

## **The Greatest Exaggeration In The History Of Sports**

It almost seems wrong to do anything but praise Michael Phelps. What he just pulled off at the Olympics is a monumental achievement which should be praised between now and the end of eternity. But I'm going to need a ton of Neosporin for this expanding cut on my skull, courtesy of all the head-scratching at those who call Phelps the greatest athlete of all time. I don't know why we live in such an age of exaggeration, but let me say it's the most disgusting, revolting, repugnant, treacherous, dangerous awful thing that's ever happened in the history of humankind or that ever will happen. How can he be the greatest athlete of all time when most people weren't saying the same thing about Mark Spitz? Phelps set a world record in most of his events; Spitz did it in all his events. Phelps won more gold than him; the 50m freestyle wasn't even part of the Olympics in Spitz's day. Phelps also had two events that were won by a hair—one that he owes to his teammate's incredible move and one that we can't be 100% sure he even won at all—Spitz only had one really close event and at least he won that by half a stroke.

Again, this is not to belittle Phelps but to try and understand what the difference is between him and Spitz. The latter was named 33<sup>rd</sup> on a recent top 50 athletes of all time list, but Phelps is now number one? One more event that didn't exist 35 years ago is worth 32 additional rungs on the all-time athletes ladder?

To me, Phelps is more a marketing campaign than the mark which all athletes in the future will have to aspire to. He's a good looking guy who brought excitement to an Olympics which just hasn't had the same amount of great moments as others. Doesn't hurt that he's American either, does it? When I listen to all the talk of him being the greatest athlete, I have to ask myself if he's actually had to compete against the greatest? I ask myself how many young men dream of being a top swimmer and put the same amount of effort into the pool as they do the gridiron, the basketball court or internationally, the soccer field. It's the same question I've asked myself when it comes to Armstrong and cycling or Woods and golf. But at least there's one thing we can all agree on—this is the greatest column in the history of sportswriting.