it exists below the poverty line.

It is (obviously) a slow march out with a final swipe of a sandwich or those free peanut M&Ms. Hugs and handpounds all around for those who you feel like you've been at war with for the last seven days. "Will you be at Quail Hollow?" Things of that nature.

As everyone left, I almost had to put sunglasses on at 11 p.m. that night because I just cried my eyes out through writing that entire piece. That is what I mean when I say it wasn't even writing.

An interview of Wright Thompson I once read comes to mind.

He wrote one of the seminal Masters pieces in the history of the tournament – something I do not pretend to get within striking distance of – and he was asked about it by Chris Jones.

**"I cried the entire time I was writing. It was in the Augusta National press room. I was a mess."**

Literally me.

**"The story ranks at the top of the list in some ways, but, in other ways, it doesn't. Maybe writers will understand what I mean. I didn't write that story. There was no craft. I opened a vein."**

[Wright Thompson]

*There was no craft. I opened a vein.*

Maybe a couple of them. One as a dad. One for the last decade of my career covering one of the best who's ever lived, always having to write losing stories, never really getting to write winners (at least not at the majors).

Every sentence made me cry, but the stuff about my son certainly the most. I do not know why I called him. I made a note to myself to text my wife before I went out on the course to tell him to watch, and then in the middle of all the mess, I saw the phones and thought, "Oh, well I can just tell him myself."

I'll never forget it, though.

In an interview from 2023, Derek Thompson said the following.

**"One of the things that scares a lot of young writers is that they feel like they have to get in the tuxedo. That's not what people want. People love to be talked to as if it's a friend, a friend with a twist. Your favorite writer is a friend who's a little bit smarter than you, a friend who's a little bit more perceptive of human relationships than you. But who writes in such a way that the sentences click into your self-talk."**

**When we recognize greatness or genius or just good writing, that recognition is automatic. It's like seeing a friend in a crowd, seeing yourself in a mirror. It happens in a moment before recognition almost. It's the shock of recognition. And to do that, you have to write at the level of your audience, not just trying to impress them."**

[Derek Thompson]

I believe – quite deeply actually – that this is true. And that's why, often – not always but more often than most – I like to just find a vein and bleed a little bit. Too much is messy. Too little is cold.

But the right amount?

Well, the right amount is, in and of itself, proof that one is in fact very much still human.

## Our Guy

[Let's pick back up with my dispatches from an Augusta Starbucks <sup>57</sup> and then a couple more from when I got back home]

If we're being real here, I've been on tilt since 13 on Sunday. Never really got off it. Just rode it all the way through, cried my eyes out while writing about my boy who watched The Boy do the thing we never thought he'd do.

It hit me deep into Sunday night.

I was firing off all the hyperbole that my rationale (or what was left of it) would allow me to fire off, and I called it the greatest Masters of my lifetime.

### The greatest Masters of my lifetime.

[@Kyleporterns, 8:23pm, 13 April, 2025]

I have no idea if this is true. It *felt* true on Sunday. Still does today.

It's definitely the most *unique* Masters of my lifetime.

But then I saw that Webb Simpson retweeted it. I have no idea why that's what got me. I respect Webb a lot, find him to be reasonable and rational and all the things I am not. I truly think this maybe was the best Masters of our lifetime.

When else are we going to see someone slay an 11-year dragon? The first Masters in 90 years for the slam. And the guy who won it had to go through his own personal hell about 20 different times ... on every hole.

That will never happen again.

Not for us anyway.

Not for those of us who grew up on Tiger from a distance but for whom Rory became our guy from up close. Every media era has a guy.

Rory is ours.

### This is our 1986.

[@Shanebacon, 6:26pm, 13 April, 2025]

Personally, that takes all the twists and turns you would imagine. It has all the ebbs and flows professional relationships take on. But he never really stopped being our guy, which is why you saw and heard what you saw and heard on Sunday night.

Were we rooting? Of course! Inwardly, always. But even outwardly at times on Sunday. As my friend Joe Musso said, *Yeah no rules yesterday. We were all on one team.*

I thought Bacon said it well.

**"It's funny to be happy for a stranger, someone you don't know. Sports are weird like that. But I've followed Rory as my life has evolved and changed and people of consequence become a part of your life.**

**You watch their highs and lows and eventually feel them as they do. I'm just so happy for the guy. I'm happy he did it. I'm happy he put all that to bed. And I'm excited for what is to come. Rory, man. Rory Freakin' McIlroy."**

[Shane Bacon]

## Crazy in His Eyes

Normally, starting is so easy for me. You just open up a page and begin with the champ. In this instance, though, there are so many places to go, so much ground to cover. I don't really know where to begin.

KVV always tells me to start small, though, so let's do that here.

What were you thinking when he pulled a club on 15 and started looking around with crazy in his eyes?

From just up the left, I couldn't see his view so it looked a little like he had about a 90-yard slinger to even see the green. It was obviously less than that, though not a *lot* less, and the shot is just outrageous.

What I notice about it: When it lands, it does that side sauce thing that all slingers do,



WATCH >>>

The Final Five Holes  
Every Shot from Rory McIlroy  
©The Masters

and the pin is right in its line of sight. It's just tumbling end over end like that weird dance all the youths are into, gunning for the cup.

### Nantz nailed it: "The shot of a lifetime!"

Except Rory was on his 17th lifetime of the round.

The walk, too. Both of his walks on 15.

We'll replay those for as long as YouTube is a company. They were so much like the Tiger walk from 2011. Shoulders quiet, stride controlled but the club holsters say it all.



<sup>57</sup> I had to visit a different one than SMartin – too much celebrity at his for me to focus and concentrate.

Manifesting a Masters x Normal Sport collab, one fake (but plausible) hat at a time.

## The Best 73 ... Ever?

It must have been the greatest 73 in the history of golf. Imagine trying to play the toughest major championship golf course in the world with the most prestigious prize in sports on the line. Now put on a 225-pound weighted vest and step up to the 10th.

**“Knot in your stomach. Haven't really had much of an appetite all day. Tried to force food down. Your legs feel a little jelly-like...**

**It's such a battle in your head of trying to stay in the present moment and hit this next shot good and hit the next shot good. You know, that was the battle today. ... I'd like to say that I did a better job of it than I did. It was a struggle but I got it over the line.”**

[Rory McIlroy, 2025 Masters]

Tommy Fleetwood called it, “possibly the greatest mentally resilient achievement ever in our sport.” That’s the part that will almost certainly be lost to history when we look back on this major. In 30 years, nobody will remember what a war it was. Not with Rose or with Bryson or Lowry. Only with himself.

The last 11 years jammed into the last nine holes. All the ups and downs. All the heartbreak and jubilation. All the poor choices saved by pure talent. All the shots. All the mistakes. All the gifts. All the throwing them away. All the dragging them back out.

That back nine was the full Rory, as a player and a person, condensed into two hours of the greatest theater we have ever seen. He’s better than everyone he’s ever looked at, but like the rest of us in golf, he so often eschews the book to simply follow his heart.

Rory may actually be who everyone thinks Spieth’s supposed to be.



## I Want it Anyway

You know what a normal golfer does? One whose mind isn’t racing with historic implications. Lays up on 11. Hits it over the green on 13. Punches out on 15. Hits the middle of the green on 18. Wins by five.

He literally said it!

**“So, yeah, anytime I hit it in the trees this week, I had a gap. Even the second shot on 7 today, which I probably shouldn't have taken on. Harry was telling me not to. I was like, 'No, no, I can do this.'”**

[Rory McIlroy, 2025 Masters]

The easiest way to experience his humanity is by watching him weep his face off on the 18th green. But if you’re paying attention, if you’re watching closely, you can see it in every decision, every desire. He does what he shouldn’t and doesn’t do what he should.

Even his golf is human (although many of the shots are not).

My youngest son once came to me and my wife and asked for a LEGO set he couldn’t live without. We told him, “Buddy, you know that won’t fulfill you. You just got one for Christmas and you’re already tired of it.”

He looked at us, “I know, dad,” he said. “But I want it anyway.”

That’s exactly how it feels like Rory plays.



Have you too been caught staring off into the distance since Sunday? We’ve got a card for you.

## Birkdale Remixed

There are so many tiny moments at every major but especially the Masters. All of them mean so much. Two that stood out, and both reminded me of Birkdale in 2017 when Spieth hugged Kuchar's wife after he stomped on her husband's soul.

At the end of the line on Sunday, Justin Rose's wife, Kate, went up to Rory and hugged him for a long time. It's hard to hear the audio, but it sounds like she says, "I'm really, really happy for you" and then maybe (?) "I'm f'n happy for you."

She did the same with Erica just beyond the 18th green after Rory made three in the playoff to put her husband in the worst club: Only golfer in history to play in at least two Masters playoffs and never win a jacket.

How painful that must be.

Between this and Rose's caddie, Fooch, kissing Rory on 18, I am shocked (SHOCKED) that Europe is good at Ryder Cups. Stunned.

I cannot believe that the team that loves each other this much is so good at a team event! They must just make more putts!

## Primal

I have imagined what this would be like more than once. I'm not ashamed to admit that. I have covered Rory winning majors, but I was a year or two into the job, didn't know what I was doing, was never really in the mix. Never experienced one in person.

At that time, I may as well have been a fan with a keyboard.<sup>58</sup>

But even when I envisioned what it would be like, I did not think he would be that emotional, that raw.

The hardest thing in sports is carrying around the thing that everyone says you will — not could or should or might but *will* — do.

Here's what he told Marty Smith afterward (you should watch it).



WATCH >>>

Rory McIlroy – Masters  
Champion with Marty Smith.  
©Marty Smith / ESPN

**The hardest thing in sports is carrying around the thing that everyone says you will — not could or should or might but will — do.**

<sup>58</sup> I guess in that sense, not a lot changed.

**“Now that I’ve been able to do it, I maybe didn’t realize the burden I’d been carrying all this time. I would show up here every year, and I would put my positive hat on and I would go in with the right attitude, and it never quite happened for me.**

**And I’d come back next year and I’d do the same thing. I think time after time and year after year of doing that, that burden builds up.**

**When I finally was able to do it and get over the line and win, I think that emotion that you saw was 14 years of coming here and not getting the job done and feeling that burden each and every year.**

**It all just came out there on that last green.”**

[Rory McIlroy]

What a quote. What a win. What a moment.

He convinced himself over and over and over and over and over that he wanted to and could. I do wonder if down in the deep and darkest places, he truly thought he *would*.

Then he did.

There is something special about fulfilling a dream. There is something special about overcoming a nightmare. Now imagine those two are the very same thing. It must feel like he lost 100 pounds. Send the jet to Jupiter, he'll just fly on back home.

## Heavy is the Crown

There was a lot of chatter about how he tried to choke the thing away, about how the 73 was a crowning, that he didn't show his guts. But I'm not sure people truly understand the yoke. Nobody in golf over the last 25 years has ever been more expected to do a single thing than Rory was expected to win this particular tournament.

This is what expectations look like.

For reference on CBS's peak 19.5 million number yesterday: That's only about 700K less than the 20.2 million average for Tiger's win in 1997.

[@JoshACarpenter, 22:26pm, 14 April, 2025]

Being Rory is fun and great and wonderful. It's also exhausting and tiring and taxing. He didn't ask for the expectations of the world, but he received them anyway. And he still did it.

Truly one of the great achievements in golf sports history.

**Being Rory is fun and great and wonderful. It's also exhausting and tiring and taxing. He didn't ask for the expectations of the world, but he received them anyway. And he still did it.**

## The Forever War is Over

And a reminder that all of this happened in a week in which...

- Everyone said he would.
- Including Player, Nicklaus and Watson.
- He shot 72 to finish T27 in the opening round.
- He made four (!) doubles, including two on Sunday.
- He played with the guy who murdered him at Pinehurst.
- He almost kicked it away 15 different times.

The forever war is over. It was only ever with himself.

Rory conquered not ANGC nor the Masters nor Bryson nor Rosey nor the slam on Sunday. All of those things, yes, but Rory vs. Rory was the only one that mattered.

**“People, I think, instinctually as human beings we hold back sometimes because of the fear of getting hurt, whether that's a conscious decision or subconscious decision, and I think I was doing that on the golf course a little bit for a few years.”**

[Rory McIlroy]

He went on to say that he's gotten better at being willing to do this than he was in the middle part of his career. The battle in his brain. The desires in his heart. Only getting a certain number of chances. Those were the wars.

**Forget fame, forget fortune.  
This is a real human movement  
and it's the happiest i've been for  
someone I don't even know in a  
long time.**

[@Super70Sports, 00:23am, 14 April, 2025]

The golf is the easy part, it's everything else that you must tame.

Because again, winning the Masters is barely (barely!) about playing great golf. These top guys? They can play great golf in their sleep.

Especially for Rory, it was about whether he could conquer himself.

Whether he could answer the question his buddy, Shane Lowry, asked on Sunday before winning the 2019 Open at Portrush: *Do I have what it takes? Can I meet the moment?*

You and I will never hit that shot on 15, sure, but nothing in the world could be more compelling or aspirational than that.

## Is Ten Crazy?

This Masters win resonated for a million reasons, but one of them is this: It somehow felt as if we were watching a first-time major champion on Sunday. Someone who had tried and failed and failed and failed. It felt like Rory became the first person to ever complete the grand slam with his first major win. How a slam winner turned into the lovable underdog is beyond me, but that's what it felt like.

That is weird, I know. But because it had been 11 years and because his heart had been shredded innumerable times — most of them self-inflicted — it felt inspiring to watch.

Very much like Phil in 2004. Except that Rory had already banked four majors, including the other three. Phil won five after his first.

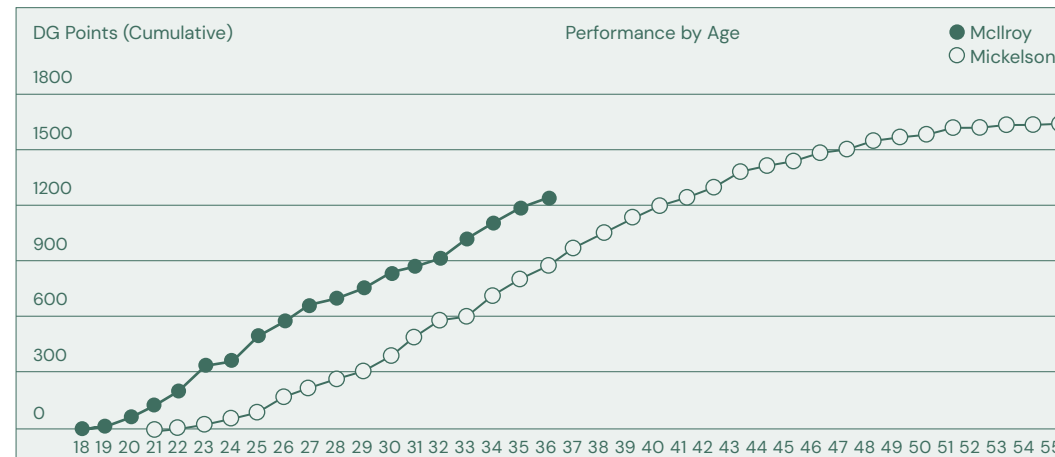
This seemed unfathomable even two weeks ago. Now? It seems difficult, unlikely, but also not unreasonable.<sup>59</sup> I have been hollering, yelping, about how Rory is having the inverse of Phil's career. But what if he's just having ... Phil's career ... with several in the bank at a much (much) younger age.

That 22-year-old Rory feels like a different player and person. What if Rory 1.0 wins four and Rory 2.0 wins four more?

We will yell about his place in the pantheon, but it's no longer as a top 25 player. He's hunting the top 10 now. No matter how you dice it up, Phil is a good marker for that 10 spot. If you have him just outside, I'm fine with that. Just inside? Good there too.

And now Rory has five at an age when Phil had just three. Here is the cumulative Data Golf points comparison. Same traj, even if Phil got started a bit later than Rory. Again ... Phil is probably one of the *10 best players of all time*, and Rory is well ahead of pace.

<sup>59</sup> Sitting here at the end of the year, it very much does not feel like he will get anywhere close to 10.



## 59-80

Let's talk about the scores. Rose and Rory shot a best ball 29 and a worst ball 41 on the back. A 12-shot swing on the back alone. Three combined pars on that side.

Overall – across all 18 holes – it was a best ball 59 and a worst ball 80. If there is some representation of what the day felt like, this is it.

From the first hole on, has a tournament ever felt like it shifted more legacies and history ... not on every hole but on every *shot*?

We crave consequential golf shots, and we got so many of them on Sunday. Because of the time elapsed between his majors and the chase for that slam, I just don't know that there will ever be anything else quite like it.

Hole	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18
Par	4	5	4	3	4	3	7	5	4	4	4	3	5	4	5	3	4	4
McIlroy	-10	-10	-11	-12	-12	-12	-12	-12	-13	-14	-13	-13	-11	-10	-11	-11	-12	-11
Rose	-6	-6	-7	-6	-5	-5	-6	-7	-7	-7	-8	-9	-10	-9	-10	-11	-10	-11

# Art

I mean really, how good is this illustration from Jason Page on Sunday night? A slinging tracer around the trees right into the heart of that washing machine full of dreams.

All of it on deadline?  
Come on.



# Bryson's Evolution

While not as complete yet as Rory's, Bryson's evolution is no less admirable. Here are his Masters finishes.

T21-T38-T29-T34-T46-MC-MC-T6-T5

He has now finished in the top six in four of the last five majors, and even on a week in which he didn't have his iron play — he finished 51st in approach! — he found his way into the mix on Sunday afternoon.

Bryson catches a lot of flak (most of it deserved), but he's a champion and a more complete golfer than he ever gets credit for.

I want him to win more majors. I just didn't want him to win *this* major. A terrific week, though, and the golf universe is better with him in it.

Also a funny thing that was said on Sunday: Do you think Bryson has hit more range balls or Harry Diamond has said more words this week?

That range tracker record may be Bryson's white whale. He may show up on Monday at 6 a.m. next year and try to push it to five digits for the week.



But Bryson won't be leaving ANGK empty handed.

## A Good Man

I'm not afraid to say it. I have grown to love Justin Rose. He's a lion and a champion. But the part that hit me hardest was him grabbing the back of Rory's head just as he's done with so many Ryder Cup teammates and telling him the following.

**“Yeah, Rory is a friend for sure. ... When it's all said and done, I said to him, 'Listen, I was glad I was here on this green to witness you win the career grand slam.' That's such a cool, momentous moment in the game of golf.**

**Yeah, that was it. He was obviously pretty overcome with emotion and probably not going to be able to take in much at the time. It was a big day in golf.”**

[Justin Rose]

Immelman's quote was perfect:

**“Justin is a good man.”**

[Trevor Immelman]

There's nothing like the Masters.

## Dreams Don't Come True

This truly never happens. Not like this anyway.

These wishes never really come true. Oh, maybe when you're 19 or 22 or whatever. But you can't appreciate *then* how things hit you *now*.

Remember on Sunday when I said the very best thing about him is that he hasn't gotten jaded? If he wins that 2011 Masters, I'm not sure that's the case. This thing in his life that he couldn't accomplish, in strange and subtle ways, maintained for him a connection to the boy who hoped.

I think in a lot of ways, *not* winning the Masters helped Rory preserve himself. He had to remain the kid who hit putts on a green in Hollywood with his buddy. The one who grew up pretending to win this event.

They were once two boys who wished, and somehow all of it came true for them both. That Rory would break down about sharing it with his friend of 30 years is a very Rory thing to do.

All of it feels kind of unreal even two days later.

Truly, *truly* the stuff of dreams.

**I think in a lot of ways, *not* winning the Masters helped Rory preserve himself. He had to remain the kid who hit putts on a green in Hollywood with his buddy. The one who grew up pretending to win this event.**

## Moving On

I honestly cannot believe — with absolutely zero ill will intended toward the good folks of Hilton Head, South Carolina — that there is another PGA Tour event this week.

Felt like they might just cancel the rest of the season.

I have gotten a lot of "buddy, time to move on" on Twitter.

It's not.

No, probably like the 14th best golfer of all time just did something that five other humans have ever done, and he did it after a decade of build up at the most prestigious place he could have done it. It's not time to move on. We might actually just be getting started.

That's the whole point of having my own enterprise. I can talk about the 2025 Masters for the rest of 2025 if I want. I won't ... but I might.

He won the slam!

We might be underplaying it. It feels like we should throw him in that old red convertible Arnie used to drive up to the ANGC clubhouse and at least let him cruise through Times Square for like 5–10 minutes like they used to do when we were a proper country.

That some people are like, *well I guess it's RBC Heritage time!* is such an unusual normal sport-y thing about golf and tennis. The biggest events happen in the middle of the season. Would be like jamming the World Series in June and then having to pay attention to a three-game set between the Royals and Tigers the following week.

If this was the NBA Finals or the Super Bowl, we absolutely would be breaking down what happened and the implications of it for weeks and weeks and weeks. As it stands, Harris English and J.T. Poston are playing 18 holes at an elevated event today. That's weird, but also we don't have to think about it, talk about it or care about it.

The majors obviously mean the most, this one perhaps more than any I've ever covered. So the question is not when are you going to stop talking about it. No, the question is why in the world would you want to talk about anything else?

## Rory and Helene

Here's a great normal sport point. Did ... a hurricane named Helene get Rory over the line at Augusta National? Much was made about the loss of trees at ANGC, and it was certainly noticeable in person. The tee shot on 10, behind the green on 15 and (most visually striking to me) up the right side on 16. Even up the left on 13.

Someone who knows things told me over 1,000 trees.

I have no idea what the actual number was, but it is not inconceivable that all of this saved Rory, what, a shot? Two shots?

A natural disaster devastating a community like that is so awful, and it definitely owed us a changing of golf history in the most optimistic and best way possible.

**“I've rode my luck all week.  
And again, I think with the things  
that I've had to endure over the  
last few years, I think I deserved it.  
So, yeah, anytime I hit it in the  
trees this week, I had a gap.”**

[Rory McIlroy - on his shot on No. 7 on Sunday]

## The Improbability of it All

I rewatched some of the back nine on Tuesday with my sons. He could have lost 100 different times. I just now saw Rose's eagle putt on 13. The hooked shot into 11. Trevor said it was 6 inches from going in. It may have been less.

All of it was so precarious, so close to going differently. It reminds me of a thing I wondered during LACC: *It's not as astonishing to me that Brooks Koepka has won five of these or McIlroy has won four as it is that anyone ever wins one at all.*

One way to view it is that he shouldn't have hit it in the water on 13, which is true. Here is another way to view it ...

What Rory did on 15, 16 and 17 in the final round is BONKERS. 1 in 28,700 chance.

#15> 207 yards to 6 feet  
#16> 170 yards to 9 feet  
#17> 196 yards to 2 feet

The chances a tour pro hits each of those shots as close as he did:

#15> 1.99%  
#16> 7.91%  
#17> 0.37%

The chances a tour pro hits approach shots that good on three consecutive holes? About 1 in 28,700

If you let the typical tour pro play those three holes 28,700 times, they will only accomplish what Rory did one single time.

[@LouStagner, 18:11pm, 15 April, 2025]

One of the things that I think about a lot is how few chances players have to win majors. It could be one single swing or maybe, if you're lucky, nine holes when you're in it. Then it's over before it feels like you even began, and this thing you've been working for your entire life, well, you'll never get another chance.

I felt that after St. Andrews in 2022. Just the gasping and overwhelming desperation of *it's over, gone, like a vapor, and we can never go back to that place again. I never get that shot again. Never get that putt back.*

Golf is slow until it's unfathomably fast.

To even be able to function in that crushing, oxygen-depleted environment — especially with his history and the journey he's been on, what he knew he needed to accomplish — is amazing.

To hit three straight 1-in-29,000 shots is almost beyond belief.

## Being There With Us

I have not missed not having a podcast myself ... until this week. I have been dying to talk about this, to talk about my experience, to tell the story in a longer form. May have to revisit that decision. My wife said I should just release four episodes a year and call it good. (update: we launched in September 2025).

And speaking of pods, you should listen to this one from NLU. It is an immersive audio experience right in the heart of Augusta National.

Neil and KVV were mic'd up all week just running around getting the best of what that place has to offer.

When the boys told me about it last week, I presumed it would drop in like May or June. "Nah ... Tuesday," they told me. I was stunned at the turnaround time. Even more so at how good of an idea it was.

Someone recently asked me to break down what it was like to be on 15 with my friends. You can literally hear the moment at the 1:02:45 mark. All-time shot, all-time moment, and that 1:02:45 mark is an all-time memory for me. I'll never forget it.

I get chills just thinking about it. Whew.



LISTEN >>>

989: NLU Presents  
Sounds of The Masters  
No Laying Up. ©YouTube

## The Gifts

One mini moment that didn't get enough run: Rory completely breaking down when talking about his mom and dad in Butler Cabin. It was so good, so real. Some people probably wonder what I mean when I say ridiculous things like that Rory has preserved his own humanity.<sup>60</sup>

This is what I mean.

Pro golf grinds you up, spits you out, lobotomizes your emotions.

You are literally told that to be better at golf, you need to control your emotions. And Rory? Plenty of people cry after winning the Masters (or a different major), but so rarely do they disclose this much.

He has always been almost ashamed of his gifts.

I'll never forget the Jaime Diaz article from 2015.

**“Until just a few years ago, I don't want to say I felt guilty for being successful because I had this ability given to me, but it was sort of like, 'Why me?'" he says. "Because I felt like it's a very selfish thing to be a winner, a very selfish trait. Which is what you sort of need in golf. And I guess it just took me a while to be comfortable with that, just because of the personality I have.**

**I realized that if I want to succeed in golf, which I do, I need to have it. What helped was**

**realizing how much people like winners, how people gravitate to them. So if other people are happy for me winning, then why can I not be?**

**Now I want to win at golf all the time. I feel like golf has allowed me to be competitive at something in life—and my fitness has become part of that—and I feel like I've developed a bit of a ruthless streak on the golf course over the last few years. But I've no real ambition to be the best at anything else. If we're playing a game of cards, or a game of pool, or whatever it is, I'd happily let someone win just to keep them happy.”**

[Rory McIlroy]

He still has a bit of that disbelief. Watch this interaction with Jamie Weir.



WATCH >>>  
Rory McIlroy targeting major domination after Masters triumph. ©Sky Sports Golf.

One of the six humans to win a slam, and he talks as if he doesn't deserve to be mentioned alongside anyone.

Like I said on Sunday: With the golf gods now, but among that group, surely, the most human of them all.

## How Thin are the Margins

If Pat Reed makes this putt for birdie on 13, he finishes at -11. Butterfly effect and all, but can you imagine Rose and Rory shaking hands on the tee at 18 for the playoff and Reed comes running down the hill busting into the festivities like the Kool-Aid Man?

This cuts 1,000 ways. Like I mentioned above, if Rory's ball on 11 goes 6 inches farther, he probably loses the Masters! Of course, he also probably doesn't lay up on 13 so who knows. This is why actual outcomes are

sometimes (not always but sometimes) a bad way to judge how good a player is.<sup>61</sup> Rory is a hero because he wins, and a goat if that ball goes in the water on 11. Six inches!

The best players, though, are always around the rim, ready to clean up messes (sometimes even their own).

That is the easiest path to winning majors.

The best players have Wikipedia pages that look like this.

Tournament	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Masters Tournament	T21	T5	CUT	2	CUT	T22	1
PGA Championship	T8	T33	T49	8	T7	T12	-
U.S. Open	T9	T8	T7	T5	2	2	-
The Open Championship	CUT	NT	T46	3	T6	CUT	-

Also: I maintain that the funniest imaginable outcome would have been ZJ shooting 66-65 to get into the playoff and steal Rory's Masters. It also would have bumped Spieth or JT or somebody like that off the Ryder Cup team.

Golf Twitter would have never recovered.<sup>62</sup>

<sup>60</sup> Which I think I have said 175 times and may need to retire at this point.

<sup>61</sup> I mean this in the short term. In the long term, outcomes always matter.

<sup>62</sup> I am also extraordinarily glad this did not happen.

## The End of Suffering

I had a buddy who (sadistically) said that he wanted Rory to miss a putt to lose the Masters just for the theater of it all.

I thought Shane Ryan wrote it well, though. And I agree with him that it would have been a bridge too far. Rory had suffered enough, anything beyond Pinehurst would have just been cruel.

*"To lose at Augusta, as he threatened to do at least half a dozen times on Sunday, would have been just as unbearable, but—critical difference—it would have been unbearable in a way that undermined the journey.*

*Pinehurst had been the absolute limit of a decade of escalations; at this point, he had been hurt a little too much.*

*Heartbreak at Augusta would look less like an interesting setback, and more like celestial sadism.*

*"There's something cruel in this," my friend Chris said to me as we watched McIlroy dump his un-dumpable pitch into the water on 13. He put the words to what we all felt, and that's when the epiphany hit: there was no longer anything interesting about Rory blowing a major."*



READ >>>

We just watched the last great golf story, Shane Ryan.  
©Golf Digest.

**It would be a dark farce, but also a tedious one, a gratuitous one, and it would pay off emotionally only for those who enjoyed suffering for its own sake.**

[Shane Ryan, Golf Digest]

## What If ... He'd Lost?

Early in the week, Soly said on the NLU pod that he wasn't worried about this Masters because,

**"Nothing could hurt more than Pinehurst."**

This loss would have made Pinehurst feel like he won.

I guess that's the part that's most impressive to me. He's been preaching resilience for years and years and years. It felt like coachspeak or something Rotella got into his brain. But it turns out that it was not.

Remember the Rory story when he was 27?

**Nothing but a frontrunner. Not a gamer. No grit. Doesn't have it when the chips are down. Great when the swing is flowing but as soon as you throw something at him — weather, competition, a firm, fast golf course — he'll wilt.**

That player feels like he existed 40 years ago. He feels like a completely different person. I don't know if this particular one is necessarily smarter [gestures at 27 different shots from Sunday alone], but he's undeniably more complete.

And he's a dog now. A dog!

Surely nobody in golf history has ever stared as much adversity and terror and the potential of unfathomable heartache in the eyes and kept on going. Kept hitting those shots we saw this weekend. Kept making 3s.

If you would have told me 10 years ago that Rory would get his fifth in 2025, I wouldn't have believed you. But if you would have told me *five* years ago that Rory would get his fifth in this exact way — under a debilitating weight in which he had to get back in the arena over and over again, battered to the point that everyone else in the arena had to look away — I wouldn't have believed you either.

The way he has evolved with his held-off wedges and distance control is impressive, but the way he has evolved emotionally and mentally as a golfer is almost inconceivable compared to who he used to be.

## Old Dogs

Here's a take: He was luckier last week than he was smart. I have some questions about the decisions, though I'm so glad they finally broke his way.

Again, his words, not mine ...

**“I've rode my luck all week. And again, I think with the things that I've had to endure over the last few years, I think I deserved it. So I rode my luck all week, and you need that little bit of luck to win these golf tournaments.”**

[Rory McIlroy]

But that's kind of the whole deal with him. He can't help himself. Can't win like Scottie.<sup>63</sup> Or maybe just *won't* win like Scottie. It's just not who he is. Never has been, never will be.

This is why the best path to winning majors is putting yourself in the mix as many times as possible. Because sometimes the luck favors you. Rory has done that over the last five years in a way he didn't the five before that, and the payoff was better than he dreamed.

Here's a crazy stat.

- Rory's 2022 Masters: 4.03 strokes gained
- Rory's 2025 Masters: 4.15 strokes gained<sup>64</sup>

You cannot control the other 94 players in the field. You cannot stop Cam Smith and Wyndham Clark from having the weeks of their lives. Rory's strokes gained numbers at majors have often been better than they were in this one.

Just as he always would have traded 10 PGA Tour wins for one major, I'm sure he would trade both those U.S. Opens as well as that one at St. Andrews for this green jacket.

Golf gives and takes away.

Tournament	FIN	DGPs	PUTT	ARG	APP	OTT	TOTAL
2011 U.S. Open	Win	28.00	-	-	-	-	+5.77
2012 PGA Championship	Win	28.00	-	-	-	-	+5.57
2014 The Open Championship	Win	28.00	-	-	-	-	+4.90
2014 PGA Championship	Win	28.00	+1.21	+0.34	+1.25	+1.64	+4.44
2024 U.S. Open	2	14.75	+0.67	+1.26	+0.42	+1.97	+4.32
2023 U.S. Open	2	14.75	+0.46	+0.28	+1.30	+2.28	+4.31
2022 The Masters	2	13.86	-0.15	+2.01	+1.01	+1.26	+4.15
2025 The Masters	Win	28.00	-0.17	+0.91	+2.51	+0.88	+4.03

## I Wanted to Cry for Him

This on Bryson acting aggrieved about Rory not talking to him is just not a thing. Here's the quote just before the clip that went viral.

Q. What happened to Rory on 13?

*BRYSON DECHAMBEAU: I wanted to cry for him. I mean, as a professional, you just know to hit it in the middle of the green, and I can't believe he went for it, or must have just flared it.*

*But I've hit bad shots in my career, too, and it happens. When you're trying to win a major championship, especially out here, Sunday of Augusta, the Masters, you have to just do it and get the job done and do it right. There were times where it looked like he had full control and at times where it's like, what's going on. Kind of looked like one of my rounds, actually.*

Bryson is a brutal communicator, seemingly always one beat off. But he did not seem angry about Rory's silence. But also, did he think this was the Creator Classic? You want the guy whose heart you squeezed in your fist nine months ago to ask your thoughts about frame rates and upload times?

Please.

## Three Tiny Scenes

I'll remember these from being out there on Sunday.

1. Harry slapping Rory's back on 18 with a closed fist like he was punching him. Why? He's holding the ball. I don't believe 17 UFC fighters could have pried that ball out of Harry's hands.
2. Rory on the back of a golf cart driving down the first fairway speaking to — presumably — his parents. They blocked off the first hole as patrons tried to leave, and two carts cruised him over to the press building as he waved and stared back up the hill, laughing as his parents cried. What a moment.
3. I punched KVV several times on Sunday. More than once. My apologies.<sup>65</sup>

<sup>63</sup> Although he's certainly more like Scottie now than he ever has been before.

<sup>64</sup> These numbers change slightly over time because players who played in the event get slightly better or slightly worse and the field strength changes in retrospect. At one point, they were both 4.14.

<sup>65</sup> But not really.

## My Notebook

Speaking of being out there. Here are some notes I wrote down as they're written in my notebook. No context, just notes to myself for scenes I wanted to remember. I used none of them because I just opened up a vein instead, but I'm posting them here for fun.

- You never get to be up four going to the back ever again. And it should have been eight.
- How good must you be to be up four after 63 with three doubles?
- Guy peering through the board on 10 at green.
- I called Jude not because I was glad Rory won<sup>66</sup> but because I knew he would remember. He's 11. When he's 21 or 31 he will have a distant memory of dad, standing on 13, calling him from a thing called a pay phone, thinking about him on the biggest writing day of his life.
- Gasps on 16! After Rory double was put on the board.<sup>67</sup>
- Winning majors is impossible.
- I have seen unbelievable things.
- "Why is he going for it?"
- KVV closed his eyes, when he opened them I was screaming in his face.
- Never experienced a coaster like that.
- BP said it was over if he missed on 14.
- Rory chant on 16.
- Makes Spieth look like a kiddie ride [lol].
- Most emotion I've ever felt [at a golf tournament].
- Today felt like four rounds.
- I have seen inconceivable things.
- Grown men inhaling and exhaling like they're bungee jumping.
- I don't know how I'm alive.
- Rory's number going up on the board

on 18 was loudest cheer of the day.

- I couldn't see on 18 so I listened for the sound I've heard 1,000 times.
- This was Rory's forever war.
- Clubhouse packed at the top ...
- [Next note was] "My dreams have been made today."

## Jasons Notebook

- I don't know what's in the Augusta merch tent so it could be anything ...
- How Masters is this Masters on a scale of Sergio green jacket to Tiger 2019?
- Homa root wrist = painstraw
- Never seen a golf ball with teeth before – Colsarts
- Dipsidoodle – Butch Harman
- Big putters are like branding irons – Butch Harmon
- Put books under couch @home to experience slopes of Augusta
- Whirley dirley follow through – Butch Harmon
- Bryson high-five tracker stats
- If Rose goes out in 29
- Who's the next Rors best not to win? Aberg?
- Coupon for significant other for a date night out after Masters weekend.
- Please excuse me I have had a million little heart attacks at the Masters.
- I wanna give him a smack on the face and a big kiss – Faldo
- Rory's game plan notes "KEEP IT INTERESTING"
- Facebook ad, Jupiter, FL, for sale, collection of self help books, meditation pillow and juggling balls.

## Alone

There is no sport in the world where you can be surrounded by that many people and feel utterly and unequivocally alone. Your caddie is there, sure, but what use is a sail when the boat is being battered by a hurricane? What good is the 4-wheel drive when you are driving through a lake?

The most epic journeys in history were made alone, and alone is often where the participants find themselves. Alone in the history books. Peerless. Without competitors.

That is certainly where Rory is now. There are no modern comps. There are no European contenders. He is by himself in this era, and he has shown that to get to a place that no one else has gotten to, you must be willing to do some things – to go through some stuff – that on one else is willing to take on.

Tennis? Maybe? But at least there, you have the comfort of a competitor who is trying to tear your face off. A strange comfort, sure, but a comfort nonetheless. In the middle of the 15th fairway with two thousand up the left and probably even more up the right<sup>68</sup>, with Justin Rose bobbing up and down at the top of that white board, well, nobody in recent golf history has ever been more alone than that.

There is fear in the stage and the lights and the bright red button. But there is also opportunity. Those two are usually fairly intertwined. Rory said in the aftermath that he never wanted to go back to the 15th tee on Sunday, never wanted to enter that state again.

Because of the weight, I'm sure, but because it must have felt like he was floating in space looking back at the pale blue dot with all the people looking back at him but too far from him to do anything but stare and hope that he could somehow get back home.

<sup>66</sup> And then he almost didn't.

<sup>67</sup> This is one I never properly conveyed in the newsletter. One of the stunning parts about being on the grounds is how loud the roars and dismays were from other parts of the course when they found out what Rory was doing on specific holes. I'll never forget it.

<sup>68</sup> And 19 million watching in the United States (and more globally).

## The Weight of Time

I asked on Twitter this week what everyone's lasting image from the week would be. There are so many great ones (both the silly and the serious).

For everyone in golf, playing the Masters is a dream.

For very few, playing it is a nightmare.

For nobody — maybe just him — is it both.

If you're extraordinarily lucky, you get a few minutes on a Sunday throughout your entire career in which the golf has historical implications.

All that work. And it comes down to just a handful of swings or putts.

Even for someone as great as he is.

Time carries with it an incredible weight.

So how good must it be, in the aftermath of it all, to flip a forever war that can only be fought a couple of days every year into something that can never be undone?

How much do you exhale after exchanging all those years of work for one single moment in which all of it changes forever?

How difficult was it every year to load up the yoke once again, one that he would carry around for the next 51 weeks because of two or three dumb things that happened across a couple of seconds in a field in north Georgia?

How great must it feel to turn all the doubt, all the fear and all those questions (even of himself) into delight in a career that's now among the best there's ever been?

**So how good must it be, in the aftermath of it all, to flip a forever war that can only be fought a couple of days every year into something that can never be undone?**

# Notes and Thoughts

Here are a few disparate thoughts, most of which I never put in a newsletter but all of which I wanted to put somewhere ... I'll list them out before we get to the closing act.

## Foolish Enough to Dream

Here's what I wrote after LACC.<sup>69</sup>

*It's not the coming back that's the point, though, for anyone can simply show up. It's the reentering with purpose, and like Fowler noted Saturday night, not being scared of the outcome.*

*If the cost of ambition is the burden of failure then that's far too high a price for most rational adults to pay.*

*And then there are the fools who dream.*

*Along this 33-mile road of empty frustration and unfulfilling endings, Rory learned something that few ever internalize. At the end of the day, trophies and records and glory will fade. What remains is the enduring truth that who you become matters far more than what you could ever possibly achieve, and not just because the former informs the latter.*

*Perhaps more important than all of the accolades or even the closest of calls is that after all these years, all those shots, all that tremendous failure is that one north star has prevailed in the four-time major champion's life.*

*Rory McIlroy remains foolish enough to dream.*

[Kyle Porter, CBS Sports]

I think this ties into his quote before the Masters about "instinctually as human beings we hold back sometimes because of the fear of getting hurt." Somewhere around LACC – probably a year or two before but maybe that week – he started embracing the idea of getting hurt, of leading from out in front. That idea, leading and really going for it is – I don't know that I am conveying this properly – more emotionally difficult than it seems. You have to be built a little different. It takes skill, sure, but it also takes a willingness to risk, to get nuked by the rest of the leaderboard. That is below the surface, perhaps several layers, but Rory is correct about the self-preservation part.

Gabby Herzig wrote about this for The Athletic just before the Masters. She was focused on Masters scar tissue, specifically, but the same idea – that trying to lean into a thing that has led to pain in the past is difficult to do. There is no pain in finishing T11. There is a lot of pain in finishing solo second. And so some part of us would probably rather finish T11 than solo second, as dumb as that sounds.

*"When the human brain recognizes it's back in a place that echoes a past painful experience, even if that situation is only remotely similar to what actually occurred, it is physically built to provide us with alarm*

<sup>69</sup> Was I prepared to write 8,000 on CBS Sports dot com after a W there? I was. Am I glad it happened when I could write about calling my kid from ANGC instead and cover it in the exact way I wanted to cover it instead? I am.



READ >>>

Rory dares to dream despite near-promise of heartbreak  
©CBS Sports.

*The mind subconsciously shifts from pursuit to prevention."*

*"It's human nature," McIlroy says. "We were designed to survive. So, oh — don't do that! That puts you in danger. Do this instead."*

*"At the Masters more than any of the other majors, the brain shows us exactly how it was designed to operate. Raymond Prior, a performance psychologist who has worked with multiple Masters champions, likens it to a prehistoric time: "If it were 250,000 years ago, and your brain didn't remember that this is where you saw saber-toothed tigers last time, you'd be dead really soon."*



READ >>>

How do you get over losing the Masters?  
©New York Times.

My friend Matt Considine, who founded NewClub, had a really great (and similar) take on a podcast we did. Here's what he said ...

*"The moment for me was when he dropped the club on 10 and he ended up 5 feet below the pin and buried the putt. Rory's brain believed he would blow it. I fully believe the deep part of his brain thought he would blow it. That's the doubt. Humans always do. No matter how confident we are, how committed we are, how prepared we are, how good we are, that doubt is a very instinctual trait.*



LISTEN >>>

Four Grand Thoughts on Rory McIlroy's Historic Masters Slam.  
©The Bag Drop, NewClub Golf.

*"I was talking to my wife about this on Sunday, and there are evolutionary things protecting us. When we were animals in the wild, is that rustling in the bush wind? Is it a predator? The doubt is to alert us and give us caution. In your childhood, too. When you're developing, doubt plays a significant role in your curiosity ... It's a really instinctual thing.*

This is the hidden part of playing world class major championship golf. Yes, Rory swings the club better than almost anyone he's ever played with, and he's a tremendous putter and short game manager as well. But you also have to be either dumb enough to not recognize that you are trying to protect yourself from the risk of being hurt, or (like Rory) you have to fight that tedious war in your body and your brain on Sunday after Sunday after Sunday at places like Pinehurst, Brookline, St. Andrews and now, finally, the Augusta National Golf Club.

**"If it were 250,000 years ago, and your brain didn't remember that this is where you saw saber-toothed tigers last time, you'd be dead really soon."**

[Raymond Prior]

## A Near Nightmare

We were just a few years from Rory giving this Ernie Els quote.

**“When a thing stings you, it keeps stinging you,” Els said several years ago. “When it gives to you, it keeps on giving. I’ve seen that with Gary Player. I’ve seen it with Jack [Nicklaus].”**

**“I’ve got a love-hate relationship with the place. It was always almost like a curse to me. It was not a romantic deal to me. It was a f---ing nightmare for the most part.”**

[Ernie Els, 2019]

That quote was coming. He used the term “complicated relationship” after winning, noting that it is now very uncomplicated. Forty-six-year-old green-jacket-less Rory is for sure giving that Els interview.



READ >>>  
Ernie Els is so done with Masters.  
©New York Post.

## Destroying Rory

Earlier this week, my tweet about how Rory’s career makes me better at my job was talked about on the Press Box podcast.

I am completely fine if you want to call me head of the glaze committee, or whatever, when it comes to Rory. Totally get it, completely understand. I’ve seen every comment imaginable (and a lot I wish I hadn’t).

We all probably take it too far at times (me possibly most of all).

It is strange to cover a generational athlete like this, though, someone who could go down as one of the 10-15 best ever in his 150-year-old sport. Someone who also lets you into his humanity at times, both publicly and privately.

I like Rory personally, of course, but I also think his golf and his life bring out the best in me, the best of my writing and my thinking about this stupid, ridiculous game.

Certainly, that is a rabbit hole you can go too far down and find yourself in too deep. But I would always rather err on that side than on the side of holding back my writing about a sport I’ve truly grown to love.

I’ve said it 1,000 times, but I am grateful that his career has intersected with mine. There is nobody more fun for me to write about or to have as a character in the golf universe.

He’s unusual -- all the gifts and he’ll give himself away. I’ve never covered anyone like him. Sometimes that means I don’t know \*how\* to cover him, but I’ll continue to try and find the vein as often as possible for you, the reader, the most important subject of all.

[@KylePorterNS, 16:43pm, 13 April, 2025]

You can listen starting at 4:55 below. It led into a discussion about whether anyone would have gone after Rory if he’d thrown it away (which he almost did six different times!).



LISTEN >>>  
Rory McIlroy’s long awaited Masters win.  
©The Press Box.

KVV had a good thread on it, and I agree with this part specifically.

**“I personally don’t have a ton of appetite for a written detonation anymore, at least as a writer. What could I say about Rory that [is more] devastating than scenes of his own collapse? I think the same would be true of Phil or Bryson or Rahm or Sergio.”**

[KVV]

This excerpt below is far heavier than me ranting and raving about that 6 iron you shouldn’t have hit on 11 or whatever. The weight of your own reality is far more devastating than anything anyone could say. Mostly because it is far less easy to justify or for you to explain away. Here’s what I wrote for CBS Sports after Rory lost the 2022 Open.

**“McIlroy slumped out of the media hut and disappeared around a corner. When he reappeared, his wife, Erica, was by his side. They jumped into the middle of a golf cart as Smith estimated how many beers he could pour into the Claret Jug.**

McIlroy’s manager was on the back of the cart facing the media, his eyes wet and red. He was not the only one. As the driver hit the pedal, Rory removed his hat, just as he did on the 18th green. As Smith caressed the trophy, McIlroy turned to face his wife. As they began to roll, he put his face into her shoulder and mourned what had been lost. Neither of them moved as they disappeared from sight.

**Golf is the cruelest game, but that’s also what makes it the most beautiful.”**

[Kyle Porter | CBS Sports]

## A Collective Sigh of Relief

I don't think I have ever seen the outpouring of emails, DMs, texts etc. from my golf friends and/or readers like I did on Sunday.

When Rory let it all go, it felt like everyone else could, too.

This is odd — this parasocial relationship — and I struggle with it. But as has been discussed, the combination of his heart and his hope and his humanity makes him feel like he's us with just a bit more talent.

This wasn't limited to the online experience. Walk around the trees and the umbrellas and the scoreboards after the tournament ended, and men were wiping their eyes, women clasping their mouths.

Tiger in 2019 was crazy in a surreal way — almost beyond belief — but people were more emotionally invested in this one. I cannot believe it's the first one I got to cover on my own for this ridiculous business.

**Walk around the trees and the umbrellas and the scoreboards after the tournament ended, and men were wiping their eyes, women clasping their mouths.**

## Family draft final score

Mom (Mrs. Normal)		Jack (age: 8)		Jude (age: 11)		Sadie (age: 5)		Dad (me)	
Scottie	-8	Rory	-11	Morikawa	-3	Dr. Chipinski	+6	Rahm	-3
Fleetwood	-2	Michael Kim	-1	JT	+2	Sergio	+10	Ludvig	-6
Lowry	+4	Niemann	E	Cantlay	+2	Henley	+9	Bryson	-7
Spieth	-3	Hideki	-2	Akshay	+4	Hatton	-3	Xander	-5
English	-4	Brooks	+11	Tom Kim	+9	Keegan	+9	Zalatoris	+14
Straka	+11	Hovland	-2	Sahith	E	Finau	+10	Cam Smith	+11
Total	-2		-5		14		41		4

- I somehow had four guys who finished in the top 15 and still finished third. Zalatoris just absolutely destroyed me.
- Poor Sadie struggled as well. Maybe don't take someone who can't figure out if he's a doctor or a chef with your first pick.
- Brooks was not who I expected to drag down Jack's team.
- My wife's reaction was: "I pick Rose every major, and the one time I don't he does this!"

**My wife's reaction was: "I pick Rose every major, and the one time I don't he does this!"**

## All He Thinks About

I was surprised to hear Lowry say that the Masters is all Rory thinks about, all he ever talks about. I never got that sense, but I did believe it was a professional demon in his life. The not winning. The “I know I’m supposed to win, and I don’t know what to do differently than what I’m doing.” That haunted him more than he let on because Rory, like most (all?) of us, hates letting other people down.

Here’s what he told Anna Jackson in the aftermath.

**“There’s 15 years of pent up disappointments and emotion and coming back to this tournament every year. Wanting desperately to win and not being able to get the job done. To finally be able to do that today... it feels like a massive weight that’s been lifted off my back.**

**The hardest thing is that everyone else has either expected me to do it or everyone else has said that I’m going to do it at some point. Those expectations. It’s very flattering, and it’s really nice for people to have belief in my ability and belief that I am going to get it done here one day. But it doesn’t make it any easier.”**

[Rory McIlroy]

This is a bit unique. When Michael Jordan failed to do something, I never believed that he cared about the fact that he was letting anyone down other than Michael Jordan.

Rory? Well, consider this quote from The Guardian in 2022.

**“If I know anything about myself it’s that I’m naturally a people-pleaser. It weighs on me if I am pissing people off. I don’t want people to not like me.”**

[Rory McIlroy]

This is probably a better way for athletes to operate, but Rory’s way – legitimately caring about fulfilling this desire everyone had for him – is far more human, far less sociopathic. I think back to the Diaz article in Digest.

*“I’ve no real ambition to be the best at anything else. If we’re playing a game of cards, or a game of pool, or whatever it is, I’d happily let someone win just to keep them happy.”*

It is odd for someone to be this good and this accomplished with that disposition. But perhaps this is why it haunted him, this is why it was all he thought about. Because when every person you encounter is a reminder that you haven’t done the thing that they promised themselves you would do, how could you feel any other way?

## The Five Major Club

The slam is definitely crazy, crazy stuff. But don't sleep on the fact that five majors is also so many. So many!

In July 1968, Player won his fifth major, the 97th Open Championship at Carnoustie. Since he raised the fifth of what would eventually be nine trophies, 20,728 days have elapsed. Only eight of those days have included a men's golfer winning his fifth major championship.

In those nearly 60 years, the players who have won a fifth are ...

- Rory
- Brooks
- Phil
- Tiger
- Faldo
- Seve
- Watson
- Trevino

That's – depending on how you feel about Brooks – probably close to half of the 16 best players of all time.

## The 30/5 Club

To go along with that, with one more PGA Tour win (I feel confident this could happen!), Rory will join the five major/30 PGA Tour win club. Current members.

- Sarazen
- Watson
- Mickelson
- Hagen
- Nelson
- Palmer
- Hogan
- Nicklaus
- Snead
- Tiger

The 40/6 club is very much in play.

- Mickelson
- Hagen
- Palmer
- Hogan
- Nicklaus
- Tiger
- Snead

But the 50/7 is probably (?) a bridge too far.

- Palmer
- Hogan
- Nicklaus
- Snead
- Tiger

There are 1 million ways to measure legacy, but 30 PGA Tour wins, including five majors is a pretty good one (especially in the modern era). Yes, this excludes golfers like Player, Jones, Seve and Faldo, who I realize are all-time greats.

And while I would prefer a global wins list, that list is 1. Difficult to aggregate and 2. Difficult to contextualize. Gary Player won the Yellow Pages South African Open four times. Is this easier or more difficult to do than Rory winning the Canadian Open twice? I have no idea, which is part of the reason I default to PGA Tour + major championships.

And regardless of how you feel about the Yellow Pages Open, Sarazen, Watson, Mickelson, Hagen, Nelson, Palmer, Hogan, Nicklaus, Snead and the Cat is a hitters-only list that Rory is about to join.

## Justin Rose is a nice wine

I don't know that Rose is getting better with age. In fact, I'm pretty sure he's not. But I do know that my appreciation of Justin Rose is increasing over time.

Here's what he said after getting his heart ripped out by a former and future Ryder Cup teammate.

*"The reason I'm willing to put in that work is for these occasions, these moments. Standing ovation on 18 when I finished, I took a moment, not knowing the result, but just soaking that in. That was obviously a nice moment because it was still what might be, what could be.*

*But you're still -- you know, you're living the dream. Like one day, I won't be competing this way at this tournament. So you know, for now, the hard work is totally worth it, to get these little moments, they are very special."*

Echoes of a parent who knows their child won't be a child forever. She will someday be an adult, and that parent knows that he will miss the days when she was a child. And yes, I'm very much talking to myself.

**“The reason I'm willing to put in that work is for these occasions, these moments. Standing ovation on 18 when I finished, I took a moment, not knowing the result, but just soaking that in. That was obviously a nice moment because it was still what might be, what could be.”**

[Justin Rose]

## The Perfect Major Course

Augusta National is the perfect major championship golf course. I'm not smart enough to know *why* this is the case, but it is, without a question, the case.

Here's one I thought about on Sunday: Bryson has a nice look into 11, but he's down big and has to rip at that pin. Water, blouses. See you at Quail. But you can easily have a putt at four. Or I guess if you're Rory, you can hook one up there and scare the water before almost running to hit it before it rolls down the bank in the most important round of your life and then have an easy look at four.

But ANGC is incredible because it always dangles hope. Sure, you could finish 4-3-3-3-4-3, but if you take on all those shots, you might also finish 4-5-7-5-4-5. Who can say.

In the same way the Ryder Cup is the perfect event because it convinces you you're in it until the very end, Augusta National is the perfect major course because it convinces you could conceivably do something that everyone knows you almost certainly won't.

## The Odds

This one is courtesy of Justin Ray.

Humans who have played a major: 9,556  
Number who have won one: 234 (2.4%)  
Number who have won two: 89 (0.93%)  
Number who have won three: 47 (0.49%)  
Number who have won four: 30 (0.31%)  
Number who have won five: 21 (0.22%)  
Number who have won the slam: 6 (0.06%)

Those 9,556 are among the greatest golfers who have ever lived, and only .22 percent of them have won five majors and .06 percent have won the Slam. Rory is in both groups.

## Post-Masters struggles

It was fascinating to go back and re-read everything I'd written in light of what happened with Rory in what amounted to a post-Masters malaise. The strangest thing I will remember – and one that is emblematic of how erratically he acted over the months following his Masters win – happened at Oakmont during the U.S. Open.

Here's the exchange.

Q. You're so transparent for us and very available. Yesterday was six major rounds in a row you've stepped away [and not talked]. Has that been part and parcel to the frustration on the golf course? What do you attribute it to?

*RORY McILROY: No, not really. It's more a frustration with you guys.*

Q. In what way?

*RORY McILROY: I'm just, yeah, I don't know. I have, I've been totally available for the last few years, and I'm not saying -- maybe not you guys, but maybe more just the whole thing.*

Wait ... what? He's frustrated with [gestures at all of golf media]? The very golf media that cannot stop talking about how wonderful it is to cover him and his achievements and everything he's accomplished over the last 20 years? What?!

Following the Masters, I half-jokingly said that Rory might win them all in 2025. I included some of that writing in this very book. I said this because I presumed removing the burden he was shouldering would allow him to operate with as much freedom as he's ever operated with. Instead, the opposite happened. He operated like a prisoner. Not a basic house arrest prisoner either. More like

a maximum security “the other folks have tattoos on their eyelids” type.

In retrospect, we probably should have seen this coming.

The perhaps apocryphal David Duval quote after the 2001 Open Championship comes to mind. The one I want to write a book about someday.

The one from when he was flying back from Lytham caressing the Claret Jug and (allegedly) said ... *“Is that it?”*

How much more so did Rory experience this statement after 15 years of trying to win the Masters and 10 years of trying to win the Slam.

This thing he presumed would fulfill him inevitably did not fulfill him, and *of course* he acted like a maximum security prisoner irritated with everyone and everything. Of course. That was the only way any of that was going to go.

This is life. This is all of us. We would never say it out loud, but we certainly think to ourselves (either consciously or unconsciously), *I think this iPhone is the one. Yep, this one is going to do it. I will be satisfied after I get this one.* We do the same thing with our sons throwing touchdowns or our spouses getting promoted. We do it with meals and love and vacations.

*Surely, this will be what fulfills!*

But it never does, at least not for very long. This is the human experience. The one we all feel no matter our socioeconomic status.

Scottie touched on this very thing a few months after Rory won the Masters.

Here’s what Scottie said just before winning his fourth major at Portrush.

**“This is not a fulfilling life. It's fulfilling from the sense of accomplishment, but it's not fulfilling from a sense of the deepest places of your heart.”**

[Scottie Scheffler]

Scottie said this from a Christian worldview, which is the POV I’m coming at it from as well. I find this C.S. Lewis quote instructive.

**“If we find ourselves with a desire that nothing in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that we were made for another world.”**

[C.S. Lewis]

That is a powerful reminder. There is a beautiful logic to it, too. If an iPhone doesn’t satisfy and neither does a new car or a cleaner house or a baseball tournament victory or \$2 million in cash or anything else, then I am led to believe that a Masters win won’t really satisfy either. And in that light, it’s easy to see why Rory was so irritable and annoyed with the very people heaping praise on him over and over again.

# The Great Unburdening

April 19, 2025

## Essay 03 – Life is hard.

There is nothing — no pile of money large enough, no success enduring enough nor achievement lofty enough — that will undo that reality.

From the poorest people on earth to those who have it all, the human experience touches everyone. This plays out in a thousand different ways, and there are certainly varying degrees — it is harder for some than others — but this underlying truth is fundamental and immutable.

Life is hard.

It always has been, it always will be.

I have been thinking a lot about why Rory's win at Augusta National resonated so deeply, so emotionally, so effusively. Some of it, certainly, is because ~~we were rooting for the first interview we did as a business to win the first major we covered~~ of who he is, because of what that tournament means and because he's now one of four living humans who have won all four major championships.

But more of it, I think, is because of how it happened — the nearly decade and a half of waiting and striving, of taking on the weight of the world. The shedding of a favorite prediction from everyone in golf when you asked what they believed: Of course — OF COURSE — Rory McIlroy will win a Masters.

So much of why it resonated has absolutely nothing to do with Rory McIlroy, the Masters or the career slam. No, instead, I think it has to do with us.

With you.

This win has resonated beyond the fact that it's Rory — well beyond him, I think — and it seems as if we have moved beyond golf and even sport itself. We are post-whatever it was that played out on Sunday afternoon when he found himself gasping for air and grasping for a crevice to hold on to.

I literally saw grown men crying.

Under the big tree by the clubhouse, as I walked away from the jacket ceremony, I saw an older gentleman, as hardened by age as he was by the sun. He shamelessly wiped his eyes. The boy from Northern Ireland with the swing of dreams had finally closed the loop. And this man — who has seen so much life — was brought to tears.

But honestly ... why?

The answer can be found at the very end.

When he rattled home the putt that slayed 10,000 demons, you can, if you squint, nearly see all those things he carried slide right off his back.

**“Now that I've been able to do it, I maybe didn't realize the burden I'd been carrying all this time.”**

[Rory McIlroy]

Nobody reading this — I should say, almost nobody reading this — carries around that specific burden. But the oppression that this particular expectation brought about is emblematic of the life that we're all living.

Nobody drags around the weight of the slam, but everybody drags around something. And most of us have been dragging that something around for a long, long time.

This is specifically and uniquely why the redemption of Rory McIlroy's Masters win, 14 years after his Masters loss, resonated so deeply and so unequivocally with those who watched. Because if he can be unburdened after all that time, all that normalizing and all that doubt that he would ever shake it loose, then maybe ... maybe ... you and I can be too.

Tiger's win in 2019, I'll never forget it. Never forget standing in the walkway on 15 and staring down the hill thinking he made a 1 on 16 to win the Masters. Hahaha, what a ludicrous thing that would have been.

Even more ludicrous than what actually happened: Which is that a 43-year-old lion named Tiger made one last rush to the summit. That one crushed, and it made us feel things. But it reminded us of him, not really of ourselves.

Bryson may be the “people's golfer” but nobody reminds more people of themselves than Rory. The asinine decisions? We've made those. The unabashed desire? We have that. The fear of the future and the pride of the fight? Yes.

The humanity? He contains it all.

Mostly, though, it's the hope.

**Under the big tree by the clubhouse, as I walked away from the jacket ceremony, I saw an older gentleman, as hardened by age as he was by the sun. He shamelessly wiped his eyes. The boy from Northern Ireland with the swing of dreams had finally closed the loop. And this man — who has seen so much life — was brought to tears.**

They say it's the hope that kills you, but that's not really true, is it. No, it's truer to say it's the hope that helps you.

What upended the hearts of those who watched was the hope that we, too, might be unburdened of the albatross in our life, of that which we were not meant to drag around for another year or even another day.

Life is hard.

It's hard for everyone in different ways. Some of us are carrying around anxiety and insecurity. Others of us, the fear that we are not enough. Many of us are shouldering the weariness of parenting, of wondering how it will all turn out. Career dreams unfulfilled, unspeakable loss of friends or family. Everything in between. Everyone is carrying something. Just because Rory's demons were out there in the public, for all the world to see, doesn't mean that other people don't have them, even if they're buttoned up.

A ridiculously-colored sports jacket cannot truly unburden, of course. That would be a preposterous thing to say. Nor can a treacly dinner on the second Tuesday in April. Winning the Masters does not fulfill, not ultimately. But in this case, it does point to the truth that hoping is not futile, that there is a greater hope to be had and the arrival of that hope can lead to our own great unburdening.

A thing I have been thinking a lot on this Easter weekend: We were not meant to carry around these weights. Atlas is mythological for a reason.

So when you watch the ending, as I'm sure you have a thousand times, pay attention to how he looks, what you can see.

Rory hoped against all hope. He hoped with no guarantee. He hoped in the face of despair and anguish. And the burden finally left him. He's almost a different person now. It was all over his face, and you could almost see his body falter under such a change.

He told me in the aftermath that no round of golf will ever be that hard again. That everything will be easier than it was that day. This could not make more sense, and it's why there will be books about that week [like the one you're holding right now] and that day and that journey he was on — the one he had to take.

It did not have to go this way, but it was the best way it could go.

For what it taught him, for what it taught us.

Because as you rewatch the things he was feeling, there is one thing that is obvious. As Rory McIlroy changed history with his 280th (and final) stroke, you can clearly see that the only thing greater than the relief of joy is the joy of sweet relief.

# Appendix A / B

## Appendix A

We could get extremely steep on strokes gained, or we could say it like this: strokes gained is very simply the field average in a given day minus your score. So if the field average was 75 and you shot 70, you gained five strokes.

Data Golf – my drug of choice – further amends this number by using field strength and then breaks it down into buckets like tee shots, approach shots, around the green and putting.

A crude example of what I'm talking about: If the expected score on a given hole from the field is 4.4, and you make a 3, then you gained 1.4 strokes. Using some basic and some complex math, they figure out exactly where you gained those strokes based on historical and tournament averages.

As you might imagine, this is incredibly noisy data across a given hole, round or week. But across several months or years? Well, it would be hard to argue against the three players

with the most average strokes gained per round over the last 10 years at the time of this writing. These are also the three best players when going by the eye (or any other) test.

Rory – 2.15  
Rahm – 2.12  
Scottie – 2.09

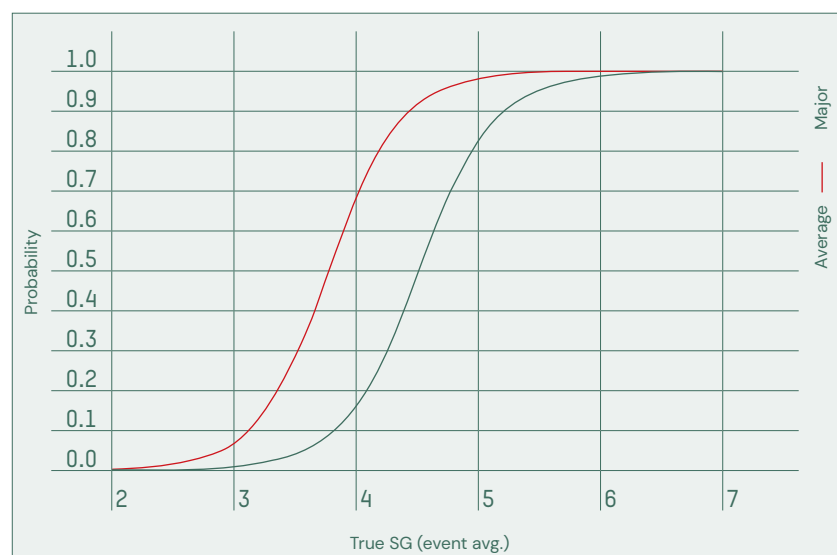
Nobody else is over 1.9 strokes gained per round.

This is one of my favorite charts ever. It shows that your probability of winning a major when you gain 4.0 strokes per round for the week is about 15 percent. If you gain 5.0, your probability rises to over 80 percent. And at 6.0, you are approaching 100 percent.

Two famous outliers.

Tiger at the 2019 Masters (won): 3.4  
Phil at the 2016 Open (lost): 6.6

Golf is extremely stupid.



## Appendix B

When I think back on the 2025 Masters, there are a thousand moments I'll forget, but a couple that I'll remember.

I wanted to list those here with links to the videos of them, which I have watched a lot but Rory said he has tried not to watch as to

preserve his memory of being there in the moment and living it.

That reminds me of what Carlton Fisk once told baseball writer, Roger Angell, about his famous home run in Game 6 of the 1975 World Series.

**I once talked to Carlton Fisk—I was writing a piece about home runs—and I asked, “Do you have any memory of that home run in the sixth game in 1975, any private memory of what it was like? We all know the famous TV shot of you going to first base waving the ball fair, pushing it to the field and it hits the foul pole and the game is won.”**

**He said, “It's very interesting that you should bring this up. I have only seen that shot about four or five times in my lifetime. Every time I see it coming up, I leave the room or turn the set off. Because I want to keep a crystal memory of what that was like for me.”**

[Identity Theory]

That is beautiful, and I identify with parts of it even though I was simply a bystander and not the protagonist. Part of my reason for writing this book is to commit to print *for myself* the things I remember about being there, about what I heard and what it felt like.

So without further ado.

1. The putt on 10. A birdie at the 64th hole of the tournament to go up five on Bryson and Ludvig and four on Rose. Data Golf calculated in that moment that he had a 92 percent chance of winning. On the property, it felt like 192. Everything was rushing downhill, and everyone there was simply hopping in the stream and enjoying the ride. It wasn't quite jubilation, but it was certainly jubilation-adjacent. Surely, the last eight would be a victory lap lol.
2. The third on 13. Visions of a formerly elite amateur from England shooting something in the mid 60s to win the Masters from out of nowhere danced in our heads. Every shot from the leaders is difficult to see on property on Sunday, especially this particular Sunday. So as information gets passed back and spread around, it wasn't so much, "Wow what a terrible shot!" as

much as it was, "What in the world could have happened there?!" The unforgettable part about this seven is that – like Spieth's seven in 2016 – the howls from other parts of the course when the volunteers changed the numbers in the big white leaderboards were absolutely haunting.

3. The second on 15. You could do an entire book or documentary on this single shot. We never sat down to discuss all of this – though I reached out a few times – but I'm desperate to know what he was feeling and what he was thinking when he got over this shot. Major moments (like, *moments*) are so elusive, and he's reflective enough (even in the middle of that chaos) to know that he only gets that specific shot one time. I can't imagine what it felt like to stand over it. It was the kind of quiet that makes you wonder if time has shifted and what you're experiencing has ever been experienced before or will ever be experienced again. The explosion was both distant (on the green) and in my face (KVV and I screaming at each other). It was the most unforgettable major championship moment I have ever experienced.

**The explosion was both distant (on the green) and in my face (KVV and I screaming at each other). It was the most unforgettable major championship moment I have ever experienced.**

**Tens of thousands bellowing at the sky, a mimicry of what the man who had just shed the albatross of his career was also doing. It felt surreal. It felt hopeful. It felt wonderful.**

4. The second on 17. This one gets a bit lost, but I got maybe my best view of any of his shots on the back nine. When he started leaning forward and telling it to go, I got concerned. But he was properly juiced up and got the roll out he needed to make three there, which it turns out he had to have for the win. It was the most body language I think he displayed after 13 until the very end. I remember feeling like he'd left it way short and was startled to hear the massive roar up ahead when it settled to just a few feet. This one won't make the highlight reel 50 years from now, but I think you could argue it was one of the toughest shots, and perhaps even the most important.
5. The second on 18 (in the playoff). When it gets close to the end at ANGC, all you can do is listen. I was up the right side behind the clump of trees separating 10 and 18 when he dumped one in the bunker in regulation. The lack of noise was deflating, the mistake even more so. There is an

argument to be made that not hitting the green there was a more egregious mistake than what he did on 13. I don't know that I would make that argument, but you definitely could.

The time between the end of regulation and the playoff at the Masters is a bit chaotic. I somehow ended up in the clubhouse watching shots into 18 by Rory and Rose on TV – this was my only hope of seeing anything at all. As soon as Rory's landed up the slope and started trickling back toward the hole, I made a beeline for the 18th green.

Again, I was 20, 25, maybe 30 rows deep when I got out there. We were all on our tiptoes, hoping for just a glance. All we got was shouts, though. Tens of thousands bellowing at the sky, a mimicry of what the man who had just shed the albatross of his career was also doing. It felt surreal. It felt hopeful. It felt wonderful.

# Something from Our Readers

## Something from Our Readers

I got so many wonderful emails from our readers that they could be an entire book unto themselves. These four stood out, though, and I found them each to be beautiful in their own way.

Here's the first from Shawn A.

● ● ○

*I left my muni to a barrage of texts after Rory completed the fourth. Poured a vodka tonic and am now upstairs watching the masters.*

*Like Michael Scott, I am ready to hurt again.*

*Over the years, I've tried to articulate why I love Rory and why I want him to win so badly, and why it hurts so much when he doesn't.*

*I'm 41 years old so Rory represented my generation of golfers, especially after Tiger had his car wreck. Because he succeeded early and I identified with his ascendancy, real or imagined.*

*Because he failed. He was vulnerable. He got lost but never shied away from his failures. Tron once said about Rory, "Man have some self respect," but for those of us who know deep and profound failure, it's impossible to ignore it or run from it. It permeates everything in our lives until, over time, we grow out of it.*

*Because his swing is beautiful. There is no evolutionary purpose for beauty. Beauty is undeniable and points to something more glorious and beautiful than this world, and deep down we want there to be more. We want beauty to be recognized and rewarded because we want it to be true. We need it to be true.*

*Because, like Wright Thompson's dad (and my dad) felt when Jack won in 86, I feel like it isn't over for me yet. That if my (golf) hero can overcome obstacles of identity and a silly game, then I can as well. That I haven't lost my fastball, that there is still good to come in a life that moves quickly, celebrates youth, but is wasted on the young.*

*I don't know him. I don't know what kind of man he is. But as a golfer I want him to win, for beauty to be true, for dreams to come true.*

*All the best,  
Shawn*

**I don't know him. I don't know what kind of man he is. But as a golfer I want him to win, for beauty to be true, for dreams to come true.**

[Shawn]



*I was watching with my wife and two sons, one of whom is an elite player and wants to be a pro. He cared, and he's only 15. He wasn't even born in 2011. My other son, who is a scratch player himself but now a happy student and barely watches or plays any more, cared. My wife, who doesn't play but has to sit patiently while I've watched obscure PGA tournaments on late night TV in which Rory would play in the hope of seeing some magic because it's just Rory being Rory, she cared.*

*I know why we care. People say it's because of his struggle. Because he wears his heart on his sleeve. Because of his distance.*

*I think it's because he has managed to weave us a living fairy tale of a talented boy born to poor parents who had a dream. And he couldn't achieve his dream despite his talent. And he kept getting knocked back down. And he never complained, he just kept going.*

*And the more he fought, the more people followed him. And his fight became something for all of us, because we all have our struggles and our demons. And his were ours to share. Young children, teenagers, adults, pensioners, we all had a stake in the game. And our fairy tale came true.*

*Joss F.*

*I've been a huge Rory fan for a long long time, before any majors. By chance, my son (3 at the time, now 15) also met him in a friend's house that was being used as a green room for a TV advert he was filming in the house next door (random).*

*With no fans, no media around, he was truly the nicest anyone could have been to my son when there was ultimately no need to be at all, or certainly no need to do any more than just say hello. I have great photos of him playing with my son and lifting him up and stuff. This was my own example of the human side to Rory that you've talked so eloquently about.*

*No matter the golf course pain we've lived through or when he's done some of his more daft public things, from that meeting I've always believed that in simple terms at his core he is just a good guy. And for that, I've relentlessly stood behind him and supported him (painful though it has been at times!).*

*I was at the Masters this week for the first time, over from the UK. The number one bucket list trip I've always dreamed of doing since I started watching the Masters in the late 80s. As you know, it's a unique and special place as a golf fan, and getting to experience it at all with my friends would have been amazing. But to watch the week play out as it did being there in person was a time I'll genuinely never forget.*

*You said "I have never felt that way about a stupid round of golf," and I couldn't agree more.*

*David H.*



*Since you posed the question, I have been thinking about why I love Rory so much. Yes, the incredible golf ability, but that's not really it.*

*That's not why the text chain with my brother and best friend was buzzing with anxiety during that entire roller coaster of a round. Why a friend who has never watched a golf tournament before texted me that she couldn't believe he blew his "two point lead." Why multiple people told me they cried after he won. Why I had a pit in my stomach and could barely bring myself to watch that back nine and then shed happy tears once the final putt fell.*

*For me, the simple answer is that he cares. He puts himself out there time and time again. He failed (guess can use the past tense now!) so many times in the most public way possible.*

*We all have things that we want, and while we can come with a million logical reasons why we don't go after them, usually the real reason is fear. So we don't even try.*

*But not Rory. He cares, and he admits he cares. It seems like he knew that it might not happen, but he also knew that the only way to know for sure was to keep trying.*

*At times it was excruciating to watch, but it was also impossible to look away.*

*And while yes, the dream did come true, even if it never did, I think that he still could have been proud that he continued to show up and try. And served as a reminder to all of us of what true persistence looks like.*

*Christine P.*

**We all have things that we want, and while we can come with a million logical reasons why we don't go after them, usually the real reason is fear. So we don't even try.**

[Christine P.]

# The Scoring Hut

April 10 – 13, 2025

## Rory's Scorecards

Round 1, Thursday April 10

Hole	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	Total
Par	4	5	4	3	4	3	4	5	4	4	4	3	5	4	5	3	4	4	72
R1	4	5	3	3	4	3	4	4	3	4	4	3	4	4	7	3	6	4	72
+/-	-	-	-1	-1	-1	-1	-1	-2	-3	-3	-3	-3	-4	-4	-2	-2	-	-	-

Round 2, Friday April 11

Hole	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	Total
Par	4	5	4	3	4	3	4	5	4	4	4	3	5	4	5	3	4	4	72
R2	4	4	4	3	4	3	4	5	4	3	3	3	3	4	4	3	4	4	66
+/-	-	-1	-1	-1	-1	-1	-1	-1	-1	-2	-3	-3	-5	-5	-6	-6	-6	-6	-6

Round 3, Saturday April 12

Hole	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	Total
Par	4	5	4	3	4	3	4	5	4	4	4	3	5	4	5	3	4	4	72
R3	3	3	3	3	3	3	4	6	4	5	4	3	4	4	3	3	4	4	66
+/-	-7	-9	-10	-10	-11	-11	-11	-10	-10	-9	-9	-9	-10	-10	-12	-12	-12	-12	-12

Round 4, Sunday April 13

Hole	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	Total
Par	4	5	4	3	4	3	4	5	4	4	4	3	5	4	5	3	4	4	72
R4	6	5	3	2	4	3	4	5	3	3	5	3	7	5	4	3	3	5	73
+/-	-10	-10	-11	-12	-12	-12	-12	-12	-13	-14	-13	-13	-11	-10	-11	-11	-12	-11	-11

Playoff, Sunday April 13

Hole	18	Total
Par	4	72
Rory	3	-1
Justin	4	-

# LEADERS

PRIOR	HOLE	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18
	PAR	4	5	4	3	4	3	4	5	4	4	4	3	5	4	5	3	4	4
<b>12</b>	<b>MCILROY</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>ROSE</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>6</b>	<b>REED</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>SCHEFFLER</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>IM</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>10</b>	<b>DECHAMBEAU</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>6</b>	<b>ÅBERG</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>SCHAUFFELE</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>JOHNSON, Z.</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>DAY</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>5</b>





## Join the Normal Club

Normal Sport is supported by exactly 1,010 deranged individuals. By becoming a member, you empower us to continue creating projects like this one and writing books and going to events and exploring so we can report back on what we find. You are the engine behind our business, and the reason it is possible.

And by joining the Normal Club, you will receive all the benefits modern media businesses offer (discounts, bonus content etc.), but we also want to note that you will have far less explaining to do re: your CC statement than going to the Masters merch shop. Marital counseling costs way more than \$82.

Become a member today:  
[www.normalsport.com](http://www.normalsport.com)



# Normal Sport

# The Weight of Rory

On one of the great events  
in golf sports history.

**Goodbye, friends.**

The most epic journeys  
in history were made  
alone, and alone is often  
where the participants  
find themselves.

Alone in the history  
books. Peerless.  
Without competitors.  
That is certainly where  
Rory is now. There are no  
modern comps. There are  
no European contenders.  
He is by himself in this  
era, and he has shown  
that to get to a place that  
no one else has gotten  
to, you must be willing  
to do some things – to  
go through some stuff  
– that no one else is  
willing to take on.

Digital ISBN: 979-8-9854298-8-6  
Physical ISBN: 979-8-9854298-9-3

Printed in Canada.

Copyright © 2026  
Whistleharp Publishing  
All rights reserved.



**Normal Sport**

[normalsport.com](http://normalsport.com)

