

Woods has lack of urgency entering his 10th Masters

He enters the annual major having won once this year

By Ron Green Jr.
Knight Ridder Newspapers (KRT)

AUGUSTA, Ga. — If the sentimental story of this upcoming Masters revolves around Arnold Palmer's 50th and final competition at Augusta National, the practical question centers — as it so often has — on Tiger Woods.

This will be Woods' 10th Masters, a mini-milestone that has arrived with alarming quickness to the three-time champion.

"Can you believe that? Ten years here," Woods asked rhetorically in a question-and-answer session after Tuesday's practice round.

Not unlike a decade ago, Woods arrives at the Masters this year with questions hanging in the spring air around him.

Ten years ago, it was whether Woods could possibly touch the enormous expectations surrounding him. This year, it's whether he can regenerate the dominance that has marked his career, especially in major championships.

Woods hasn't won a major title since he held the U.S. Open trophy above his head in the dying light at Bethpage two summers ago. That's six straight majors without a victory, nothing noteworthy for anyone but

Woods, who knows that Jack Nicklaus once went 14 straight majors without a victory in the prime of his standard-setting career.

"There's no urgency," said Woods, who has won once on the PGA Tour this year. "You can't look at it that way. If you (do), you won't win."

There have been multiple theories as to why Woods hasn't won like he did in 2000 and 2001 when he became the first player to hold all four major titles at the same time.

His break with teacher Butch Harmon and his engagement to Elin Nordegren have been prime material. Woods insists he set an impossibly high standard even he can't consistently reach while admitting his game isn't as sharp as it was, citing the nature of golf rather than the nature of life.

"Tiger is Tiger," said Vijay Singh.

"I don't know if he's not playing well or just waiting for the majors, I have no idea. But I think our play has gone up and closed the gap if there was one."

Woods has hit too many crooked tee shots and, consequently, paid the prices for his big misses. While steadfastly maintaining his independence from Harmon, Woods said he spent last week at home in Orlando, Fla., working on his take-away, which has created some of the swing problems that have crept in over the past weeks.

With Augusta National expected to play firm and fast for the first time since its major overhaul after the 2001 tournament, ball-striking will become more critical than ever.

Because of the addition of trees and length over the past three years, there is more emphasis on positioning tee shots. Compounding the challenge are the firm greens, which have deceptively small landing areas, despite their appearance. The list of potential winners, Woods said, is narrowed by the expected conditions.

"It's just amazing how you have to hit the proper golf shot and, if you don't, you're really going to pay the price because everything is just zipping off the greens," Woods said.

While others fret for and about Woods' game, he talks like a man content with where he will begin Thursday.

"I feel like I'm playing well," Woods said. "As far as the mass hysteria (about his perceived struggles), it's different for me versus any other player. Some other player has a bad week and misses the cut, it's no big deal. I shoot one bad round, and it's a little bit different."

"That's the way it is. It's the only thing I've known since I've been out here."

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NHL's postseason set to get under way

The playoffs could be the last hockey many fans see for a while because of an expected labor strife

By Mike Heika
The Dallas Morning News (KRT)

DALLAS — ESPN hockey analyst Bill Clement studied the Stanley Cup playoff bracket and shook his head.

"The shame of it all is that some very good teams are going to be sitting home after the first round," he said. "I mean, teams that believe they can win the Stanley Cup are going to be done, just like that."

Well, one man's shame is another man's glory. This season's playoffs have a chance to be the best ever, and that's in large part because of first-round series that pit old rivals such as the Stars and Colorado, Philadelphia and New Jersey, Toronto and Ottawa, and Boston and Montreal. Yes, some good teams will be eliminated after one round, but the level of play for this year's Stanley Cup chase should be volcanic from Day One.

It could be the kind of hockey that finally sheds good light on a league that has stumbled through a year of darkness.

"It's the best time of the year, and this year might be better than ever," said Flyers coach Ken Hitchcock, whose team has drawn no small assignment in opening against the defending Stanley Cup champion

Devils. "You look down the line, and every series has something intriguing. And I will guarantee you this: Any prediction you make is a pure guess. There's nobody who can even begin to imagine what might happen this year."

In a season when The View's Meredith Vieira has weighed in on hockey violence, it would actually be good to hear more of Barry Melrose opining on how Detroit goaltender Manny Legace controls his rebounds.

Vieira and a host of other talking heads criticized the NHL after Vancouver's Bertuzzi sucker-punched Colorado's Steve Moore, causing two broken vertebrae that could end Moore's career. Bertuzzi was suspended for the remainder of the regular season and playoffs, and the league is hoping he will become a footnote in the postseason.

"You look at the matchups, and they're terrific," Stars winger Bill Guerin said. "The league has to be ecstatic."

And a large group of veterans believes this could be their last chance to win a Stanley Cup.

The NHL's contract with its players expires Sept. 15. There has been little progress toward a new agreement, and players and management are prepared for a labor war that could wipe out next season.

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Horoscope by Linda C. Black

Today's Birthday (April 7). This year is about plans and preparation. Get your ducks in a row, but don't march them off quite yet. The closer you get to your goal, the more problems you'll discover. Proceed with caution. To get the advantage, check the day's rating: 10 is the easiest day, 0 the most challenging.

Aries (March 21-April 19) — Today is an 8. You can share your concerns and feelings of inadequacy with your mate, but don't let the competition in on your little secret. Allow them to believe that you haven't a fear in the world.

Taurus (April 20-May 20) — Today is a 6. It's not a good day to travel or to test abstract ideas. Stay practical and close to home in order to minimize annoyance.

Gemini (May 21-June 21) — Today is a 6. When you're busy, you may forget that you have a goal in mind. If you don't have one, then make one up now, and make it a juicy prize.

Cancer (June 22-July 22) — Today is a 7. It's not a good time to gamble, though you're lucky in other areas. A friend of yours comes through just when you need help the most.

Leo (July 23-Aug. 22) — Today is a 6. There are a few things in your way that aren't conducive to the vision that you and your partner share. You'll have to move them aside.

Virgo (Aug. 23-Sept. 22) — Today is a 7. With concentration and planning, you can turn your nest egg into gold.

Others might make and lose several fortunes, but you'd rather get one and hold onto it. Figure out how, with the help of a rich friend.

Libra (Sept. 23-Oct. 22) — Today is a 7. Creative work pays best now, but it's hardest to pin down. You can't afford distractions, so schedule romance for another time. Friday night should be good for that.

Scorpio (Oct. 23-Nov. 21) — Today is a 7. You may not have to say what's on your mind. You can let your partner, or perhaps even your attorney, carry the message to those concerned.

Sagittarius (Nov. 22-Dec. 21) — Today is a 6. Be forewarned that something you believe to be true could be tested, and soon. In a way, this is good. You'll know which parts are fact and which parts are fantasy.

Capricorn (Dec. 22-Jan. 19) — Today is a 7. A friend points out a flaw in your reasoning, causing you to reconsider whether you can afford to fulfill a fantasy now. You may want to wait a while longer.

Aquarius (Jan. 20-Feb. 18) — Today is a 7. A critical person's comments cut deep, and in a most vulnerable spot. Unfortunately, it hurts. Fortunately, it helps you get tough.

Pisces (Feb. 19-March 20) — Today is a 7. A fantasy bubble will soon pop, so don't be riding in that bubble when it bursts. Allow yourself a little emotional distance.

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