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### Woods, Tiger; and Yamaguchi, Kristi.

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**Great Lives from History**

# **Asian and Pacific Islander Americans**

## TIGER WOODS

### Athlete

*Tiger Woods was once one of the world's most celebrated professional athletes. His success on the golf course as well as his endorsement deals earned him a fortune. He was widely considered to be the great-est golfer in history. However, Woods's reputation was tarnished in late 2009 by revelations of his extramarital affairs.*

**Born:** December 30, 1975; Cypress, California

**Full name:** Tiger Woods

**Birth name:** Eldrick Tont Woods

**Areas of achievement:** Sports, philanthropy

#### EARLY LIFE

Tiger Woods was born Eldrick Tont Woods on December 30, 1975, in Cypress, California, to Earl and Kultida Woods. Earl nicknamed his son "Tiger" after a South

Vietnamese military officer who had saved his life during his military service in the Vietnam War. Tiger would be closely identified with his parents throughout his celebrity career. Earl Woods had been previously married to Barbara Hart, with whom he had three children before their divorce in 1968. The following year, he married Kultida Punsawad, a native of Thailand whom Earl had met overseas. The couple settled in the small town of Cypress, California. Earl Woods was African American with Caucasian and American Indian ancestry. Kultida Woods was a Buddhist, and had a diverse Asian heritage. Attending Cypress public schools, the young Woods was sometimes taunted for his mixed racial background.

Although Earl Woods was unfaithful to his wife Kultida over the length of their marriage, he was fanatically devoted to his son, who was a golf prodigy.



*Tiger Woods.* (Getty Images)

The senior Woods taught his son how to swing a golf club when he was a year old. At the age of two, Woods appeared on *The Mike Douglas Show* to demonstrate his putting ability. At age five, he was featured in *Golf Digest* and on the television show *That's Incredible*. Woods's mother was an equally formidable, if unheralded influence on him, imparting to him her self-assured demeanor, competitive drive, and Buddhist faith.

At age seven, Woods began entering golf tournaments. By the time he turned eleven, he could defeat his father in golf. Woods was undefeated in thirty Southern California golf tournaments. Earl entered Woods in the Junior World Golf Championships; he won six times. In 1991, at the age of fifteen, Woods was named *Golf Digest* Junior Amateur Player of the Year. That same year, he became the youngest golfer ever to win the US Junior Amateur Championship. Woods won the same championship in 1992 and 1993. He became the first golfer to win the US Amateur Championship in three consecutive years, from 1994 to 1996. In 1994, Woods graduated from Western High School in Anaheim, California.

#### LIFE'S WORK

Woods enrolled at Stanford University in 1994, but left in 1996 to concentrate on his professional golf career. After turning professional, he signed a multi-million-dollar endorsement deal with Nike.

In 1997, he won the prestigious Master's Tournament with a score of 270, far ahead of the other competitors. From 2000 to 2009 Woods was the most dominant player in golf. Although he was hampered by an injured left knee, Woods worked relentlessly on both the technical and the competitive aspects of his game. He worked with coaches Buster Harmon and Hank Haney in seeking to improve what was already a graceful and nearly perfect golf swing. Woods was able to drive the ball over three hundred yards with ease, had an accurate short game, and demonstrated strong putting skills. In 2000, he won the US Open for the first time, a feat that he repeated in 2002 and 2008.

Through 2009, Woods won fourteen major professional championships, second only to golfing legend Jack Nicklaus. He ranked third in Professional Golf Association (PGA) tour victories with seventy-one, and had earned the most PGA prize money: \$111 million. Woods won three grand slams, meaning he consecutively won the Masters Tournament, the US Open, the British Open, and the PGA Championship three times. Woods was named PGA Player of the Year a record ten times, and ranked as the world's number-one golfer for the longest period of time in the sport's history.

Woods quickly achieved iconic status as a professional athlete. Nike, his chief sponsor, paid him hundreds of millions of dollars to endorse its products. Woods was credited in part for the increase of Nike's revenue throughout the 2000s. Nike made use of Woods's charisma in a series of memorable television commercials, which featured Woods with children of all races and ethnicities who repeated "I am Tiger Woods." The advertisement emphasized Woods's own racial diversity and broad appeal. In another commercial, Woods inventively bounces a golf ball on his sand wedge forty-nine times to snappy background music before casually hitting the ball in mid air some two hundred yards.

Woods took great pains to maintain his public image. He consistently avoided any kind of political commentary, and refused to become a spokesman for any movement. He also rejected any attempt to categorize

him racially, declaring himself to be “Cablinasian,” a word he invented symbolizing his ensemble of racial heritages. He likewise refused to inject himself into any kind of racial advocacy or controversy.

On October 5, 2004, Woods married Swedish fashion model Elin Nordegren. The couple moved into a luxurious home in a gated community in Windermere, Florida. The couple’s daughter Sam was born on June 18, 2007. Their son Charlie was born on February 8, 2009. Woods’s reputation as a doting father and devoted husband enhanced his public image, and his popularity was compared to that of baseball legend Babe Ruth and basketball legend Michael Jordan.

Before Woods, golf had never achieved such a wide following as a spectator sport, but Woods’s mastery of the sport, combined with the power of his celebrity, increased golf’s popularity worldwide. He earned endorsement contracts from numerous companies, including Electronic Arts, American Express, Gillette, Gatorade, Accenture, General Mills, General Motors, Titleist, Tag Heuer, and Buick. In 2009 *Forbes* magazine reported that Woods was the first athlete in history to have earned a billion dollars. In addition to owning a 155-foot yacht named *Privacy*, it was reported that Woods owned multimillion-dollar homes in California, Wyoming, Sweden, and Dubai.

In addition to his success as a golfer, Tiger Woods has become known for his philanthropy. Established in 1996, the Tiger Woods Foundation focuses on promoting the sport of golf to inner-city children. The foundation also oversees the Tiger Woods Learning Center, which helps low-income children get into college. In addition to his athletic achievements, Woods’s clean public image and charitable work made him a role model for children.

On December 5, 2007, Woods was inducted into the California Hall of Fame. Although he eschews politics, Woods spoke at Barack Obama’s presidential inauguration at the Lincoln Memorial in 2009.

On November 27, 2010, Woods crashed his car into a tree near his Orlando home at 2:30 in the morning. Rumors began to circulate in the media that he was fleeing a domestic dispute. The police arrived and issued Woods a citation. Over the next several days numerous women, including fashion models and actresses, began making claims of having had extramarital relationships with Woods. In addition, his twenty-one-year-old Orlando neighbor also claimed she and Woods had a relationship. Over the next months, Woods was unmasked in the media as a serial adulterer. Although

### Tiger Woods’s “Cablinasian” Identity

Woods is from a mixed-race background; his father was African American and his mother hailed from Thailand. When Woods entered the public arena as an eighteen-year-old golfer, he issued a press release stating that he was equally proud of his African American and his Asian heritage. He asked reporters to focus on him as a golfer and person and not as a representative of any race. When Woods appeared on *The Oprah Winfrey Show* on April 24, 1997, he announced that he was “Cablinasian,” a word he invented to represent his heritage as one-eighth Caucasian, one-fourth African American, one-eighth American Indian, and one-half Asian (Thai and Chinese). He asked that he not be seen in racial categories. “I’m just who I am,” Woods told Winfrey, “whoever you see in front of you.” His comments sparked an immediate reaction. For example, Columbia University professor Manning Marable accused Woods of “minimizing” his African American identity. One week later, Winfrey ran a follow-up show devoted to the “Tiger Woods Race Controversy.”

Although Woods rarely used the term “Cablinasian” in subsequent years, he never veered from his insistence that he belonged to no single racial group. Woods has been admired for rejecting rigid and divisive racial categorization. By most accounts, he was a successful pioneer in symbolizing a post-racial United States.

he had succeeded over the course of his career in scrupulously preserving his image and privacy, the scandal surrounding his numerous affairs resulted in the details of his personal life being exposed and examined by the media.

On December 11, 2009, Woods admitted to the affairs and announced that he was taking a leave of absence from golf. Many of his commercial sponsors, excluding Nike, canceled his contracts. In January 2010, he entered a clinic to receive therapy and treatment for his personal problems. Woods also spoke of returning to his practice of Buddhism. In February 2010, Woods admitted that he had let the temptations of fame and fortune get the best of him, saying “I was wrong. I was foolish.” On August 23, 2010 he and Nordegren divorced. They were awarded joint custody of their children.

When Woods returned to golf on April 8, 2010, at the Masters Tournament, his skills were seemingly

diminished. By May 2011, he had fallen out of the top ten in world golf rankings for the first time in fourteen years. His last championship victory was at the 2009 WGC-Bridgestone Invitational.

#### SIGNIFICANCE

Woods is one of the most important figures in the history of American athletics and one of the few who transcended his sport. It is widely agreed that he is one of the greatest golfers in history, as evidenced by his numerous tournament victories. His only rival in career victories is Jack Nicklaus, who obtained them over a much longer career. Before Woods arrived, golf was perceived by many as an exclusive sport, reserved for elites. When Woods won the Masters Tournament in 1997, he was the first person of African and Asian ancestry to do so. Woods not only broke golf's color barrier, he became one of the most popular and idealized athletes in the world. His ensuing endorsements made him the richest athlete in the world, and the first to reach a billion dollars in career earnings. As a public figure, Woods has treated his own racial identity with sensitivity. He has rejected racial categorization, and he refused to accept the label of African American, in part because he felt that it would diminish the importance of his Asian heritage. For all of his accomplishments, his legacy will no doubt be tarnished by the scandal surrounding his infidelity in 2009. In the years that have followed, Woods has not been the same on the golf course, and his image is no longer featured as prominently in the mainstream media.

*Howard Bromberg*

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## KRISTI YAMAGUCHI

### Athlete, entertainer

*Kristi Yamaguchi was the first Asian American to win a gold medal in Olympic figure skating and the first Asian American woman to win an Olympic event. An elegant skater, charismatic performer, and civic-minded person, Yamaguchi is one of the most popular figures in the history of the sport.*

**Born:** July 12, 1971; Hayward, California

**Full name:** Kristine Tsuya Yamaguchi

**Areas of achievement:** Sports, entertainment

#### EARLY LIFE

Kristi Yamaguchi was born in Hayward, California, on July 12, 1971, to Jim and Carole Doi Yamaguchi. Her father worked as a dentist, and her mother worked as a medical secretary. Yamaguchi was the second of their three children and grew up in Fremont, California. Yamaguchi is a fourth-generation American of Japanese descent. Her grandparents were sent to the Japanese internment camps after Japan's attack on the US naval base at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii.

Yamaguchi was born with a foot deformity, and was fitted with a cast within weeks of her birth. Until she was three, she wore corrective shoes and leg braces to correct her condition.

At the age of four, she began to take ballet lessons. Yamaguchi's parents felt that ballet would help her overcome her foot problems. At age six, Yamaguchi saw an ice show at a shopping mall and asked her mother for figure skating lessons. She fell in love with the sport, and began spending countless hours on the ice. She also began carrying around a miniature doll of American ice skater Dorothy Hamill, the 1976 Olympic champion. By age eleven, Yamaguchi began competing in figure skating competitions. She began training at five o'clock in the morning, six days a week. Yamaguchi's spent five hours on lessons each day, and even more time practicing. After graduating from Willow Glen High School in San Jose, California, Yamaguchi did not enroll in college, and instead began devoting all of her time to figure skating.

#### LIFE'S WORK

Yamaguchi excelled in both single and pairs skating, which is an unusual skill in figure skating. Her partner was Rudy Galindo. In 1986, Yamaguchi and Galindo won the junior pairs skating title at the US Figure Skating Championships and a bronze medal at the Olympic

Festival. In 1988, she won the World Junior Championship in Brisbane, Australia, both in the singles competition and in the pairs competition with Galindo. In 1989 and 1990, Yamaguchi and Galindo were the United States pair champions. In addition, the seventeen-year-old Yamaguchi placed second in the 1989 US Championships singles event. Her long program was praised for being beautiful and exuberant in execution. In 1990, Yamaguchi and Galindo placed fifth in the 1990 World Figure Skating Championships in Halifax, Canada.

Following her fifth-place finish with Galindo in 1990, Yamaguchi decided to concentrate exclusively on singles competition. She moved to Edmonton, Canada, to continue training with the highly regarded skating coach Christy Kjarsgaard Ness. Yamaguchi had established herself as one of the world's elite women skaters, along with fellow American figure skaters Tonya Harding, Jill Trenary, and Nancy Kerrigan. Other prominent competitors at the time included Surya Bonaly of France, Chen Lu of China, and Midori Ito of Japan. Yamaguchi was a well-balanced skater, who emphasized



*Kristi Yamaguchi.* (Getty Images for IMG0)

### Kristi Yamaguchi at the 1992 Winter Olympic Games

The highlight of Yamaguchi's skating career was winning the gold medal in ladies figure skating at the 1992 winter Olympic Games in Albertville, France. Although she was at the time the women's world champion in figure skating, she was not necessarily the favorite to win Olympic gold. Her two main rivals, Tonya Harding and Midori Ito, were strong, athletic skaters, capable of performing the demanding triple axel, a jump that was beyond Yamaguchi. However, Yamaguchi performed her routines with both her customary elegance and mistake-free technique, landing several triple jumps. Her routines were expertly choreographed by Sandra Bezic and won plaudits for their grace and speed. Although Yamaguchi slipped at one point in her program, Ito and Harding fell during their routines. Yamaguchi's artistic routine scored enough points to ensure her first-place finish. On December 8, 2005, Yamaguchi was inducted into the US Olympic Hall of Fame for her 1992 performance. Her induction was a fitting tribute to one of America's most dedicated, talented, and popular ice champions.

artistry and elegance in her routines. She began lifting weights to build up her speed and strengthen her jumps. Her hard work paid off the following year when she won the 1991 World Singles Championships with a performance that included six triple jumps.

In 1992, Yamaguchi had one of her most spectacular years as a competitive skater. She won three coveted titles. She first won the US National Senior Ladies Championship. A few months later, Yamaguchi became the first Asian American woman to win an Olympic gold medal at the 1992 Winter Olympics in Albertville, France. Finally, she followed up her Olympic victory by successfully defending her world champion title.

Following her spectacular results in 1992, Yamaguchi left competitive skating to become a professional entertainer. Over the next ten years, she was a star attraction with the *Stars on Ice* dance show. She also performed in numerous television specials and won several professional competitions. A favorite with the public, Yamaguchi appeared in February 1994 in a humorous commercial for the fast-food chain Wendy's with its founder, David Thomas.

In 1996, Yamaguchi established a philanthropic foundation, the Always Dream Foundation, which benefits early literacy programs in underserved neighborhoods. The foundation was named for her personal motto, "Always Dream." On July 8, 2000, Yamaguchi married former professional hockey player Bret Hedican. The couple's first daughter, Keara, was born on October 1, 2003. Their second daughter, Emma, was born on

November 18, 2005. In 2008, Yamaguchi won the Thurman Munson Award for excellence in athletics and philanthropy. That same year, she won the Inspiration award at the Asian Excellence Awards and was the celebrity winner in the television dance competition *Dancing With the Stars*.

In 2011, Yamaguchi published a best-selling children's book, entitled *Dream Big, Little Pig*. The book reflects her "Always Dream" motto, portraying a pig who follows his unlikely dream to become a skating star.

#### SIGNIFICANCE

Yamaguchi is an outstanding figure skater, who brought her own brand of elegance and graciousness to the sport. She developed near-flawless form and

technique through rigorous and persistent practice, becoming one of the most popular skaters of her generation. In her early career, she excelled in both doubles and singles skating. When she skated in both the singles and pairs in the 1989 US Championships, she was the first woman to do so since Margaret Graham in 1954. The highlight of her career was her two world championships in 1991 and 1992 and her winning the Ladies Figure Skating competition in the 1992 Olympics, the first gold medal won by an Asian American woman.

*Howard Bromberg*

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