

This Week – Trading places



Picture this. Miami Heat fans hold images of NBA superstar LeBron James outside the American Airlines Arena in Miami after the two-time MVP announced he would leave the Cleveland Cavaliers and join the Heat. James said he would team up with free agents Chris Bosh and Dwyane Wade. He made his decision – which stunned Cavalier fans, but delighted their Heat counterparts – after two months of deliberation and endless speculation. Photo: Reuters

Monday

I've had enough of soccer. I have got something to achieve. And that is equally as big for this country as what the soccer World Cup will achieve

South Africa coach Peter de Villiers is sick of soccer's World Cup, and wants his rugby team to focus on the Tri-Nations

Tuesday

It's the nature of the sport. Sometimes you're the hammer, sometimes you're the nail. Today, I was the nail. I have 20 days now to be the hammer

Lance Armstrong after suffering on the treacherous third stage of the Tour de France, where a puncture cost him big time

Wednesday

I have achieved what I wanted to achieve. There is nothing left or any target to reach. I am not getting any younger, you can't play for ever and ever

Sri Lanka's world bowling record-holder Muttiah Muralitharan on retiring from test cricket after a career spanning 18 years

Thursday

I'm really stunned, I never thought he'd leave. It's like we just lost a championship on the final shot at the buzzer. It's so disappointing

Disillusioned Cleveland Cavalier fan Tom Sheehan on NBA superstar LeBron James' stunning move to the Miami Heat

Friday

I didn't play badly, just a couple of poor swings and four penalty strokes. I wanted to get four competitive rounds in before the Open but I'll now get an extra couple (at St Andrews)

Phil Mickelson puts positive spin on missing the cut by one stroke in the Scottish Open

Monday



American rider Tyler Farrar grimaces in pain after crashing during the second stage of the Tour de France. Photo: AP

Tuesday



The New York Mets' Johan Santana pitches during his team's 8-6 loss to the Cincinnati Reds at Citi Field. Photo: AFP

Wednesday



MotoGP world champion Valentino Rossi returns to his bike at the Misano circuit for the first time since his injury. Photo: AP

Thursday



Ethiopia's Gelete Burka beats Moroccan Ibissam Lakhoud in the 1,500m at the IAAF Diamond League in Lausanne. Photo: Reuters

Friday



Fans of Australian golfer Karrie Webb follow second-round action at the US Women's Open in Oakmont, Pennsylvania. Photo: AP

Alvin Sallay



I've got a feeling that tonight's gonna be a good, good night. Whatever the outcome, a new world soccer champion will be crowned. Let's hope Spain and the Netherlands put on a show worthy of a World Cup final.

So far, these have been the two countries that have best embodied what the Beautiful Game is all about. Once upon a time, that buoyant spirit was shown proudly by Brazil. But the samba has long been stamped out of Brazilian soccer and, these days, the magical skills are just a memory.

It's a crying shame. Other team sports have also had a particular country that used to be the exemplar of how the game should be played. In rugby sevens, we always believed Fiji played the game the way the gods intended. And for a long time, the West Indian brand of "calypso cricket" lifted the soul.

Sport played in this joyous, carefree fashion always drew admirers. We will always have a special place in our hearts for Viv Richards, the West Indian batsman, whose elegant play was a joy to watch. Just watching him walk out nonchalantly to take guard was a treat in itself.

It is the same with sevens legend Waisale Serevi, who has given Hong Kong fans many memorable moments. His cheeky goose-step, which left defenders clutching at thin air, and his vision made him untouchable in his prime. He played with a smile on his face and joy in his heart.

Brazil also brought smiles to the faces of the team's fans worldwide – once upon a time. Not anymore. Today the South American powerhouse is in mourning. Lucio and his team had hoped to add another star to the five on their shirts, but they failed miserably, beaten by the delightful Dutch.

On the eve of the World Cup, I met former Brazilian midfielder Zico when he made a stopover in Hong Kong. He, like many others, was critical of Dunga's approach to the game and said he would rather watch Spain than Brazil.

It's a pretty damning indictment coming from the man known as the "White Pele". The days when Pele enthralled fans with his virtuoso

skills are long gone. Even when Zico played – he turned out at three World Cups (1978, 1982, and 1986) – Brazil dazzled. But as he said, the fact that he never won a World Cup medal and the failure of the "class of 1982" – widely regarded as one of the best Brazil produced – were instrumental in the sea change in attitude.

Function over flair is the order of today. Style was shelved for results. "I believe the reason Brazil chose to play the way they do today is a result of our failure in 1982 to lift the World Cup," Zico said.

Brazil decided their players also had to play like programmed robots. Dunga, a midfielder in his heyday, went for a record-extending sixth World Cup title with a game based on rock-solid defence, counter-attacks and set pieces. Brazil looked more like Germany.

Traditional invention was forsaken for coached coherence. Intuitive skills were ironed out. We had such high hopes that players like Kaka (pictured) and Robinho would follow in the tradition of the greats, but they were poor shadows of their predecessors.

This is what happens when the joy is leached out of the players by the system. When you don't play with a smile in your heart, you tend to become afraid – afraid of losing.

We have seen many teams at this World Cup who played with

fear in their hearts. They have all been weeded out. Brazil, the team who most neutrals support, has also fallen on the scrapheap of history. Then more the pity Brazil chose to adopt a utilitarian approach. Let's just hope the outcome will see Brazilian soccer get back to its roots. It needs to do so for the sake of the game.

If Brazil failed, so did Africa. Teams from this continent also show plenty of flair and are good to watch. But even though Shakira sang *This time for Africa*, their time is still to come.

Pele said an African nation would win the World Cup soon after the turn of the century. He was a superb footballer, but he would make a poor prophet. His prediction has never materialised.

Ghana went the closest. It would have been great if the team had managed to hold its nerve, but it failed to become the first African team to reach the semi-finals thanks to the blatant foul by Luis Suarez, who stopped Kevin-Prince Boateng's header on the line with the score deadlocked at 1-1.

Suarez has been treated as a hero for his handball. But it was a disgraceful act. Suarez cheated and his team prospered because the ensuing penalty was missed.

Fifa should look at ways to penalise players who deliberately cheat. Suarez got a red card. He deserved more. The message his act sent out to millions of kids was that cheating is OK.

Suarez's cheating denied Ghana the chance to keep the African flame alive. At the end of the day, Ghana buckled under the pressure and lost out on the penalty kicks.

But the legacy of this World Cup can still be a testament to playing the game beautifully. We have two sides – Spain and the Netherlands – who can weave magic.

With Andres Iniesta at the centre of Spain's probing passing game and Arjen Robben spearheading the Dutch attack, we are set for a fitting finale.

Cup finals are normally drab, tense affairs as sides don't want to take unnecessary risks. Let's hope this is not the case tonight, and that flair rules over fear. It would be the perfect message to Brazil that the old ways are best.

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WHAT DO YOU THINK? Do you agree or disagree with what Alvin has to say? E-mail us at alvin.sallay@scmp.com

Jason Dasey



Making a mark with his remarkable actions as well as his carefully chosen words, Tom Watson will cross paths with Tiger Woods next week at St Andrews ahead of his first British Open as a 60-year-old.

They will take part in Wednesday's Open Champions Challenge, a curtain-raiser to the 150th anniversary tournament on the Old Course. But organisers will avoid what might have been an awkward reunion by selecting Watson and Woods in different teams for the competition that features 28 former winners.

With so many of Woods' peers choosing to stay silent, Watson has been critical of the troubled world No 1 following his return to the PGA Tour after a self-imposed break because of personal issues, but only on golfing grounds. He implored him to "show some humility" to the game and to "clean up his act".

"I feel that he has not carried the same stature as other great players like Jack [Nicklaus], Arnold [Palmer], Byron Nelson, the Hogans, in the sense that there was language and club throwing on the golf course," he said earlier this year.

He may hail from a different generation to Woods, but the five-time Open champion is anything but an out-of-touch old "fokey". Twelve months after going so close to becoming golf's oldest major winner as he ran a close second to Stewart Cink following a play-off at Turnberry, Watson remains one of the sport's hottest properties.

After shooting an opening-round 67 to lie a shot off the lead at the Masters in April, Watson finished in a tie for 18th place to earn a place in history as only the second player after Sam Snead to register top-20 major finishes in five different decades. And last month at the scene of his memorable 1982 triumph, Watson made the cut at the US Open on the brutal Pebble Beach layout before finishing in a creditable joint 29th spot.

And just as he did 28 years ago when his miracle chip-in birdie at the 17th helped him overhaul

Nicklaus, Watson threw his ball into the nearby Pacific Ocean. With Pebble Beach not scheduled to host the tournament again until 2019, Watson knows 2010 will probably mark his last US Open on the Californian course.

Watson didn't linger long on home soil after the second major of the year. Instead, he took an early flight to London where he's been promoting his new instructional DVD *Lessons of a Lifetime*. It's dedicated to his former caddy, Bruce Edwards, who died in 2004 at the age of 49 from amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, commonly known as Lou Gehrig's disease. A portion of the DVD profits will go to research into the ailment.

"I wanted to be filmed when I can still swing the golf club reasonably well and I wanted to produce my knowledge of the golf swing for posterity, especially for my son," Watson said. "The aim of this project is simply to give golfers a fundamental understanding of what comprises a sound golf swing."

It may come as a surprise that

Watson says he believes his technique was flawed until more than a decade after winning his eighth and final major: the 1983 Open Championship at Royal Birkdale where he beat Andy Bean and Hale Irwin by one stroke.

"I didn't learn how to swing the golf club correctly until 1994," Watson admits. "Then after more than 15 years of proving to myself that indeed I had learned the proper swing was I satisfied that my understanding was correct and that golfers would truly benefit by learning from my method."

And Watson certainly seems to be playing better than ever. Since his second place at last year's British Open, he's won twice since turning 60, both in Hawaii – on the Champions Tour and in the Wendy's Champions Skins Game with Nicklaus.

But it was his inspirational performance last year at Turnberry where he became the oldest man to lead during the final round of a major that still gets wide-eyed strangers stopping him. He set the tone for a remarkable tournament by opening with a five-under-par 65.

"One of the common threads was the age factor and how people said they were inspired not to give up on their life's pursuits because of their so-called advanced age," Watson said. "Playing well at age 60 means that the human body can still be actively competitive in golf later than many people expect."

Watson is hoping for another good showing next week but doesn't have a great record at St Andrews: his tie for second in 1984 is his only top-10 finish in six appearances at the spiritual home of the sport.

The following week he will remain in Scotland for the Senior British Open at Carnoustie, to continue a love affair with golf that began soon after beginning school in the Midwest state of Missouri.

"From when I was six years old to today, I still get a thrill out of producing a shot that is perfect... the perfect flight with the perfect result. If I produce more than one perfect shot in a round of golf then I feel I am playing well."

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Tom Watson after his heroics at last year's Open at Turnberry

