

THE SPORTIER

Father Time Bested Again

Tom Brady, at 43 years old, won his seventh Super Bowl championship in February, becoming the oldest player (breaking the bar set by 41-year old Tom Brady) to do so. Serena Williams, at 39 years old, became the oldest active player to reach a Grand Slam semifinal at the Australian Open in February. On Sunday, Phil Mickelson set a similar record. At 50 years old, just one month before his 51st birthday, the legendary golfer nicknamed "Lefty" became the oldest winner of a major championship after securing his victory in the PGA Championship. Julius Boros, who previously held the record of the oldest player to win a major championship in 1968, was 48 at the time of his PGA victory.

Prior to the PGA Championship, Mickelson was ranked 115th in the world and was given 250 to 1 odds to win the major at the beginning of the week. Even further, on May 14, he was granted a special exemption to the US Open at Torrey Pines in June, as he was expected not to qualify for this event. Now that Mickelson was able to secure a major victory on Sunday, he has earned an exemption for 5 years.

Mickelson and four-time major champion Brooks Koepka, who is 31 years old, traded leads frequently throughout the PGA Championship. Koepka took the early lead after his two-stroke first hole, though the next hole saw Mickelson jump out in front of Koepka after a four-stroke birdie compared to Koepka's double bogey. This set the theme for the whole championship that saw the two very close most of the time. Mickelson made some errors throughout, such as ending the third hole, a par-four, with a bogey that was a result of coming up short of reaching the green on his first shot. Still, Mickelson's bogeys were followed by birdies, allowing him to start competitive. One of the most memorable moments from the championship was on the fifth hole, a par-three. Mickelson hit his first shot into the sand, with Koepka reaching the green on his first shot. Yet, it was Mickelson whose ball found the hole first, as he chipped in for a birdie that had the whole crowd roaring. Koepka two-putted for par, but it still remained close even after this hole. After an inconsistent back nine that featured splashing his ball in the water and multiple bogeys, Mickelson was able to hold his own with Koepka and South African golfer Louis Oosthuizen, who was right with Mickelson and Koepka towards the end. Mickelson was able to finish 6 under par, beating both Koepka and Oosthuizen by two strokes.

Mickelson's accomplishment as an older golfer is impressive. He has been able to defy the odds and seemingly come out of nowhere again and put himself back into the spotlight of professional golf. As mentioned before, athletes like Tom Brady and Serena Williams, who have been aging compared to their competition, have still remained extremely competitive. This is truly a testament to how well these athletes train. With Brady, it is widely known that his TB12 dieting and fitness method, which is very strict, allows him to maximize his playing ability to keep his muscles in shape as he ages. As these athletes get older, they seem to be able to remain at the top of their sports. Through mental and physical aspects of training, athletes have learned that less partying and more rest will allow for them to be able to thrive especially as they age. The success of these athletes shows that you don't always have to be the quickest or the strongest, but being very smart with your technique and training will take you very far.

Jet Jones on the Move?

Not everyday can you find a 2-time All-Pro player who will be a first-ballot Hall of Famer, one of the best at his position ever, available on the trade market. Atlanta Falcons star wide receiver Julio Jones is just that player. While rumors have been circulating throughout the duration of the entire NFL offseason on the future of the receiver, yesterday gave many confirmation of what can be expected. Pro Football Hall of Famer Shannon Sharpe, who co-hosts Fox Sports 1's "Undisputed," with sports commentator Skip Bayless, called Jones while on air from his personal cell phone. While some believe that the 32-year old wideout did not know he was being recorded, with others claiming the whole setup was pre-planned, the statements made by Jones were nonetheless uncharacteristic for a player who has stayed relatively quiet throughout his 10-year professional career. After recent images of him in a Dallas Cowboys sweatshirt surfaced on the internet, Jones replied to Sharpe's question on whether or not he wanted to stay in Atlanta with, "I'm outta there." After Sharpe asked where Jones would ideally like to land, previously mentioning the Cowboys, Jones said, "Right now I wanna win." It is clear that Julio hasn't made up his mind as to where he wants to go, but wherever he goes, he has made it clear he does not want to spend his 11th season in Atlanta.

Beyond the Falcons' poor performance in recent years, which is the reason why Jones would like to leave the team, Atlanta is in a salary cap nightmare. The Falcons are well over the salary cap, with the figure on March 31 indicating that they have just \$5.3 million in available salary cap space. The Falcons are considered to be in one of the worst salary situations, not only because they have the 25th-lowest available salary cap space, but because it almost certainly requires that the Falcons get rid of either Julio Jones or quarterback Matt Ryan, the players with the largest salary cap numbers to the organization, to fix the situation.

The question now is: Why haven't the Falcons dealt Julio already? It is clear that he doesn't want to be with the team, and it would be best if the Falcons could line up a deal to resolve the situation. The issue has been, again, with the salary cap. Julio Jones has a cap number of \$23,050,000. This is how much the Falcons will be charged towards the \$182.5 million overall salary cap for the 2021 season for Jones'. With this in mind, if the Falcons decide to trade Jones before June 1, they would not be saving money. While his \$15.3 million guaranteed salary would be erased from the Falcons' plate, they would see \$15.5 million in prorated money become a part of the cap. This means that if the Falcons trade him pre-June 1, they would actually suffer an increase in the cap hit of Jones for this season, with \$200,000 being added to his cap hit (Jones' overall cap hit would become \$23,250,000). If the Falcons were to trade Jones post-June 1 as they are expected to do, the Falcons would erase the \$15.3 million guaranteed salary and only face \$7.75 million in dead money affect their salary cap for this season. While this is a short term fix for the Falcons that they desperately need, they would suffer the \$15.5 million cap hit in 2022 as dead money. In either scenario, the Falcons are likely to not be able to escape this situation in an extremely favorable way towards their cap, so it is just a matter of minimizing the damage.

Julio Jones is a prime target for many teams, though he has said that he wants to win now. Players have already started recruiting him after his trade requests became public yesterday, with Arizona Cardinals receiver DeAndre Hopkins being the most aggressive in his social media pursuit of Jones. Though the Falcons have said that they would like to receive a first-round draft pick in 2022 for Jones and would like to trade him to a team in the AFC, the Falcons will likely have to take the best offer they receive, even if it doesn't meet their expectations. Jones only played 9 games last season, battling a hamstring injury, which has dropped his value on the trade market. Still, contending teams that may be just a few pieces away, such as the San Francisco 49ers, New England Patriots, and the Indianapolis Colts may be good landing spots. It is also critical to note that the team acquiring Jones must be able to accept the \$15 million+ salary cap hit that he carries with him this season.

Julio Jones has been a fantastic receiver in Atlanta. Jones has averaged 95.5 yards per game in his career, which is the most in NFL history, nearly 10 more yards per game than NFL legend and Hall of Famer Calvin Johnson. One of the most dependable receivers ever, Jones helped lead Atlanta's high-powered offense to Super Bowl LI, where the team would infamously lose the game after leading Tom Brady and the Patriots by 25 points in the third quarter. While it is unfortunate that Julio seems to be leaving Atlanta on a sour note, he has done all he has been able to for the city of Atlanta and the Falcons organization, and nobody can blame him for wanting to chase a ring at this stage in his career.



MAY 23, 2021 - PHIL MICKELSON WINS THE PGA CHAMPIONSHIP ON THE OCEAN COURSE AT KIAWAH ISLAND, SOUTH CAROLINA



FALCONS RECEIVER JULIO JONES

Sources:

PGA Tour, Golf, NY Post, ESPN, Pro Football Network, Pro Football Reference, Fansided, NFL