

Tiger Woods grows on and off the golf course

BY RON SIRAK
AP GOLF WRITER

The shadows stretched across the Four Seasons Resort like fingers on a hand reaching for the most difficult chord on a piano. As the sun lowered, most of the activity was in the hospitality tents.

Only two people were on the practice putting green on Saturday evening at the Byron Nelson Classic - Tiger Woods and Jerry Chang, a friend from his Stanford days who now travels frequently with him.

Sitting silently nearby in a golf cart, basking in a fading shaft of sunlight, was a hulking form of a man paying close attention.

Woods, with his hat turned around in the style of most any 22-year-old who should be just picking up his college degree, was doing two things: He was working on golf; and he was having fun.

Those two things have always gone hand in hand for Woods.

Clearly in the middle of a match, Woods winced when Chang rolled in a long putt to win a hole. When Woods pushed a putt wide of the cup, a voice from the golf cart bellowed: "Follow through with the stroke."

The advice came from Earl Woods, who taught his son the game even before he could walk and now hopes to see him become the best golfer ever.

Barely more than a year ago that wish seemed unlikely. Not that Tiger Woods would not become the greatest golfer ever, but that Earl Woods would live to see it.

The elder Woods wore shorts as he sat in that golf cart. Visible on both legs were scars from the operation in which veins were removed and used for the quadruple heart bypass operation that saved his life.

"Yeah," Tiger Woods said back to his Pop. "I'm not finishing the stroke."

Then Chang called back: "Hey, no lessons in the middle of the match."

Laughter all around. This has been life for Tiger and Pop for more than 20 years. Playing golf. Working on golf. Having fun with golf.

Several things were clear at the Byron Nelson Classic. Woods is working on his game as hard as ever. He is much more comfortable with his fellow players, the fans and the media than he was a year ago.

And he is a better golfer. Don't be misled by the one PGA Tour victory compared to the three last year at this time. He drives the ball straighter, has better distance control with his irons and a somewhat more varied game around the green. And he has become a more consistent short putter.

"He's going to be scary how good he's going to get," Jim Carter said after playing with Woods on Saturday.

Nick Faldo says golf is not about the quality of one's good shots but the quality of one's bad shots. Woods' bad shots are way better than last year, which means he will give himself more chances to win.

Then there is the fact that he is a year older. His maturity shows not only in the more controlled way he plays but also in how he interacts with others.

True, he still gets angry after a bad shot - sometimes very angry. And true, he displays annoyance at times with a good shot that is not great. But he smiles more, acknowledges the crowd more.

Woods also interacts much more with his fellow pros than he did last year. He is much less likely now to take off 20 yards ahead of his playing partners, walking with his eyes fixed straight ahead. He is

much more likely to talk and laugh with them.

Last year, for four unbelievable days, Woods' game came completely together at the Masters in a remarkable display of his skills.

That hasn't happened yet this year, and it may not happen to the degree that it did at Augusta very many times in his career.

But the feeling Woods exudes right now is that he is dancing around his considerable ability, circling his skills and pulling them together for another remarkable display.

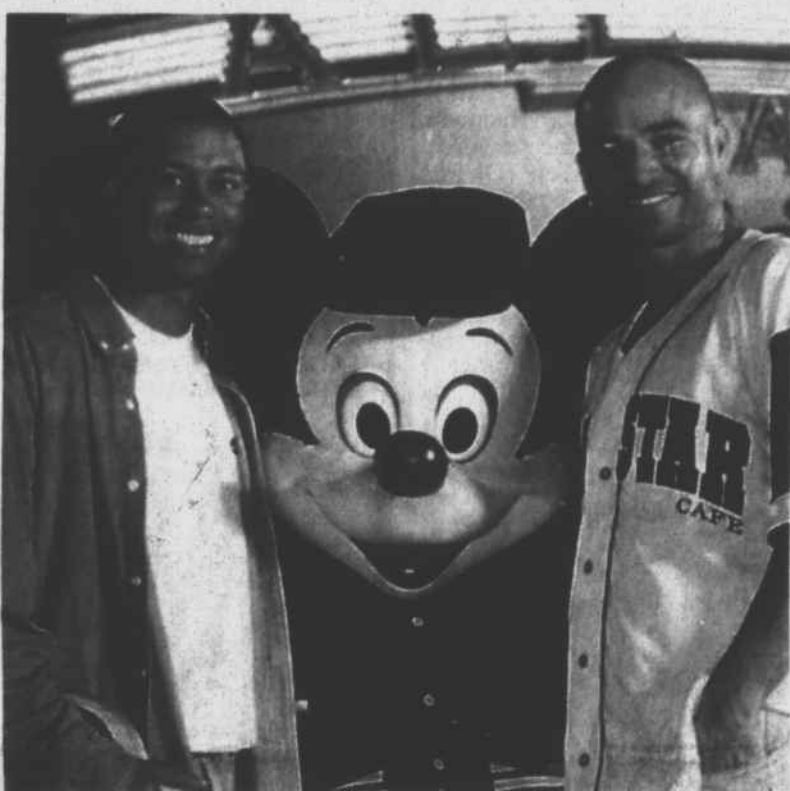
"I had it going for a while," Woods said after he made a brief run at the leaders Sunday at the Nelson.

Then he shook his head and smiled as he thought of what could be.

"I'm really close," he said. "I hit the ball good in spots and putted good in spots but couldn't do both together."

Perhaps that will happen next month in the U.S. Open at the Olympic Club, a course Woods knows well from his days at Stanford.

Perhaps what we have seen from Tiger Woods this year was merely a prelude for something wonderful, something that once again will leave people shaking their heads.



Tiger Woods (l) and tennis star Andre Agassi are investors in a restaurant at Disney World

New York basketball legend 'The Goat' dead at age 53

BY LARRY MCSHANE
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

NEW YORK - He was perhaps the greatest player never to make the NBA, an incredible leaper who made dunking an art form back when Michael Jordan was in diapers and Kareem Abdul-Jabbar was still Lew Alcindor.

Earl "The Goat" Manigault, the New York City playground legend whose descent into heroin addiction cost him a professional career, died Friday of heart failure at Bellevue Hospital. Manigault, whose life was made into a 1996 HBO movie, was 53.

The 6-foot-1-inch Manigault was "the best player his size in the history of New York City," according to Abdul-Jabbar, who often squared off against "The Goat" in city parks during the 1960s.

Manigault's domination of the players at the 98th Street courts was so total that it became known as "Goat Park." And his high-flying antics were credited with changing the game, paving the way for Julius Erving and Jordan.

"All this stuff you call NBA basketball and 'Showtime'?" Manigault said earlier this year. "Well, we were the ones who brought in the noise and brought in the funk."

But while city contemporaries like Abdul-Jabbar and Connie Hawkins went on to professional careers, Manigault battled a drug problem and twice landed behind bars. The dope sapped his abilities, and a 1971 tryout with the ABA's Utah Stars ended with his release.

"For every Michael Jordan," he once said, "there's an Earl Manigault. We can't all make it."

Manigault's stunts were legendary: leaping to place a quarter on the top of a backboard. Reverse dunking a basketball 36 straight times to win a \$60 bet.

Author Pete Axthelm, in his book "The City Game," said Manigault would typically leave other players slack-jawed.

"Occasionally he would drive past a few defenders, dunk the ball with one hand, catch it with the other - and raise it and stuff it through the hoop a second time before returning to earth," Axthelm wrote.

Manigault never made the transition from the playgrounds to organized ball. After starring at Harlem's Benjamin Franklin High School, he

went to a North Carolina prep school and attracted recruiters from college powerhouses Duke, Indiana and North Carolina.

Manigault opted for the smaller Johnson C. Smith University, a predominantly black school where his grades plunged and he fought with the coach over playing time.

He returned to Harlem's playgrounds, where both his legend and addiction grew. Manigault did 16 months in jail for drug possession in 1969-70, and did another prison term from 1977-79 in a failed robbery plot, counseling center for teens. He became an unofficial coach at Wadleigh High School, culminating in the school's city championship this year.

Manigault is survived by his wife, Yvonne, and two sons, Darrin and Earl.

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