



Metro/Sports

Woods wins again at Memorial, but isn't satisfied



Photo by Associated Press
Tiger Woods, left, receives the Memorial Tournament trophy from Jack Nicklaus after Woods finished with a 19-under-par 269 on Monday, May 29, 2000 in Dublin, Ohio.

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Since winning at the Memorial Tournament a year ago, Tiger Woods has won 12 tournaments.

And he's not satisfied.

"I'm trying to get better. I'm trying to work on every facet of my game. I'm trying to improve to give myself chances in each and every tournament I play in," Woods said Monday after rolling to a five-shot victory in defending his title at the rain-delayed Memorial Tournament.

Ernie Els shot a 7-under 65 and never got closer than four strokes. He was stunned by the prospect of a new and improved Tiger.

"He's probably as good as we want to see him play," Els cracked. Of course, no one was surprised that Woods won. After all, he started the day with a six-shot lead over Steve Lowery. After he birdied three of the first eight holes, the lead was eight and it was just a matter of time until tournament founder Jack Nicklaus handed over the \$558,000

first-place check.

Woods' closing 70 left him at 19-under 269, five shots better than Els and Justin Leonard. It also left him a shot off Tom Lehman's tournament record.

Yet Woods hardly had a triumphal march up the 72nd fairway — adding a whiff of color to an otherwise methodical round on a gray day.

His 7-iron approach from 156 yards took off like a Mark McGwire moonshot, ricocheted off a cart path 30 yards beyond the green and disappeared into the gallery some 50 yards away from the pin. Sheepishly, Woods walked up the hill toward the clubhouse and hit two wedges to get on the green before making his bogey putt.

Woods left the green shielding his eyes in mock embarrassment.

"That was one of the worst shots I've ever seen," Woods said. "I've played in many pro-ams but ... wow! I definitely need some work."

Despite that errant shot, Woods had an impeccable week. He only had four bogeys, including two in the final

round when his name had all but been etched on the crystal championship trophy.

With his 19th career victory, he now has won more than \$4.1 million this year, already the second highest in tour history behind the \$6.6 million he stockpiled in 1999.

At the age of 24, he's already the first player to top \$15 million in career earnings. He's won 11 of his last 20 tour events and has finished in the top 10 in 23 of his last 25 tournaments worldwide.

And it's still not enough.

"What you're supposed to do is continue to try and get better," Woods said. "That doesn't mean that you're going to get better, but I'm trying to get better."

Nicklaus, one of only three others to win the Memorial twice, said there were similarities between the way he and Woods approached the game.

"If I was hitting the ball the way I wanted to hit it, I always felt like everybody else was going to play for second," said Nicklaus, winner of 18 major championships. "And I think he feels the same way."

Even though Woods looks at his game and sees its flaws, others see what he has accomplished and what the future could hold.

"He's phenomenal," said Paul Azinger, whose 66 got him into a tie for fifth at 10 under. "He can turn this golf course into a par 68."

Woods, 17-2 worldwide in tournaments he's led going into the final round, will take off the next two weeks before heading for the U.S. Open at Pebble Beach.

He said he'll hang out with his friends, relax and watch his beloved Lakers in the NBA playoffs.

As scary as it may sound to other players, he'll also tend to his golf shortcomings, such as they are.

"I have a few things I need to work on," he said. "My irons, continue to work on my short game, my driving ability ..."

Comets 84, Liberty 68



New York Liberty's Teresa Weatherspoon, right, knocks the ball away from Houston Comets' Tina Thompson during the second half Monday, May 29, 2000, in Houston. Weatherspoon was called for a foul on the play. The Comets beat the Liberty 84-68 in the season opener.

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Cynthia Cooper became the first player in WNBA history to reach the 2,000-point mark and Sheryl Swoopes scored 27 points Monday as the three-time champion Houston Comets defeated the New York Liberty 84-68 in the season

career points. A 3-pointer with 13:25 to play put her over 2,000 for her career. She finished with 19, putting her at 2,006.

Swoopes got the Comets started in the first half, and the defending champions led 40-33 at halftime. They built a 66-50 lead with 10:28 to play before the Liberty made their final charge with a 10-0 run, cutting the margin to 66-60 with 7:44 left.

But the Comets recovered before a sellout crowd of 16,285.

Swoopes also had three blocked shots and six rebounds.

Tamika Whitmore led the Liberty with 15 points, while Sue Wicks had 14.

The Comets started 2-for-13 from the field before Swoopes heated up with 15 first-half points and rallied the Comets to the halftime lead, their biggest to that point.

Trailing 21-15, the Comets went on a 13-2 run with Swoopes scoring nine consecutive points with a steal and layup, two free throws, a 3-pointer and two more free throws.

The game was a rematch of the 1999 WNBA championship series. The Comets beat the Liberty 59-47 last Sept. 5 for their third straight WNBA championship. New York guard Teresa Weatherspoon's 50-foot shot at the buzzer in Game 2 gave the Liberty a 68-67 victory and forced the series to the third game.

opener.

In a tearful pre-game ceremony, the Comets raised their third straight WNBA championship banner inscribed "No. 3 for No. 10" in honor of Comets point guard Kim Perrot, who lost her fight with cancer last Aug. 19. Cooper entered the game with 1,987

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Devils relishing underdog role

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Waiting to see who would win the Western Conference finals was an enlightening experience for the New Jersey Devils.

It didn't seem to matter whether the defending champion Dallas Stars or the Colorado Avalanche advanced to the Stanley Cup finals, the perception among the so-called experts was that whoever won was going to take the Cup.

The Devils smile when reminded of that, and they'll note how tough it will be to beat the Stars when the best-of-seven finals gets under way tonight at the Continental Airlines Arena.

The Stars have more experience, their defensive style is tough to beat, they have great skill players in Mike Modano, Brett Hull and Joe Nieuwendyk and goaltender Ed Belfour has allowed only 31 goals on 450 shots, a .931 save percentage. Dallas also won both games in the season series.

If you know the Devils, that sounds very similar to 1995, when New Jersey met the Detroit Red Wings in the Cup finals.

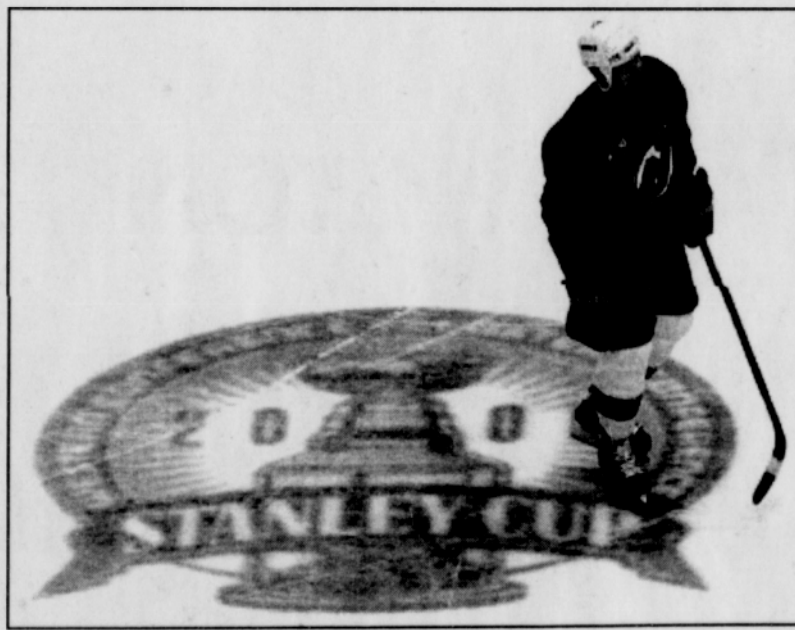
Everyone picked the Red Wings with their left-wing lock and star-studded cast that included Steve Yzerman, Sergei Fedorov and Mike Vernon. The result: The Devils swept in winning their first and only Stanley Cup.

"It's a lot like '95," said Claude Lemieux, one of nine holdovers from that team and the winner of the Conn Smythe award as the playoff MVP.

"We don't have their experience but we have youth and guys who have been getting better every round," Lemieux said. "They are only going to get better as they get older and as they play in the finals, they will get more comfortable."

What makes the comparison to 1995 even more remarkable is the way the seasons went.

New Jersey started out strong both



New Jersey Devils right winger Jason Arnott skates over the Stanley Cup logo during team practice in East Rutherford, NJ on Monday, May 29. The Devils and the Dallas Stars play game one of the Stanley Cup final Tuesday.

years and then faded down the stretch in the regular season, leaving doubts whether it could make a run at a championship. They played very well in the opening two rounds of both playoffs and then beat Philadelphia in a very hard-fought conference finals, with the difference this year being it took seven games instead of six.

"We feel good about ourselves and we are going to have to play our game," defenseman Ken Daneyko said. "That's what we've done all playoffs, worry about what the New Jersey Devils are doing. If we can execute, we think we have a shot."

Dallas coach Ken Hitchcock isn't buying into the predictions his team is a lock for a second straight title. "I don't think where they are surprises anybody," Hitchcock said. "I think we should be the favorites because we are the defending champions. That is what makes us the favorites, but that all goes out of the way in the first period."

The series pairs two teams that like to clog the neutral zone and then

counterattack. Defensively, both teams can be bruising along the back line.

Devils captain Scott Stevens is a leading candidate for this year's playoff MVP. He has been matched against Pavel Bure of Florida, Mats Sundin of Toronto and John LeClair of Philadelphia in the first three rounds of the playoffs and those players combined for one goal.

Stevens also has been devastating with his checks, turning the tide in Game 7 of the Eastern Conference finals by knocking out Eric Lindros of the Flyers in the first period.

Stopping Modano and Hull, who share the goal-scoring lead in the playoffs with nine apiece, might be a little more difficult.

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