

Spieth hangs on to Masters lead, but just barely

By DOUG FERGUSON
Associated Press

AUGUSTA, Ga. — Jordan Spieth set a Masters record on Friday by leading the tournament for the sixth straight round. He sure didn't seem to be in a mood to celebrate.

Spieth led by as many as five shots after a fast start, and then, just like everyone else on this wickedly windy day, he had to hang on for dear life. Spieth holed a 15-foot par putt on the 18th hole for a 2-over 74 that gave him a one-shot lead over Rory McIlroy.

"I'm still in the lead. I couldn't ask for much better than leading," Spieth said. "I'm a bit disappointed right now, fresh off the round. Two over on the last three holes will leave you that way."

McIlroy, who needs a green jacket to complete the Grand Slam, played the last six holes in 3 under for a 71 to match the low round of the day. Conditions were so brutal that it was the first time since the third round in 2007 that no one broke 70.

"I know I'm in a good position going into the weekend," McIlroy said. "And I'm happy with that."

The prospects of Spieth and McIlroy in the final group at any major, much less the Masters, is tantalizing. Both of them realize that this is far from the duel. With more wind expected on Saturday, it feels more like everyone against Augusta National. And right now, the odds are with the golf course.

The way Spieth came back to the field, the Masters is wide open. He was at 4-under 140, the



Jordan Spieth walks along the 15th fairway during the second round of the Masters golf tournament Friday, April 8, 2016, in Augusta, Ga.

highest 36-hole lead since that frigid, windy Masters in 2007.

Danny Lee bogeyed his last two holes for a 72 and was two shots behind, along with Scott Piercy (72). The only other players who remained under par were Hideki Matsuyama (72), Brandt Snedeker (72) and Soren Kjeldsen (74).

Dustin Johnson birdied all the par 5s for a 71 and was in the group at even par that included U.S. Amateur champion Bryson DeChambeau, who felt the sting of Augusta on the final hole. DeChambeau was playing the best round of

the day at 3 under and just one shot out of the lead. But he hooked his tee shot into the trees and had to return to the tee, hooked the next one and made triple bogey for a 72.

Still in the mix was Jason Day, who sputtered along to a 73 but was only five shots behind.

"It almost feels like a U.S. Open where you need to survive," Day said. "And I'm trying my best to survive right now."

Spieth finished a round over par at Augusta for the first time in his three Masters appearances. Coming off his wire-to-wire victory last

year, that par save from the bunker on the 18th allowed him to set a record for most consecutive rounds in the lead. Arnold Palmer was atop the leaderboard for six straight rounds in 1960 and the opening two rounds in 1961, though he shared in those last two rounds.

Even so, it was hard to get past Spieth's mistakes — a four-putt double bogey on No. 5, a three-putt bogey on No. 16. Frustration began to set in on the 10th when Spieth posed over his approach until it came up short of the green. "How is that into the wind?" he said, before

turning and having a stern conversation with himself.

McIlroy was as many as eight shots behind and never lost sight of the difficult conditions. He picked up birdies on the two par 5s on the back, and holed a 40-foot birdie putt on the 16th before finishing with a par save out of the trees.

"I was at 8 under and you finish at 4. That's kind of tough," Spieth said. "I felt like I played better than 4 over from the fourth hole on."

The gusts topped out at 30 mph on Friday, and it's not expected to get easier. Throw in the pressure on Spieth to become only the fourth back-to-back winner at the Masters, and a burden on McIlroy to finish off the Grand Slam, and this could be theater at its finest.

"Tomorrow is going to be more difficult than today," Spieth said. "Even par is one heck of a score tomorrow."

He said anyone breaking par Saturday could move into the lead from as far back as 25th place.

Spieth's par on the last hole not only kept him in the lead, it sent Phil Mickelson home for the weekend because of the 10-shot rule. Mickelson shot a career-high 79 and finished at 7-over to miss the cut.

Tom Watson missed the cut by two shots in his final Masters appearance, walking up the 18th fairway to a standing ovation and warm applause. He parred his last four holes for a 78 and said later, "I'm glad I don't have to play that 18th hole anymore."

Spieth, McIlroy and everyone else have two more days to endure to see who claims the green jacket.



Rory McIlroy, of Northern Ireland, holds up his ball after saving par on the first hole during the second round of the Masters golf tournament Friday, April 8, 2016, in Augusta, Ga.

McIlroy roars back into contention

By DOUG FERGUSON
Associated Press

AUGUSTA, Ga. — Rory McIlroy knows better than most how quickly fortunes can change in the Masters.

He was eight shots behind Friday and headed to the scariest par 3 at Augusta National in tree-shaking wind. All that mattered was picking the right club, hoping for the right wind and getting it somewhere on the 12th green. He did just that, made his par and began an important climb back into contention.

With birdies on the par 5s and a bonus birdie from a 40-foot putt on the par-3 16th, McIlroy recovered for a 1-under 71 that left him one shot behind Jordan Spieth and in the final group going into the weekend.

"The most comfortable thing for me on this golf course is knowing that even if you are five or six shots back, things can change quite quickly," McIlroy said. "I've been on the opposite end of that where things can start to get away from you."

A green jacket is all that keeps McIlroy from the career Grand Slam. He looked to have that wrapped up five years ago when he took a four-shot lead into the final round, only to close with an 80 and finish 10 shots behind.

McIlroy is a long way from redemption. The Masters doesn't really get started until the weekend.

But it's clearly on his mind.

"I sort of feel that Augusta owes me something, and I have come with that attitude," McIlroy said to Irish radio network RTE. "I have come here to get something that I should have had a long time ago."

Those birdies on the

par 5s — a good chip from behind the 13th green, a 5-wood onto the green for a two-putt on the 15th — were just what he needed. And the putt on the 16th to the toughest pin signaled that his fortunes indeed were changing.

"I started it ... maybe 6 feet left of the hole and just got it up there really, really high," McIlroy said. "And basically let gravity and wind take it the rest of the way. I was just looking to two-putt, try to get it within 2 or 3 feet of the hole. And it was a bonus when it dropped."

On Thursday, McIlroy was 4-under par and challenging for the lead when he bogeyed two of the last three to fall four shots back. He was 4 under again on Friday when he made double bogey on No. 4, hit a poor pitch that didn't reach the green on No. 5 and was back to even par for the tournament when he missed a 5-foot par putt on the 11th.

He was determined to finish better in the second round, and he did.

"I probably would have taken three pars to finish and I would have been happy," he said.

Along with the unlikely birdie on the 16th, he had to get out of the trees right off the 18th fairway, and then pitched to 6 feet and saved par. His caddie kept reminding him that par was a good score in wind like this. Not only was a score under par good, it was rare on this day.

McIlroy said after posting a 3-under 141 that it didn't matter what the leaders did on the back nine. He paused when he said "leaders" and glanced over at the electronic leaderboard in the press center. At the time, Spieth was 5 under, two ahead of McIlroy.

Last cut is deepest: Watson bids adieu

Former champion plays last round at the Masters

By EDDIE PELLIS
Associated Press

AUGUSTA, Ga. — Tom Watson thumped his hands against his chest. He was thanking the thousands of fans who lined up 10 and 15 deep, craned their necks and stretched onto their tiptoes to watch one of history's best play the 18th green at Augusta one last time.

Watson has known for a while that this scene — and the tears that accompanied it — would be coming. He thought he might stave it off for two more days.

But the two-time Masters champion shot a 6-over 78 on Friday that left him two shots off his goal this week — to become, at 66, the oldest player to make the cut in tournament history.

Not a tragedy, Watson insisted.

"I'm a realist," he said. "If I could still play this golf course, I wouldn't be retiring."

He's not done with competitive golf, but he did say he's all but finished teeing it up against "the young guys."

To him, that gave Friday afternoon's windy walk through the pines an even greater sense of finality than his last British Open, at St. Andrews last year, and his final U.S. Open, in 2010 at Pebble Beach.



Tom Watson salutes the gallery on the 18th green during the second round of the Masters golf tournament, Friday, April 8, 2016, at Augusta National in Augusta, Ga. Watson missed the cut in his final appearance as a competitor at the event.

"I've made the decision that the kids hit the ball too hard," Watson said. "This course really shows the difference."

Yes, Watson said, hitting a decent drive and having to pull out 3-wood for the next shot on No. 18 takes its toll after a while.

Exhibits of how this golf course has left him behind were everywhere Friday.

— On No. 17, he stood at the high point of the fairway to gauge his approach shot ... then walked 30 paces back to his ball. On that hole, and so many others, he was hitting blind shots from huge distances into greens he could barely see.

— Walking off the 14th

green, he fist-bumped with a kid who, only moments earlier, saw Watson approaching and asked his mom, "Who's that?"

Nobody asked that back in the day.

At one point, Watson made 21 straight cuts here. He finished in the top 15 for 15 straight years starting with his victory in 1977.

He hasn't made the cut since 2010, though. When his final two-day stay at Augusta was over, he took time to reminisce.

He talked about when, as a 14-year-old, he won a Kansas City match-play tournament and got the first glimmer that he might be able to do this for a living.

And about the private phone calls he made to his mentors, Kansas City club pro Stan Thirsk and Byron Nelson, from a cabin after he won the first green jacket.

About his friendships with Jack Nicklaus and Arnold Palmer, and how his arrival to the upper echelon of golf in the mid-70s changed that dynamic.

"Before that time, Arnold was my hero. Jack was the villain," Watson said.

Now, they're all beloved, and Watson's contribution could be felt as he walked the back nine, and heard chants of "Thank You, Tom" almost everywhere he went.

Lefty leaves Augusta ahead of weekend for 3rd time

By JIM LITKE
Associated Press

AUGUSTA, Ga. — Phil Mickelson rolled a 22-foot birdie putt just below the hole at No. 18, his last miss on a day packed end to end with wasted opportunities.

When it was finally over, Lefty signed for a 7-over 79 — his worst round ever at the Masters in 24 appearances, giving Mickelson as many missed cuts as green jackets. The cut was at 6 over par.

Mickelson shot even-par in his opening round and looked like a lock to make it into the weekend. But Friday began with a strong breeze and gusts up to 30 mph and that touched off a series of what he called "just stupid things" beginning at No. 7. The miscues began piling up — a ball left in a bunker, several missed short putts, and two approach shots dumped into the drink at Nos. 15 and 16 — which produced back-to-back double bogeys. That set up a frantic scramble on the last two holes.

"I don't know how to explain it," Mickelson, 45, said afterward.

"I just threw away a lot of shots. I just made a lot of poor shots in the wrong spot. This is worst I've managed myself around this golf course."

A year ago, Mickelson finished tied for second behind Jordan Spieth. After arriving this week, he said that while his expectations hadn't changed, he was driving the ball well and, "I feel a little bit more relaxed heading into this event because I'm not trying to find anything."

"I feel I'll be able to put the ball in play a lot easier," he added. "And as I'm doing that, my iron play, which I feel is the strength of my game, will be an advantage."

Yet even his normally stellar wedge game let Mickelson down. At No. 15, he laid up and left himself 94 yards in and somehow, hit the ball just 65 yards and into the pond fronting the green.

"I just thought it was set up very, very well," he said finally. "The guys that played well got rewarded and the guys who did dumb stuff like I did shot a big number. So it happens."



Phil Mickelson reacts after missing a putt on the 10th green during the second round of the Masters golf tournament Friday, April 8, 2016, in Augusta, Ga.