

Woods edges out Bob May to win third major this year

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

LOUISVILLE, Ky. — Tiger Woods finally got a fight to the finish.

All summer long, he had been winning major championships with frightening ease. Fifteen strokes in the U.S. Open. Eight strokes in the British Open.

He was no less spectacular Sunday in the PGA Championship, when he had to reach down and battle back against a player few people even knew until their thrilling drama unfolded on the back nine of Valhalla Golf Club.

When it was over, the legend grew.

In a fitting conclusion to perhaps the greatest summer of golf, Woods birdied the last two holes in regulation and won the PGA Championship in a playoff over Bob May to become the first player since Ben Hogan in 1953 to win three majors in one year.

"This was probably the most exciting one," Woods said. "Usually, you can just kind of cruise in with pars and win. That wasn't going to be the case today."

Both made five birdies, two sensational par saves and had a 31 on the back nine. Woods outlasted May by taking only three putts in the three-hole playoff, the last one a 2-foot par putt for his third consecutive major.

It was the easiest shot he had all afternoon.

"It was a memorable battle today, and I enjoyed it," Woods said. "We never backed off from one another. Birdie for birdie, shot for shot, we were going right at each other. That's as good as it gets."

Woods now holds the scoring record in relation to par in all four major championships, an 18-under 270 that allowed him to get into the playoff that he won by one stroke.

Last month at St. Andrews, the 24-year-old Woods became the youngest player to complete the career Grand Slam, with an eight-stroke victory. In June, he won the U.S. Open at Pebble Beach by 15 shots.

This was no less impressive. "The fireworks started on the back nine," Woods said. "This is probably one of the greatest duels I've ever had in my life. Hats off to Bob. He played his heart out."

May tested Woods like no one else in the last two majors,

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Tiger Woods
PGA champion

taking the lead with a two-shot swing on the second hole and never giving it up until the end.

"If I would have won, it would have been a dream come true," May said.

Tied with Woods going to the 72nd hole, May holed an 18-foot birdie putt from the fringe that put Woods in a perilous situation — a 6-foot birdie putt to get into the playoff. It curled in on the left side.

Woods took a one-stroke lead on the first playoff hole, No. 16, but not until after May showed he wasn't going away, hitting a 70-yard chip from the rough that stopped inches from the cup.

Woods tracked his 25-foot birdie putt, trotting after it and pointing at the ball as it dropped for a birdie.

Both players made impressive par saves on the 17th, setting the stage for even more drama on the 18th.

Woods hit his drive well to the left and into a sycamore tree. It dropped onto a cart path, bouncing so high it hit the tree again before rolling down the path onto some trampled dirt. He hit his approach into the left rough, and his third shot into a bunker.

But May failed to capitalize. He hit across the fairway into more rough, and his approach stopped 40 feet short.

After Woods hit out of the bunker to 2 feet, May's only hope was to make a putt that was as long as his chances.

It almost went in.

But this year — this game — belongs to Woods. He closed with a 67, his 15th consecutive round at par or better in the majors.

He has had at least a share of the lead in 11 of the last 12 rounds in the majors, unprecedented domination.

At Valhalla, the back nine turned into match play, a format the PGA Championship ditched in 1958. It more than held its own against some of the greatest duels ever.

It was the best player in the game against a player few had even heard of until this week.

While Ernie Els, Phil Mickelson and Davis Love III failed to mount a challenge, May seemed to relish it.

He outplayed Woods for the first half of an incredible back-nine duel and looked as if he had a chance to finish him off on the 15th with a possible three-stroke lead with three holes left.

But Woods made a 12-footer, May pulled his short putt to the left, and Woods' caddie summed up the situation.

"Ball game's on, now," Steve Williams told him.

Just minutes later, Woods' sand wedge spun back 4 feet for birdie on 17. He made the putt, and for the first time since the 11th hole, he was tied with May.

Both players reached the green on the par-5 18th in two, but May's long eagle putt raced by the hole some 18 feet on the fringe.

Down to his last chance, the putt broke two directions and fell into the cup on its last revolution.

Woods' turn.

His 6-foot birdie putt caught the left side and gently fell into the cup, and Woods let out a shout before slapping hands with his caddie. It was on to the playoff, where Woods delivered once again.

It wasn't easy, but the results were just the same.

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Crouch, Hampton players of the year

Picks from page 16

Colorado, whom Coach Gary Barnett likens to Eric Dickerson.

Most of the picks are safe. A few gambles are sprinkled in — Toniu Fonoti of Nebraska, and tight end Daniel Graham of Colorado.

As coach of the year, we chose Terry Allen of Kansas, as we think his will be the one team that turns in a decent improvement this year.

But it wouldn't be surprising to see Frank Solich or Bill Snyder win it if their teams go undefeated.

We're a loyal clan, so Nebraska edges out KSU, though the game in Manhattan will be no walk. We predict both teams will be undefeated when it's played.

Texas, blessed with gobs of young talent, can stave off a South Division in transition, as only OU seems poised to make a serious run. Every other team has a new quarterback or a new offense to break in.

All signs point to NU/UT part four in the Big 12 Championship, played in Kansas City's Arrowhead Stadium.

The more snow, the better.
Dr. Pepper is better cold anyway.

BIG XII PRESEASON RANKINGS

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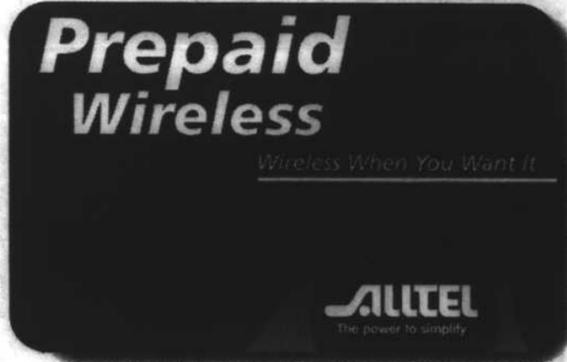
1. Nebraska
2. Kansas State
3. Colorado
4. Kansas
5. Iowa State
6. Missouri

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2. Oklahoma
3. Texas Tech
4. Oklahoma State
5. Texas A&M
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