

Monday's results

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Tiger captures third U.S. Open

Woods defeats Mediate after 19-hole playoff for 14th major

BY DOUG FERGUSON
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

SAN DIEGO — Tiger Woods cradled the silver U.S. Open trophy in his right hand and limped toward the edge of the Pacific bluffs, each step as much a burden as the 91 holes he played at Torrey Pines for a major that might have been his most amazing yet.

Out of competition for two months because of knee surgery, he won the toughest test in golf.

For the second straight day, Woods came to the 18th hole one shot behind and stood over a birdie putt to avoid a shocking collapse.

His knee throbbing and heart pounding, he delivered. He always does.

An epic U.S. Open finally ended Monday afternoon on the 19th hole of a playoff when Woods outlasted a gritty Rocco Mediate for a victory that surprised even him.

"I think this is probably the best ever," Woods said. "All things considered, I don't know how I ended up in this position, to be honest with you. It was a long week. A lot of doubt, a lot of questions going into the week. And here we are, 91 holes later."

Now the greater question is his future.

All week, Woods had managed to mask the pain, walking with an almost imperceptible limp. Finally, he could give in to it. Walking toward the bluffs for his last round of interviews, he could barely make it up the hill.

Woods conceded that he risked further damage by playing the U.S. Open, and said it was possible that he had indeed made it worse.

He does not know when he will play next, even uncertain whether he will show up at Royal Birkdale in five weeks for the British Open to continue his pursuit of Jack Nicklaus' record 18 majors. Torrey Pines was Woods' 14th major and made him the only player besides Nicklaus to win the career Grand Slam three times over.

"I think I need to shut it down for a little bit," Woods said. "It's a bit sore. I need to take a little bit of a break."

It might take that long for this victory to sink in.

Caught in a tussle with Mediate, a 45-year-old with a creaky back and no fear, Woods blew a three-shot lead with eight holes to play before rallying with a birdie to send this 18-hole playoff into overtime.

On the verge of one of golf's great



CHARLIE RIEDEL THE ASSOCIATED PRESS
Rocco Mediate, left, laughs with Tiger Woods after Woods' US Open victory following an 19-hole playoff round at Torrey Pines Golf Course on Monday.

upsets, Mediate instead became another victim.

He had a 20-foot birdie putt on the 18th hole to win — not many players get a chance like that against Woods — and pulled it just slightly.

"I just yanked it a touch," Mediate said. "But I can't really complain. I did the best I could."

Woods reached the green in two and his 45-foot eagle putt rolled some four feet past the hole. He backed off the putt when a seagull's shadow crossed over his line, then watched it tumble in for birdie. Both Woods and Mediate finished at even-par 71.

Going to the seventh hole for sudden death, Mediate drove left into a bunker, pulled that shot to the edge of the bleachers, chipped 18 feet past the hole and missed the par putt.

"Great fight," Woods told him as they embraced on the green.

It was almost more than Woods could handle, yet he escaped again. He won the U.S. Open for the third time, and the first since it was last held on a public course at Bethpage Black in 2002.

"I'm glad I'm done," Woods said. "I really don't feel like playing anymore."

Mediate's odyssey began two weeks ago when he had to survive

a sudden-death playoff simply to qualify for this U.S. Open. Even more unlikely was going toe-to-toe with Woods — whom Mediate referred to as a "monster" — and nearly slaying him.

Mediate struggled to keep his emotions after taking bogey on the first extra hole, but he walked off Torrey Pines with 12,000 new friends who crammed both sides of every fairway for a playoff that was tighter than anyone imagined.

"Obviously, I would have loved to win," he said. "I don't know what else to say. They wanted a show, they got one."

Did they ever.

From the opening tee shot Thursday in a light fog known as "June Gloom," this U.S. Open simply shined.

"The atmosphere is what kept me going," Woods said. "The tournament, being a major championship here at Torrey Pines, all the people, it could have very easily ... I couldn't ever quit in front of these people. It wasn't going to happen."

The week was filled with some of Woods' greatest moments in a major — a 30 on the back nine Friday to get into the mix, two eagles from a combined 100 feet and a chip-in birdie on Saturday to take the lead, and one of the biggest putts of his

More inside: Former Illinois star Garrett Chaussard chats with The Daily Illini about his incredible experience at Torrey Pines. **Page 15**

career when he holed a 12-foot birdie with the final stroke of regulation to force the playoff.

Then came a playoff in which he built a three-shot lead with eight holes to play, only to find himself trailing four holes later.

"You just keep pushing and pushing," Woods said. "And I did, all week."

Woods seized control when Mediate bogeyed consecutive holes around the turn, but Woods bogeyed the next two from the bunker and Mediate tied him by nearly driving the 267-yard 14th hole and chipping to a foot for birdie.

Then the playoff took yet another surprising turn on the 15th.

Woods hit his tee shot so far to the right that it landed in a fairway bunker along the adjoining ninth fairway. But he carved a 7-iron from 170 yards around the trees to 12 feet, one of those defining shots that turns a tournament in his favor.

But not this time. Mediate dropped in a 25-foot birdie putt, while Woods missed and spent the next three holes in a desperate chase to make up ground until he did on the last hole.

"I never quit. I never quit," Mediate said. "I've been beaten down a few times and came back, and I got what I wanted. I got a chance to beat the best player in the world. And I came up just a touch short."

It was the second time Woods has won a PGA Tour event and a U.S. Open on the same course — Pebble Beach in 2000 and Torrey Pines, where in January he won by eight shots for his sixth Buick Invitational title.

He now has won eight times at Torrey Pines, including a Junior World Championship.

It was his 65th career victory, passing Ben Hogan for third all time. Woods raised his playoff record to 15-2 and made it 14-of-14 in majors when he had at least a share of the lead going into the final round.

He now has won every major in a playoff except for the British Open.

Just like the last U.S. Open playoff seven years ago, both players arrived wearing the same outfit — khaki trousers and a white shirt at Southern Hills, black slacks and a red shirt with a black vest at Torrey Pines.

That's typical for Woods, and when he saw Mediate, Woods removed his vest.

It felt like a prize fight the way both players marched through a wall of fans and onto the first tee, posing before the silver U.S. Open trophy. And it finished that way, too.