

Three top-five finishes highlight a strong Asian year at the Masters

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This great performance put him two shots off the lead and in the final grouping with Woods and tournament leader Francesco Molinari. All three stayed close in score until the 12th hole, when Molinari and Finau both hit their tee shots into the water, but Woods hit his onto the green. This changed the momentum of the tournament, allowing Woods to pull ahead for the win while Molinari and Finau slipped into a tie for fifth.

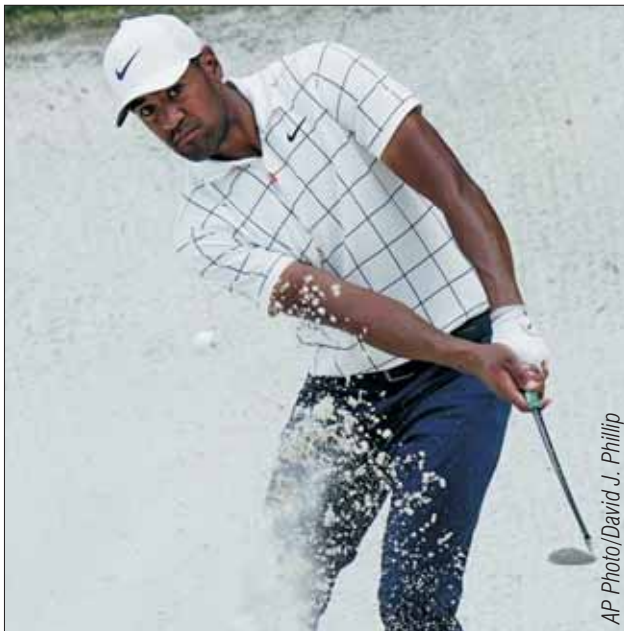
Tied with them was Jason Day, formerly the top golfer in the world. Day, who has family roots in the Philippines, battled a torn disc in his back that had flared up the day before the tournament. He managed to start on Thursday, but his back seized up again on the course, requiring treatment, but he worked past the pain to shoot a 70.

Day got even better on Friday, carding a 67 that vaulted him into a tie for first, but a 73 on Saturday dropped him back. Instead of flagging, however, Day rallied by birdieing six holes on Sunday against one bogey to rise to fifth, tying Molinari, Finau, and Webb Simpson.

Further down Augusta's final standings were four promising young Japanese golfers, one receiving the tournament's only special invitation. The top player on the Japan Golf Tour last year, 26-year-old Shigo Imahira didn't quite rank high enough in the world rankings to qualify for the Masters, so he was extended a special invitation. He played fairly well, but carding a 76 on Thursday and 74 on Friday meant he missed the cut.

Faring much better than Imahira were his three countrymen: Takumi Kanaya, Hideki Matsuyama, and Satoshi Kodaira. Kodaira and Matsuyama qualified for the Masters based on their world rankings and strong PGA Tour performances.

Twenty-year-old Kanaya qualified after winning the Asia-Pacific Amateur Championship. Kanaya qualified after winning the Asia-Pacific Amateur Championship. He became one of four amateurs to make this year's cut, shooting a combined three over par on Thursday and



AP Photo/David J. Phillip



AP Photo/Eric Gay

STRONG SHOWING. Tony Finau, left, and Si Woo Kim, right, played well at the recent Masters golf tournament.

Friday. Kanaya carded a 68 on Saturday, but a 74 on the final day dropped him down to a tie for 58th place.

Kanaya still finished a stroke ahead of Kodaira, who played well on Friday and Saturday but framed those performances with a 75 on Thursday and 76 on Sunday. Kanaya's finish was an incredible debut for an amateur on golf's biggest stage, but Matsuyama had done even better in his own amateur debut in 2011.

That first year, Matsuyama carded a one-under to tie for 27th place, but he did even better in 2015, finishing in fifth place with an 11-under. This was his best finish at Augusta, but he also tied for seventh in 2016, 11th in 2017, and 19th in 2018.

This experience helped Matsuyama recover from a rough Thursday to shoot a 70 on Friday, a 68 on Saturday, and 72 on Sunday to tie him for 32nd place. While respectable for most other golfers, this Masters finish was

Matsuyama's worst since missing the cut in 2014.

Other notable Asian golfers also performed respectably at Augusta. Kiradech Aphibarnrat, the first Thai golfer to qualify for the PGA Tour, carded a strong 69 on the first day but shot four-over the rest of the way to finish tied for 49th place. China's Haotong Li is only 23 years old, but he finished in 32nd place in his Masters debut last season after starting strong but fading down the stretch. This year, Li did the opposite, starting slowly and ending with a 68 to tie for 43rd.

Once, just reaching the Masters, whether via qualification or special invitation, was a victory for golfers from the east. But today, that's no longer good enough as Asian and Asian-American golfers continue to climb the ladder. With so many players getting so close to victory, it won't be long until another golfer with Asian roots dons the green jacket given to those who win at Augusta.

NWSL's seventh season opens, looks for bump in World Cup year

By Anne M. Peterson

AP Sports Writer

PORTLAND, Ore. (AP) — The National Women's Soccer League (NWSL) opened its seventh season with some lingering questions about its health, but also the encouraging possibility of a "bump" from the World Cup.

The NWSL has already outlasted any of the other previous pro women's leagues in the United States. With support from the U.S. Soccer Federation, it has fared better than the earlier attempts.

That doesn't mean there aren't concerns going into Year 7 — many of which were there in the sixth season, too. Possible expansion, the stability of some individual clubs, a need for sponsorships, and the lack of a TV deal are among the issues faced by the league that hasn't had a commissioner since Jeff Plush stepped down in March 2017.

Still, the NWSL could get greater exposure starting in June when the World Cup opens in France. NWSL rosters are filled with national team players from around the globe. Teams will have to navigate player absences during the tournament but could win fans for the latter half of the season — much like after the last World Cup in 2015, which the U.S. won.

Portland Thorns defender Meghan Klingenberg said she believes the league is still headed in the right direction. But continued success will depend on both investment and the will to see it through.

"The most important thing is investment across the league, in human resources; whether that's coaching or whether that's just staff that's helping out, whether that's in better fields, whether that's in better housing, whether that's in whatever. Making the league better, in the league front office but also the clubs' front offices, I want that," she said. "And if we can get that, year after year after year then I think we'll be in a good place."

The defending champion North Carolina Courage opened the season with a 1-1 draw at home against the Chicago Red Stars. The Courage defeated the Thorns 3-0 in the title game in front of a crowd of



SEVENTH SEASON. Ellie Carpenter (right) of the Portland Thorns defends Sam Kerr (left) of the Chicago Red Stars during a National Women's Soccer League (NWSL) preseason match held in March at Merlo Field on the campus of the University of Portland. The NWSL opened its seventh season in April. (AR Photo/Jan Landis)

New Jersey, and have access to the school's wellness facilities in addition to practice fields.

Tony Novo, who served as team president and general manager, resigned and Alyse LaHue was named interim GM. Novo had been criticized by the Cloud 9 supporters' group.

Schedule

The league will take a short break during the group stage of the World Cup in France. But a chunk of the league's players will be away with their national teams for extended periods this season. The NWSL allowed teams to expand rosters to 22 players, in addition to four supplemental players who won't count against the salary cap.

Teams play a 24-game schedule that wraps up October 12. The championship game is scheduled for October 26.

team, Sky Blue, were well documented last year after former player Sam Kerr, now with Chicago, hinted at issues. But improvements have been made.

In February, Sky Blue announced that Tammy Murphy, the wife of part-owner governor Phil Murphy, would take a more active role in running the team. And indeed, improvements have been made, with better housing and staff additions. The team will train this season at Georgian Court University in Lakewood,

Daimler says it has no idea how Kim Jong Un got his limos

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principle of responsible entrepreneurial activity."

Daimler, based in Stuttgart, Germany, is one of the world's biggest and most prestigious automobile companies. It is one of the biggest providers of high-end passenger cars and the world's largest producer of trucks above six tons.

On its home page, the multinational giant boasts of selling vehicles and services in nearly all the countries of the world and of having production facilities in Europe, North and South America, Asia, and Africa.

North Korea, however, isn't one of its official customers.

"Our company has had no business connections with North Korea for far more than 15 years now and strictly complies with E.U. and U.S. embargoes," she said.

"To prevent deliveries to North Korea and to any of its embassies worldwide, Daimler has implemented a comprehensive export control process. Sales of vehicles by third parties, especially of used vehicles, are beyond our control and responsibility."

Kim's ability to procure the limousines anyway is a good example of how porous the international sanctions tend to be.

According to Daimler, the Mercedes-Benz Pullman limousines offer their passengers "a superbly appointed setting for discreet meetings."

The version used by Kim is believed to be equipped with all the key communications and entertainment systems so that, according to a company description of the car, its occupants can remain "fully in touch with the rest of the world while enjoying the luxury and comfort of their own very special place in it."

Talmadge is The AP's Pyongyang bureau chief.

21,144 in Portland last fall. The victory capped a fantastic season for the Courage, who went 18-1-6 overall, won the league's Supporters' Shield for best record, and never dropped a game on the road.

How to watch

The NWSL and A+E Networks terminated their broadcast agreement in February, leaving the league with no TV partner. Last season, a "Game of the Week" aired on the Lifetime channel. A+E also surrendered its stake in the league, but Lifetime remains a jersey sponsor.

At least for now, the league's games will be streamed live exclusively on the Yahoo Sports app, or on the Yahoo website.

Expansion

The league currently stands at nine teams. Since the Boston Breakers folded just before the start of last season, there have been persistent rumors about whether the team will be revived by a new ownership group. Spanish club Barcelona had expressed interest in fielding an NWSL team, although there has been no movement on that front. Major League Soccer's LAFC could also jump into the fray, with co-owner Mia Hamm suggesting as recently as early April that it is a priority.

Despite all the chatter, NWSL president Amanda Duffy previously indicated the league likely won't make any expansion announcements until after this season.

What's going on with Sky Blue?

The troubles that plagued New Jersey's