

Last weekend, at the US Open at Shinnecock Hills which is out near Montauk on Long Island, golfer Phil Mickelson did something I have never seen done before. On the thirteenth hole, while playing poorly, he putted the ball, missed the hole, chased after the ball while it was still rolling and then putted the still moving ball back at the hole. He missed. This is not allowed in golf. It was an unprecedented breach of the rules. He should have been disqualified. He was not disqualified because he's Phil Mickelson, a star. I thought what he did was disgraceful. In my opinion, it was the golf equivalent of Mike Tyson biting each of the tips of the ears of Heavyweight Champion Evander Holyfield when a fight was going badly for him. In both cases, the losing athletes tried to get themselves disqualified in order to, in some warped way, protect their reputations. In both cases, Tyson or Mickelson weren't honest enough to admit to their true motivation for doing what they did, although it was obvious to any reasonable non-apologist.*



In Phil's defense, seemingly all the golfers and commentators had an issue with how difficult the golf course was set up. Good shots which landed on the green were in some cases rolling off, good putts were rolling too fast, which made putting difficult, to the point of being like no other known putting surface they play on. Phil is a very opinionated guy when it comes to how golf courses should be designed. His action was partly to demonstrate his frustration with the United States Golf Association which set up the course. That stated, what Phil did was still wrong. I also think it's worth reflecting on a few things.

The first thing that comes to mind is that, generally speaking, golf is considered a "white elitist game." To whatever degree that's true, Phil Mickelson can almost be its poster boy. Although what he did was not vulgar, or physically harmful to anyone, it was a punk move. He was trying to draw attention to himself too. He made a day that shouldn't have been about him, about him. If you follow golf, that is just the way Phil Mickelson likes it. If an African American athlete did something comparable, in any sport, he'd be metaphorically crucified, perhaps deservedly so. Phil hasn't got a free pass but he hasn't gotten criticized enough, in my opinion. I'm sorry if that offends any of you, but that's how I see it.

The next thing that comes to mind is, as I mentioned, the golf course was set up poorly. Plus, some guys were more affected by it than others because of the changing winds. However, weather frequently affects golf tournaments. Professionals really can't publicly gripe about how they were disproportionately affected by the weather. We live in a fallen world. In life we all get some bad breaks, few of us live the lives we wished we lived. For instance, I partly wish I was a golf professional of the caliber of Phil Mickelson, not the person writing this bulletin article. That aside, in life we need to make the best out of any situation. Aristotle wrote about the qualities of an ideal man. His ideal man handles the accidents in life with dignity and grace. Aristotle believed that a man will at times have to live his life like a general who finds himself surrounded by more numerous and better equipped enemy forces. Aristotle's ideal man buckles his helmet, rallies his troops, marshals all his resources and looks to breakout. In life we are at times disadvantaged, all we can do is play with the deck of cards life has given us. There is no shame in losing. There can be shame though in how we lose. In victory or defeat we should approach every person or circumstance with the humility and meekness of Christ. As per the famous military novel, *Once an Eagle*, by Anton Myrer, military persons are taught the further you go up the chain of command the more calm you have to be. A mom, dad, priest or world-class athlete should all work on staying calm and bearing the accidents of life with grace. We offer all our sufferings for the reparations of our sins and the sins of others, especially people we find difficult to like.

Finally, Phil Mickelson had a bad moment. Bad moments don't have to define us. Thank God we have Confession. Phil is known as being a good ambassador for the game. He apparently goes above and beyond his duty when it comes to signing autographs and/or engaging fans. He built up a reservoir of goodwill which came in handy when he had an unfortunate moment. None of us are going to be perfect all the time, so hopefully we too will have built up a reservoir of goodwill with how we generally live our life. Therefore, please remember any good I've done the next time I have an unfortunate moment on or off the golf course.

** To be fair to Mike Tyson, he felt that Holyfield was intentionally butting him with his bald head. I think Holyfield was just simply holding his ground. Tyson was used to his opponent backing down from him. However, my guess is Tyson was quite aware that Holyfield was likely loaded up on steroids and/or HGH for their fight or fights. Without those performance-enhancing drugs, some people argue, the naturally smaller Holyfield would not have been able to compete with the naturally bigger, stronger and faster Tyson. That stated, based on his physique for the second fight, Tyson was probably on performance-enhancing drugs too. However, in the arms race of sports performance-enhancing drugs, Holyfield was the aggressor, which I'm sure Tyson resented. This digression demonstrates how difficult it can be evaluating a moral act. To his credit, I guess you can say Tyson has kept "Guy Code" and never publically accused Holyfield of what many people would now view as true.*