



Patience then **pizzazz** pays off for Bubba!

/// By Paul Prendergast

It took a while for the traditional Masters Sunday back nine energy and excitement to start echoing through the Georgia pines, but echo it did as the mercurial creativity of Bubba Watson emerged victorious after closing out the sublime swinging South African, Louis Oosthuizen, in a playoff on the 2nd extra hole.

Having come close to a Major in the 2010 PGA Championship playoff loss to Martyn Kaymer, the emotions of this breakthrough win for the devote Christian on Easter Sunday bubbled over for Watson. With wife Angie and new son Caleb not able to travel to Augusta, Watson calmly two putted from 12 feet for the victory on the treacherous 10th green and tearfully embraced first his caddie, then mother Molly, followed by close friends Rickie Fowler, Ben Crane and Aaron Baddeley on the green to a backdrop of deafening cheers.

Only moments earlier, those same cheering patrons had witnessed the most important mercurial recovery shot of Watson's career from the trees to set up the victory. Having driven into the trees to the right, Watson would leave himself a 155 yard shot off pine straw through an opening that required a 40 yard hook to reach the green. This would under normal circumstances be child's play for the imaginative Watson, but the gravity of the circumstances made this a different scenario altogether. 'Needing' to pull off the shot in a playoff for immortality, or perish, was on the line although Watson was unfazed by what confronted him.

'I was there earlier today in regulation so I was used to it. I knew what I was facing there.' Watson said from the Butler Cabin before receiving his green jacket from defending champion Charl Schwartzel. Schwartzel himself had been through the ringer after finishing his own round, watching close friend Oosthuizen's travails nervously on TV. 'I had a good lie and I had a gap where I had to hook it, I don't know, 40 yards or

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something. I'm pretty good at hooking and somehow it nestled close to the hole.'

'I had no idea where he was but when the ball came out of there it looked like a curve ball, an unbelievable shot.' Oosthuizen smiled magnanimously.

The 33 year old Watson's victory in only his 4th appearance is a crowning achievement not only for himself, but also for an approach to the game that is unrivalled by any other player in the modern era. Watson proudly flies in the face of the modern path to success, never having received formal instruction and even refusing to analyse his own swing on video. His win will be heard beyond the golfing world and could herald a new legion of fans who want to play the game like 'Bubba'.

Prior to playing that momentous hook shot with a wedge to setup victory, the non-conformist Watson had played for him a relatively controlled round of golf from tee to green, appearing to not overdo the curvature of his shots from the fairway and only producing the audacious when required to extricate himself from trouble. After

bogeying 12, Watson made 4 birdies in a row 'nervous on every shot and every putt', but his exercise in control and some clutch putting down the stretch was outstanding and bore witness to a maturing of his game under the crucible of Major Championship pressure.

With pre-tournament favourites Tiger Woods and Rory McIlroy long relegated to the sideshow (they would both finish at 5 over par in a tie for 40th), Masters crowd favourite Phil Mickelson's courageous fight back from the brink of disaster on the first day was stepped up a notch, shooting brilliant 6 under par 30 on the back nine on Saturday. Mickelson's heroics would ensure an eagerly anticipated showdown for a 4th Green Jacket with 54 hole leader Peter Hanson from Sweden, a Masters veteran versus relative rookie, with Oosthuizen, Watson, Matt Kuchar and Lee Westwood all lurking close by.

Mickelson's 66, sparked by a long eagle putt on 13 that was 'heard' throughout the course, would help inspire Hansen playing ahead of him. In only his 2nd Masters and with the weight of a Swedish nation hoping for their first male Major

Champion, Hanson would later say the roar from Mickelson's eagle would help inspire him to play the final seven holes in 5 under par to grab the overnight lead and a meeting with Mickelson in the final pairing on Sunday.

A shot behind Mickelson in 3rd place heading into Sunday was Oosthuizen, who had the purists and the CBS commentary team, including 3 time Masters champion Nick Faldo, swooning at how well he was swinging the club and managing his game.

And as the final round unfolded, it would appear that back to back South African green jackets were in store as the silky swinging Oosthuizen grasped the nettle with a history making 2 on the par five 2nd hole, to seize an early lead from a nervous Hanson. Oosthuizen became only the 4th player in Masters history to record a double eagle, or albatross in other parts of the world, when his downhill 4 iron from 235 yards landed on the front of the green before curling left to right with the slope to fall on its last

legs into the cup.

'It was tough after that double eagle. It was my first double eagle ever and it was tough the next five holes to get my head around it, but I found my rhythm from around 11.' Oosthuizen would say.

In scoring the first double eagle on the 2nd hole in Masters history, Oosthuizen joined Jeff Maggert, Bruce Devlin and the legendary Gene Sarazen, who famously holed his fairway wood approach in the final round on the 15th hole on his way to victory in 1935, in the Masters 'double eagle club'.

Oosthuizen looked to be impenetrable, with sublime shot making later matched with some clutch putting when a few tiny cracks started to appear in his long game. With a 1 shot lead, the man known as 'Shrek' made an error with his wedge approach to the accessible pin location on 14, spinning the ball back off the false front to the fairway. A clutch 10 foot par putt down the slope was followed by another on 15 for birdie, as Watson looked over an eagle putt

which he would narrowly miss.

With Amen Corner, holes 11 through 13, having failed to conjure up its traditional fireworks, Matt Kuchar's 3 wood to 3 feet for eagle on 15 and then Watson's right to left curling putt to tie the lead for the first time on 16 would generate the first of the cacophonous roars from the crowd that we've come to expect of a Sunday at Augusta.

Kuchar would suffer the immediate letdown of a bogey after a poor tee shot on 16, leaving leaders Watson and Oosthuizen's nerves to be tested after wayward drives on the 17th put them out of position on opposite sides of the fairway. Oosthuizen would make a brilliant up and down from the front bunker to save par and Watson, after skying the ball over trees from hardpan to 35 feet, would hit the hole with his birdie putt before sinking a knee trembler to head to the 72nd hole tied with his playing partner.

That both players would pull off some of their best shots of the round on the 18th hole, in the last

hole of regulation and again on the first playoff hole, spoke volumes for their class with the pressure of the eyes of the world on them. Both would face wedge approaches, Oosthuizen carrying the ball only a yard or two too far to end above the hole on the second tier, leaving Watson to seize the advantage by spinning the ball back to within 20 feet.

When Watson missed his chance to win The Masters in regulation, Oosthuizen would again call on his putter to save him by holing from 6 feet to force a playoff, as the gallant tilts at the Green Jacket from Kuchar, Lee Westwood, Ian Poulter, Hanson and Mickelson would come up short.

Mickelson's final round 72 would include his second triple bogey of the tournament, striking the grandstand to the left of the 3rd hole and caroming into bamboo. From there, he opted to play from where it lay as opposed to returning to the tee but would need two right handed stabs at the ball, a pitch, bunker shot and 1 putt for his 6.

Mickelson will long rue those two triple bogies although should be proud of his comeback from being 4 over on the back nine of the 1st round and in danger of missing the cut. Although he would finish only 2 shots from a playoff, his family holiday in the Bahamas the following week would no doubt have included some reflection on the opportunity for a 4th Green Jacket that passed through his fingertips.

Asked in the Butler Cabin how to put into words what this meant to him, winning on Easter Sunday and so soon after becoming a father, the tearful Watson was lost for words for some seconds as he battled with his emotions. 'I never got this far in my dreams. It's a blessing. To go home



to my new son, it's going to be fun.'

'I kept my head down (all day) because I knew there were birdies and eagle opportunities on the back nine. Couple of holes in one there already on 16 (Bo Van Pelt and Adam Scott) so I knew that was a possibility too. I just kept going, kept grinding it out and somehow got into a playoff. I don't know what happened for the rest, I was crying a little bit later, that's about it.' he smiled through red eyes. 'It's nice, I look like you now!' he joked with Schwartzel, after donning his Green Jacket.

Will it be the first of many for the man from Baghdad, Florida, the University of Georgia Bulldog who has wowed us with his outlandish talent for a long time now? It should be as he has most likely erased any doubts that may have lingered about his ability to close the deal on firm, fast greens such as these. There have been plenty of examples of situations where his putting has held him back but not this week.

Watson's victory over the meticulously correct yet visually appealing tempo and swing of the diminutive South African was a contrast in styles in the extreme: the tall v short, 'leftie v rightie', flamboyant v conservative, finetuned v the unfiltered, the American v the International. Oosthuizen was full of praise for Watson immediately following the playoff 'I played well, great stuff to him, he deserves it. I had a chance there on 10 when he hit it in the trees but couldn't take advantage.'

In truth, both players were deserving of this Green Jacket but the ripple effect for the game from a Bubba win and in the style that he ultimately achieved it could be enormous. Not only his win, but in his reactions and displays of raw emotion on the final green, in the Butler Cabin presentation, in the official presentation ceremony and again later in the Media Room.

Wearing his heart on his sleeve more than any recent Major

champion, Bubba's authenticity and sense of fun is refreshing and would remind many of the great Arnold Palmer and his relationship with the galleries, 'Arnie's Army', in his heyday. Interestingly, it was the 50th anniversary of Palmer's 2nd Masters victory, also in a playoff, in 1962.

Watson is the latest Major winner in an era that has now thrown up its 8th consecutive 1st time Major Champion. In doing so, he leapt to a career high 4th in the Official World Golf Rankings, strengthening his standing amongst the slew of great players at the top of the game at the moment.

For now though, Watson's thoughts are not solely about the magnitude of his win, of World Rankings or the lifetime he has ahead of him at Augusta National. From before the conclusion of play, Watson's thoughts had been straying to being able to get home as quickly as he can to his wife and young son - where more tears of joy are sure to be shed by our 76th Masters Champion.

