

Golf

# Tiger Woods returns with mixed bag and a 73

By DOUG FERGUSON  
Associated Press

NASSAU, Bahamas — Not only did Tiger Woods return to golf Thursday, he returned to being Tiger.

Just not for long. Hardly looking like a player who had not competed in 466 days, Woods ran off three straight birdies with a variety of shots and was tied for the lead in the Hero World Challenge as he approached the turn.

Three shots in the bushes, one shot in the water and a few fits of anger sent him toward the bottom of the pack. A pair of double bogeys over the final three holes ruined an otherwise impressive return, and Woods shot 40 on the back nine at Albany Golf Club and had to settle for a 1-over 73.

He was in 17th place in the 18-man field. Only Justin Rose had a higher score.

Even so, Woods has reason to be encouraged. After taking off 15 months to recover from two back

surgeries, he felt no pain or limitations. His misses were not big, just costly. And he was playing again.

"It could have been something really good," Woods said. "I got off to a nice, solid start and made a few mistakes there. I didn't play the par 5s very well in the middle part of the round and consequently, got it going the wrong way. ... But all in all, I feel pretty good. I'm looking forward to another three more days."

He was nine shots behind J.B. Holmes, who opened with an 8-under 64 and had a one-shot lead over Hideki Matsuyama, with U.S. Open champion Dustin Johnson at 66.

Curiosity was greater than expectations for Woods, who was coming off the longest hiatus of his golfing life. Plagued by back problems since 2013 when he was No. 1 in the world, he finally shut it down after tying for 10th in the Wyndham Championship on Aug. 23, 2015, and then going through two back surgeries.



AP Photo/Lynne Sladky

**Tiger Woods wipes his face as he prepares to putt on the 10th hole during the first round at the Hero World Challenge golf tournament, Thursday, Dec. 1, 2016, in Nassau, Bahamas. Woods is one-over-par for the round.**

He was in so much pain last year there were times he wondered he had played his last tournament.

With high anticipation, he tugged his opening tee shot into the rough on the left edge of a bunker and gouged that out to 15 feet for par. Just like that, it all started to feel as though he had never been away.

"By the time I hit my tee

shot on the second hole, I had already gotten into the flow of the round," Woods said. "That's something that for me, when I've taken layoffs and taken breaks, it's how quickly can I find the feel of the round? To not play in 15, 16 months and get it on the second hole is nice."

He also knew that with only a stiff tropical wind

behind him on three of the par 5s, scores would be low.

For a short time, Woods seemed up to the task. He hit a 5-iron from 231 yards just over the green and passed his first test, a 30-yard pitch-and-run and that checked slightly and rolled out to a few feet from the hole for a birdie. He faced a more difficult pitch up the slope on the next hole and hit a chunk-and-run to 3 feet.

His confidence kept building — the flop shot from 40 yards to 5 feet for birdie on the par-5 sixth, the wedge to 5 feet for birdie on the seventh, and a 6-iron he struck so well on the par-3 eighth that he was asking for perfection. "One yard! One yard!" he said as the ball was in the air, and then settled 2 feet away.

At that point he was tied with Holmes.

But he flubbed a pitch on the par-5 ninth and made bogey. Two holes later, he flared an iron from the sandy waste area into a bush and had to take a penalty shot,

making another bogey on a par 5. Woods was still hanging around in the middle of the pack when he hit 7-iron to 12 feet on the par-5 15th and two-putted for birdie.

And then it all fell apart. From the middle of the 16th fairway, he pulled his approach and dropped the club as it sailed into a bush. He had to play that backward to the fairway, pitched a wedge some 30 feet by and made double bogey. And then on the 18th, he pulled his driver and immediately slammed the club into the turf as he watched for the splash.

His pitch hit the pin — it was too strong, anyway — and he missed from 20 feet for another bogey.

"Just made some really silly mistakes, mistakes I don't normally make," Woods said. "But I haven't played in a while. Unfortunately, I made those mistakes. I can clean that up. We've got three more days. Wind is supposed to pump on the weekend, and I'll be playing a little bit better."

MLB

# Dodgers, Latin American players losers in MLB labor deal

By RONALD BLUM  
Associated Press

NEW YORK — The Los Angeles Dodgers, Latin American teenagers and Cubans approaching their mid-20s were losers in baseball's new labor contract, which includes stiffer penalties for high-spending teams and a hard cap on signing bonuses for international amateurs.

The Oakland Athletics also came up short, with the team's ability to receive revenue-sharing money to be trimmed in stages and eliminated in 2020.

Mid-tier free agents were winners, with management agreeing teams will no longer forfeit first-round draft picks

for signing players who turn down qualifying offers. But top-tier free agents could wind up as losers if potential bidders back off because of the steeper tax for exceeding the payroll threshold.

Players and owners agreed to the five-year deal Wednesday, subject to ratification, and details were provided by several people familiar with the negotiations who spoke on condition of anonymity because the sides had not yet released specifics.

The luxury tax threshold, which was \$178 million in 2011 and \$189 million this year, will rise to \$210 million by 2021. That represents an 18 percent rise over a decade, well below the rate of increase

in baseball's revenue.

And the highest tax bracket will rise, with two levels of new surtaxes.

The Dodgers' luxury-tax payroll this year was about \$256 million, down from a record \$297 million last year, leaving them on track to owe a tax of approximately \$34 million — a 50 percent rate assesses on the amount over the threshold.

If the new rules were fully implemented this year, they would pay \$41,825,000: a base tax of \$30.5 million (50 percent of the amount above \$195 million), a surtax of \$2.4 million (12 percent of the \$20 million-\$40 million amount over the threshold) and a second surtax of \$8,925,000 (42.5 percent

of the amount above \$40 million).

However, the new rules transition in next year and don't have a full impact until 2018.

While management failed to gain the international draft it wanted, players did agree to a hard cap on international signings, which eliminates deals such as Yoan Moncada's \$31.5 million signing bonus with Boston in 2015. The signing pool limit will be \$4.75 million for the signing period that begins July 2. The pool rises to \$5.25 million for teams with competitive balance round A draft picks and \$5.75 million for clubs with round B selections.

Eight teams have spent more than \$4.75 million in

the current signing season, led by San Diego at \$34.6 million (plus a \$31.3 million tax) and Atlanta at \$15.6 million (plus an \$11.1 million tax). Because of the new limits, teams that had tentative deals in place with 15-year-old Latin players that were set to be finalized next summer could be forced to back out.

Players who left Cuba also are impacted by the changes. Under the old rules, Cubans didn't count against a team's signing bonus pool if they were at least 23 and played in a professional league for at least five seasons. Because of that, Lourdes Gourriel waited until after his 23rd birthday last month to finalize a \$22

million, seven-year contract with Toronto.

Under the new deal, the age is raised to 25 — which would reduce the amount spent on Cubans who are younger.

Oakland has been a special case when it comes to baseball's revenue-sharing plan. The old collective bargaining agreement disqualified teams in the 15 largest markets from receiving revenue sharing funds but also stated the A's will remain eligible as long as their ballpark situation was unresolved. The new deal cuts the team's revenue share receipts to 75 percent next year, 50 percent in 2018 and 25 percent in 2019 before eliminating it entirely.

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