Twitter Thread by Micah Reddy



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For what it's worth, a THREAD on Gary Player, my dad, and redemption.

My father was politicized by sport. His experiences as a young, sport-obsessed Indian boy gave him his first real sense of the inequities of apartheid...

...seeing white kids playing cricket on perfect greens, in their crisp whites - a world away from what he had.

And because he developed such a strong sense of how sport and politics were intertwined, he loathed sportsmen who used their platform to support apartheid...

...who played a fair and gentlemanly game on the pitch, but off the pitch were cheerleaders for such extreme unfairness and injustice. None drew the ire of my dad more than Player.

It infuriated him that Player could thrive, despite being so publicly unrepentant, "in a democracy that he once did all he could to thwart".

Here was a sports star who had been a flag bearer for white supremacy - “I am a South African of Verwoerd and apartheid” - who refused to acknowledge his complicity in a historical crime, yet was honored by the ANC government with the Order of Ikhamanga in 2003.

My father often spoke about the travesty of Papwa Sewgolum's victory in the 1965 Natal Open, and Player's silence when the Indian caddie turned golfing legend was made to accept his trophy in the rain outside the Durban country club.

My father was a man of Mandela's ANC and was devoted to the reconciliation project, but felt that an important part of that project was that those who'd been complicit in apartheid needed to own up to it.

Player never did, and after he was awarded the Order, my father wrote a letter to the Sunday Times condemning the decision to honour him. To his surprise, while on the golf course (playing "badly") my dad got a call from Player, who wanted to discuss the letter.

Ever sportsmanly, and ever the fair journalist, my dad decided to hear the other side, and ended up meeting Player at his Colesburg farm.

The engagement moderated my dad's views of Player. These were more forgiving times, and my dad left their meeting feeling that Player was just like many others who had been complicit in the crime of apartheid - a fundamentally decent person who had been conditioned by life...

...in a racist system.

My dad wrote an opinion piece in the Mail Guardian, noting Player's claim, seemingly genuine, to be totally committed to what was then the 'new' South Africa, and that Player's public stance on apartheid appeared to have changed by the mid-80s.

Though their meeting had ended amicably, the article ended on a more frustrating note. Until Player publicly acknowledged his role in apartheid and stopped hiding from his past, my dad wrote, "Player will inevitably be dogged by controversy every time his monumental golfing...

...achievements are recognised with honours and awards".

Yesterday, away from the cameras, Trump awarded Player the Presidential Medal of Freedom.

It was an easy opportunity for Player to help correct his past support for white supremacy by simply not gracing a cornered, barking-mad white supremacist who's been rejected by just about every decent person the world over.

Player had a clear shot, but blew it by accepting that award. At 85, he has lost his swing, and is yet to find his spine. He probably won't get an opening like that again.