

Woods, Mickelson still going strong in their 40s

By DOUG FERGUSON
AP Golf Writer



In this Sept. 4, 2018, file photo, Phil Mickelson, left, listens to Tiger Woods speak during a news conference where they were announced as captain's picks for the 2018 U.S. Ryder Cup Team in West Conshohocken, Pa.

AP Photo/Matt Slocum, File

LOS ANGELES — The 144-man field at Riviera has 88 players who have combined to win 496 times on the PGA Tour.

Tiger Woods and Phil Mickelson account for 25 percent of those victories.

No one should be surprised.

While too one-sided to be a rivalry, they have been a powerful one-two punch in golf. The same day Woods won his third straight U.S. Amateur right before he turned pro, Mickelson won the World Series of Golf at Firestone. Woods picked up his 80th career victory at the Tour Championship to end last season. Mickelson won his 44th at Pebble Beach on Monday.

If anything raises eyebrows, it's that Mickelson believes their trophy collection will keep growing.

"I just believe that, even today, if I play my best, if Tiger plays his best, it's good enough to win on any week," Mickelson said.

"And the challenge is there are so many great young players, and so many great players in the game today, that it takes our best to win. I just think that both myself and Tiger are going to have a really, really good year

this year."

Nothing changes the outlook like winning, and Mickelson made it look easy on the weekend at the AT&T Pebble Beach Pro-Am.

He recovered from consecutive bogeys along the ocean, when the wind and rain were at their worst, by playing the final 26 holes without a bogey. Mickelson made an 8-foot par putt on the 17th hole Saturday. Otherwise, his longest putt for par during that stretch was 4 feet.

But it's harder than it looks.

Mickelson turns 49 this summer, and one of

the most underrated qualities has been his health. He revealed in the summer of 2010 that he was dealing with psoriatic arthritis. Otherwise, his injuries have been either minor (left wrist from Oakmont's rough in 2007) or temporary (broken leg from skiing in 1994).

"The challenge is getting myself to play my best," Mickelson said.

Woods is 43 with eight surgeries behind him — four on his left knee, four on his lower back.

His comeback last year is why expectations are so high now. Woods played well in Florida last year,

took a dip in the late spring and then kept getting better until winning the Tour Championship the way he won so many other tournaments. He built a lead over 54 holes and played the kind of golf that was tough to beat.

He was at his best that week, and he had to be.

With the meat of the season about to begin, the question is how often they can be at their best against deeper and younger competition.

He seems to be doing just fine. Mickelson was poised to win the Desert Classic until he lost on a birdie at the last hole to Adam Long,

who was No. 417 in the world ranking. He overcame a three-shot deficit against Paul Casey by closing with a 65 at Pebble Beach. In between was a missed cut at the Phoenix Open, where he changed driver in search of a few extra yards. Mickelson is always chasing distance.

His optimism comes from picking up 6 mph of swing speed for his driver, which he says rarely happens to anybody, let alone someone in his late 40s.

There was no secret involved.

"It's not really a secret. It was nine months of hard work," Mickelson said. "And then overnight I was swinging 6 mph fast. It was biometric swing studies, taking weaknesses and making them strengths. It was time in the gym. It was a whole workout process. It's been a lot of work, but days like this make it worthwhile."

Mickelson last year won the Mexico Championship for his first victory in more than four years, the longest drought of his career. Even when he wasn't winning, he was a runner-up at majors three straight years.

Woods went five years without winning, but that was different. During a four-year stretch when he had four back surgeries, he

played only 19 times on the PGA Tour and registered only one top-10 finish. To have won last year, to have risen to just outside the top 10 in the world, is cause for optimism.

But it's not easy.

"I've worked to give my body the best chance to do my job, but there are days when I just don't practice and I don't train. Those are days I've just got to rest," Woods said at Torrey Pines. "That's probably been one of the lessons I've learned through all of this, is there are days I just have to shut it down."

The Genesis Open is their first time competing against each other since the Tour Championship, notwithstanding the overhyped made-for-TV match they played with the winner (Mickelson). They are in elite territory financially, too. With his victory, Mickelson joined Woods as the only players to surpass \$90 million in career earnings on the PGA Tour.

Mickelson says his goal of 50 victories might be tougher to achieve than he realized. What about \$100 million?

"I just need one more match with Tiger and I should get there," he said.

His game is sharp is ever. So is the needle.

Shiffrin's plans blown off course in windy giant slalom

By ANDREW DAMPF
Associated Press

ARE, Sweden — Mikaela Shiffrin might have lost this race before it even started.

The moment she stepped outside on Thursday, Shiffrin was hit in the face with an unseasonably warm gust of wind — not to mention the rain flooding this Swedish resort.

"When I saw this today I was ... losing confidence a little bit," Shiffrin acknowl-

edged after settling for the bronze medal in the giant slalom at the world championships.

Attempting to follow up her gold medal in giant slalom from last year's Pyeongchang Olympics, Shiffrin sat fourth after the opening run and only improved one spot in her second trip down the mountain.

"It felt like you couldn't get small enough to get out of the wind," she said. "In the start, both runs actually, but especially the sec-

ond run, I started to feel the wind coming on stronger and pushing me backwards from the starting gate."

It was so windy that organizers removed the banner above the finishing line for safety reasons, and the panels placed between gates flapped violently as skiers whipped past them.

Petra Vlhova, Shiffrin's Slovakian rival, found a way to beat the wind and won the first individual gold of her career. First-run leader Viktoria Rebensburg of Ger-

many came second, 0.14 seconds behind, while Shiffrin was 0.38 back.

When Shiffrin started the championships by winning gold in the super-G last week, the temperature was 0 F (-18 C). Then she left town to train in Norway for five days, skipping the Alpine combined — an event she would have been the overwhelming favorite for — and the downhill.

When Shiffrin returned, the temperature was 44 degrees warmer (7C).



AP Photo/Marco Trovati

Mikaela Shiffrin celebrates after winning the bronze medal in the giant slalom at the World Championships in Are, Sweden.

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