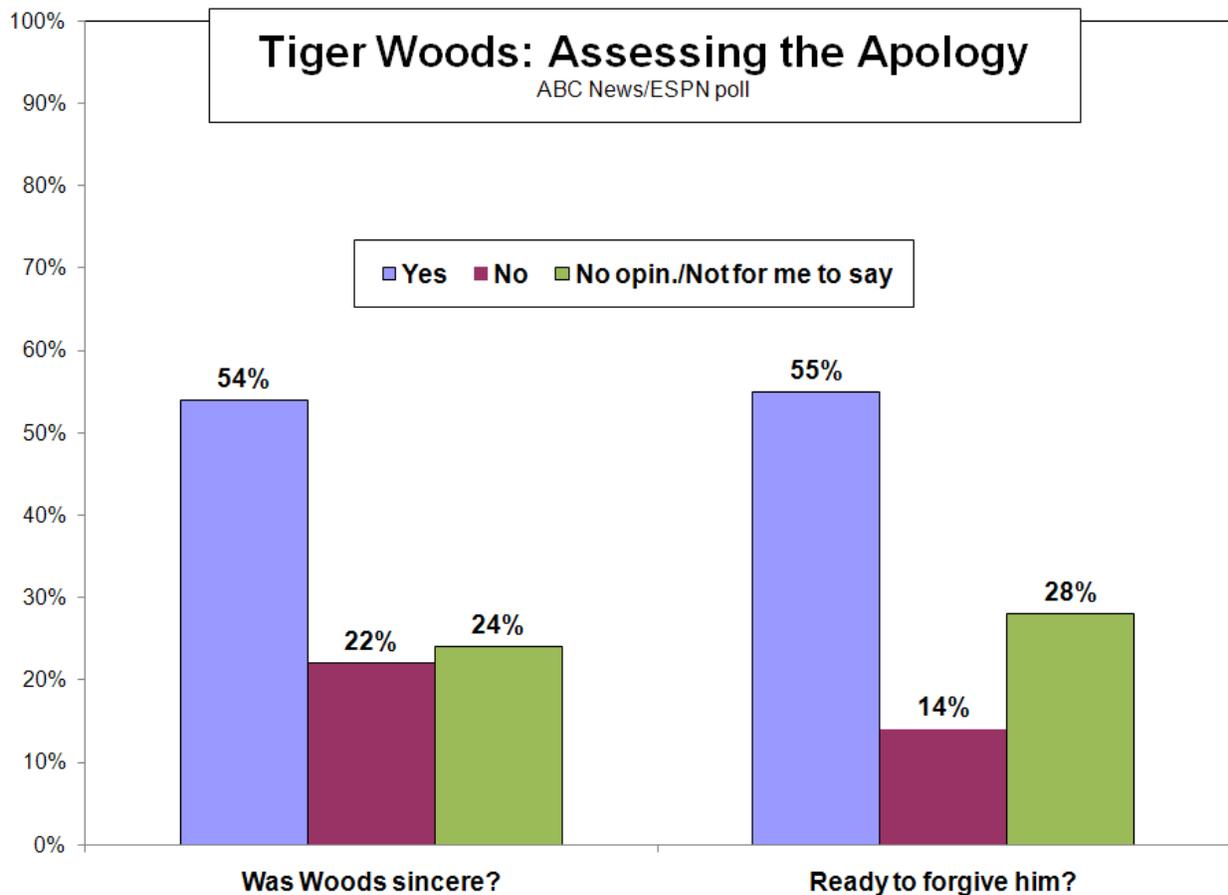


Most See Woods' Apology as Sincere Though His Ratings Stay in the Rough

More than half of Americans think Tiger Woods was sincere in his apology for the sex scandal that's engulfed his career, and express willingness to forgive his behavior. But bottom-line measures of Woods' popularity haven't moved in his favor since his televised mea culpa.

The scorecard, then, indicates that the golf star didn't lose any strokes by speaking publicly for the first time about the scandal, but neither did he hit the pin.

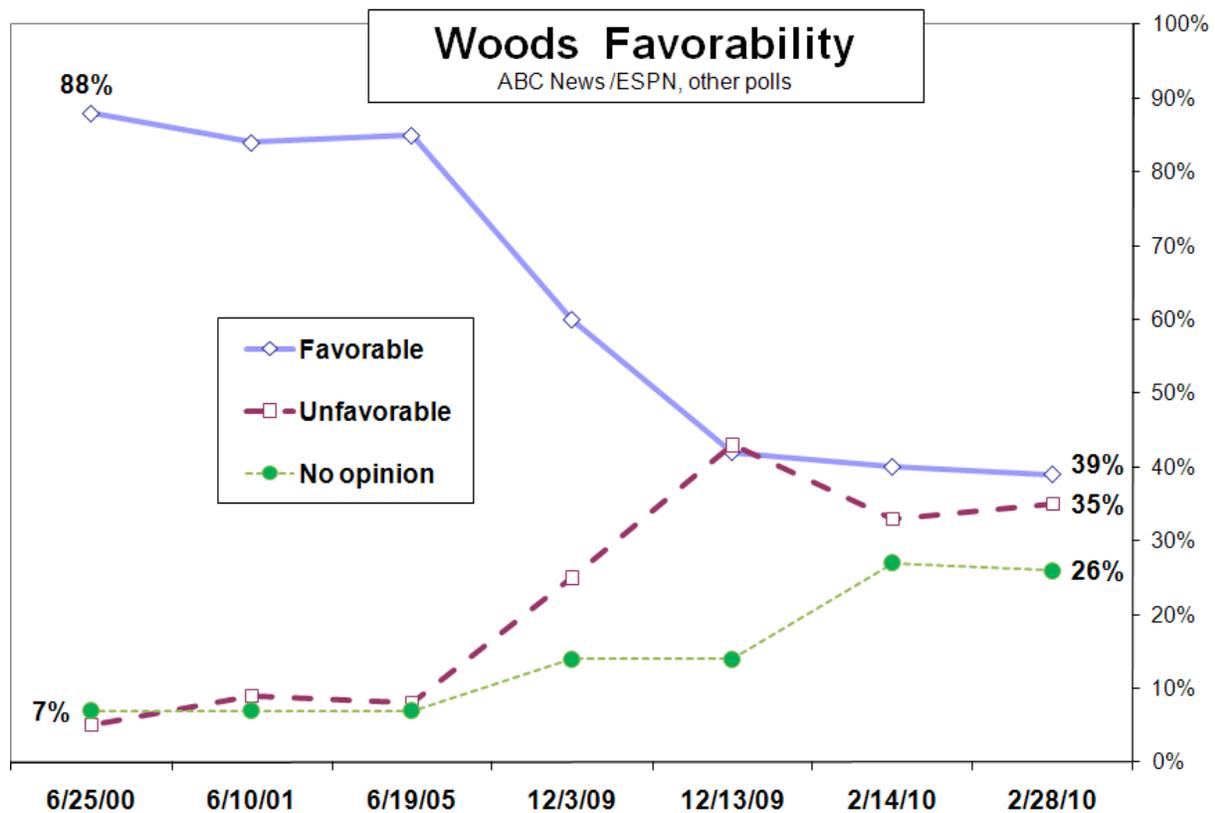
Perhaps best for Woods is that 54 percent of Americans think he was sincere in his apology and 55 percent say they're ready to forgive him, far more than see him as insincere or say they're unready to forgive. However, a quarter express no opinion of Woods' sincerity – an open question mark there – and as many also say forgiveness is not theirs to offer.



Relatively few, additionally, say that in their opinion his wife should forgive him (29 percent); almost as many say the opposite, and the plurality in this case say that's her business alone.

Woods was back in the news yesterday when The Associated Press reported that he'd completed a week of family counseling, returned to home to Florida and was focused on fitness and his golf game, though he has not said when he'll end a self-imposed hiatus from the sport.

FAVE? – In a basic measure of popularity, just 39 percent express a favorable opinion of Woods overall, essentially unchanged from its level just before his apology and still vastly below its peak, a remarkable 88 percent nearly 10 years ago. While no better, it's at least not worse; a plateau may be the best he could have hoped for after his sudden dive in favorability.



About as many, 35 percent, see Woods unfavorably as favorably, essentially the same as the number who said so pre-apology. His unfavorable rating's been higher, though – 43 percent as the scandal unfolded in December, again at least indicating that the worst of the crash may be over.

Moreover, the number of Americans who think it's OK for Woods to retain his lucrative sponsorships has held essentially steady, at 54 percent in this poll, peaking at 68 percent among 18- to 34-year-olds, a target group for many advertisers. Nonetheless, Gatorade dropped him last week, following Accenture and AT&T.

Most, 59 percent, also continue to say Woods should resume Tour play this season, although that's ebbed a bit from 65 percent earlier this month. A quarter say he should resume play but not so quickly, up from a fifth. Very few, just 4 percent, say he should leave the sport permanently.

Perhaps surprisingly, the differences between women and men in views of Woods are muted. Compared with men, women are 7 points more apt to see him unfavorably overall, 8 points less apt to say they're ready to forgive him and 7 points less likely to say his wife should forgive him. But women are no less inclined to see him as sincere in his apology or to say he should return to the sport this season.

There's a continued, much bigger gap between golf fans and non-fans in terms of Woods' personal popularity: Among fans of the sport 57 percent see him favorably overall, vs. 34 percent among those who aren't fans. Fans also are more apt, by a narrower 12-point margin, to think Woods was sincere in his apology Feb. 19, and by 11 points to say his sponsors should keep him on. But play on the course only counts for so much: Fans are no more apt than non-fans to say they're ready to forgive Woods' personal behavior.

Finally, whatever Woods' problems, golf itself remains in the bunker: with Woods off the greens, just 19 percent of Americans identify themselves as fans of the sport, essentially unchanged from earlier this month – and down from 28 percent in mid-December.

METHODOLOGY – This ABC News/ESPN poll was conducted by telephone Feb. 25-28, 2010, among a random national sample of 1,004 adults reached by landline and cell-phone alike. Results for the full sample have a 3.5-point error margin; click [here](#) for a detailed description of sampling error. Sampling, data collection and tabulation by Social Science Research Solutions at ICR-International Communications Research of Media, Pa.

Analysis by Gary Langer.

ABC News polls can be found at ABCNEWS.com at <http://abcnews.com/pollingunit>

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Full results follow (*= less than 0.5 percent).

1. Are you a fan of professional golf, or not?

	----- Golf fan -----				
	NET	Yes	Somewhat (vol.)	No	No opinion
2/28/10	19	16	3	81	*
2/14/10	18	16	2	81	0
12/13/09	28	22	6	72	*
11/24/02	23	16	7	78	0

2. Overall do you have a favorable or unfavorable opinion of the professional golfer Tiger Woods? Do you feel that way strongly or somewhat?

	----- Favorable -----			----- Unfavorable -----			No opinion
	NET	Strongly	Somewhat	NET	Somewhat	Strongly	opinion
2/28/10	39	16	22	35	19	16	26

2/14/10	40	20	20	33	19	14	27
12/13/09	42	22	20	43	17	26	14
12/3/09*	60	NA	NA	25	NA	NA	14
6/19/05	85	NA	NA	8	NA	NA	7
6/10/01	84	NA	NA	9	NA	NA	7
6/25/00	88	NA	NA	5	NA	NA	7

* 12/3/09 CNN; 2005 Gallup; 2001 and 2000 Gallup/CNN. No opinion includes "never heard of."

3. Woods has been accused of having extramarital affairs, and has apologized for what he called "personal sins." Given this situation, do you think companies should or should not continue to use Woods to endorse their products? Do you feel that way strongly or somewhat?

	----- Should -----			----- Should not -----			No
	NET	Strongly	Somewhat	NET	Somewhat	Strongly	opinion
2/28/10	54	33	21	31	13	18	15
2/14/10	53	31	22	33	13	21	14
12/13/09	54	33	20	38	13	24	8

4. Do you think Woods should resume playing professional golf this season, remain out of the sport for a longer period but return eventually, or retire permanently from the sport?

	Resume golf this season	Remain out longer but return eventually	Retire permanently	No opinion
2/28/10	59	25	4	11
2/14/10	65	20	7	8

5. As you may know, Woods made a televised statement last week at which he apologized for these affairs. Do you think Woods was sincere or not sincere in his apology?

	Sincere	Not sincere	No opinion
2/28/10	54	22	24

6. Are you personally ready to forgive Woods for his behavior, or not?

	Yes, ready to forgive	No, not ready to forgive	None of my business (vol.)	No opinion
2/28/10	55	14	28	3

7. Is it your opinion that Woods' wife should or should not forgive him for his behavior?

	Should forgive	Should not forgive	None of my business (vol.)	No opinion
2/28/10	29	21	42	8

END