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Oregon Daily Emerald

Woods goes cold at Dubai

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates -- Tiger Woods has lost before, but he's never blown a pro tournament the way he did Sunday.

Tied for the lead with Thomas Bjorn, Woods found trouble off the tee of the final hole of the Dubai Desert Classic, then splashed his third shot in front of the green to take a double-bogey 7 and remain winless this season.

It was only the fourth time Woods has failed to win after starting the final round in front, and he never had such a final-hole collapse as a pro.

Bjorn, who caught Woods with a birdie on No. 17, finished at 22-under 266 for a two-stroke victory, and joined a short but lengthening line of players who've beaten Woods down the stretch.

The American is still the world's best, but he doesn't intimidate like he did a year ago, and he's 0-for-6 this season.

"The intimidation is disappearing," Bjorn said. "People are now starting to realize you can't get intimidated by him. You have to beat him."

"Tiger's got to learn to lose. Jack Nicklaus won a whole lot of majors, but he finished second a whole lot of times. Tiger's got to learn to lose. That's just the way golf is. I'm sure he knows that."

Bjorn finished with a three-putt par to cap a 3-under 69. Woods shot a 72 to finish tied for second with Padraig Harrington, who had a final-round 69. Ian Woosnam (69) and Mathias Gronberg (68) were another two shots back.

Woods held a one-stroke lead

over Bjorn to begin the day. Harrington overtook him at No. 9, but Woods moved back in front with three birdies in five holes to go to 22-under through 13.

Bjorn eagled the 10th with a 20-foot putt and birdied the 13th to reach 21-under. Woods missed birdie chances on Nos. 14, 15 and 17, and Bjorn dropped an 8-foot putt to draw even.

At the 547-yard 18th, Bjorn put his drive into the fairway before Woods left his wide to the right, behind clumps of brush and low-hanging tree branches. He bailed out of the bramble with an 8-iron but knocked it across the fairway into thick rough. From 150 yards out and worried about running off the back of the green, Woods' touch with a 9-iron was too gentle.

Splash -- just inches short of dry land.

"From the rough, I actually hit a pretty good shot, but I was protecting against the flier," Wood said.

Bjorn made the green in two, then three-putted for the victory and \$500,000 first prize, a quarter of the \$2 million appearance Woods received. The former Ryder Cup player said Woods' tee shot on No. 18 was the key.

"I don't know where that shot came from, but all of a sudden a bad one came. It's down to my credit that I put the pressure on," he said. "This is the best performance of my life by far. I've won plenty of golf tournaments. I played in the Ryder Cup and came back from four down after four, but this is the performance of my life."

"The world's greatest player was here and I took him on head to head."

Woods' last U.S. Tour victory came in September in the Canadian Open, although he's won three non-tour events since then in Hawaii, Thailand and Argentina.

"A lot of people are talking about Tiger being in a slump and he's not doing the right things," Bjorn said. "That's way out of proportion. The guy is playing fantastic golf. He just hasn't won in the last couple of weeks."

The wind kicked up Sunday after three days of still desert golf at the Emirates Golf Club. Woods bogeyed the opening hole when his putt lipped out from 4 feet, which is the kind of putting day he had.

"I'm quite proud of what I did this week," Bjorn said. "To go out there and play with the guy for four days and then beat him is everybody's dream."

Bjorn more or less choked playing with Woods in the third round of the U.S. Open in Pebble Beach last June. Woods cracked the fierce winds and hard greens and shot a splendid even-par 71. Bjorn simply cracked and shot 82.

"I take a lot home from this," Bjorn said. "He's a great guy, I enjoy his friendship. He's the greatest sportsman in the whole world, but that just makes it a little more sweet."

"I know I can go out with that guy and I can look him in the eye and take him on. It doesn't make him anything else but the greatest player in the world. He's by far better than anybody else. Don't forget that."

"But he is going to lose tournaments."

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