

Woods wins third professional golf tournament in nine

Goes over \$1 million mark after beating Tom Lehman

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no pressure on him," he added, clearly disgusted with his own poor shot. "I hit it a little high on the club face. The wind caught it and it went in the water."

Woods, who said he played con-

servatively all week because he was rusty from lack of competition, got better with each round. He opened with a 70, followed it with a 67 and then shot a 65 on Saturday when he closed with four consecutive birdies to tie

Lehman and get in the playoff.

Lehman was equally brilliant, putting together rounds of 66, 67 and 69.

Both players were clearly disappointed that Sunday's anticipated showdown was washed out. Friday night, Lehman was voted player of the year by PGA Tour members and Woods was voted rookie of the year.

"I'd rather have played,"

Woods said. "You don't want anything given to you. You want to earn it."

Woods' sensational shot helped ease the disappointment of the highly anticipated but washed-out final-round matchup. And it gave Woods yet another opportunity to show his remarkable ability to rise to any challenge.

"I go out there trying to win each and every tournament," Woods said. And at times it seems like he might be able to do

just that. In his nine tournaments as a professional, he has finished six times in the top five.

Asked if he was surprised by winning a third time so quickly, Woods shook his head slowly and said: "No, only because it is what I set out to do - win every tournament."

At times it seems like the only thing Woods can't control is the weather. He never saw his winning shot.

"I lost it in the air because of

the clouds and the rain," Woods said. "A rain drop hit me right in the eye when I looked up."

The surprisingly large gallery huddled under umbrellas in the cold rain told Woods where the ball ended up, erupting in a huge roar, many shaking their heads as if asking, "What else can this kid do?"

Woods' next chance to strut his stuff will be at the Phoenix Open in two weeks.

Track is Cavs' claim to fame

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enough at North Rowan to have attracted many athletes, blessed with lots of talent, who set lofty goals, and are willing to work hard enough to achieve those goals. Without a combination of those three things, we don't get it done."

Amazingly, the Cavaliers' reputation has gotten around, and this small community is making large strides in track. North has won nine Rowan County titles in a row, five conference championships, eight invitational titles, two sectional titles and seven regional titles. The Cavaliers also won state indoor titles in 1990 and '91, and three outdoor titles in

1994, 1995 and 1996. Steele, who has been coach for 11 years, has coached 78 individual athletes who have won state titles, three All-Americans, two honorable mention All-Americans and won the Sportsmanship Award three times in the 1990s.

Athletic achievements are not the main focus of Steele's teachings, though. He has a keen awareness of the bridge between track and field.

"Your success in the classroom is very important," he said. "Hopefully, many of our athletes will use their track and field talents to further their education. The NCAA

regulations have made it more difficult to qualify for an athletic grant. So, therefore, athletes must study and prepare themselves to take the ACT or the SAT from the time they enter the ninth grade."

North's success is the result of many individuals, Steele said. Not only do athletes contribute, the community has a hand in making the Cavaliers among the best.

"A lot of hard work goes into what we do," he said.

"There has been an effort to finance this program, parents have been great, and together, we put a lot of pride into this track and field program."

Hornets quietly improved team

Defense has played a major role in Charlotte's turnaround

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play has become infectious. "It's a collective mind set that everybody wants to play defense, you know quickly, first and foremost, not like, 'Oh damn, we got to play defense' but everyone wants to play defense and they're enjoying it," Mason said.

The Hornets are enjoying it so much, they roared off to the best start in franchise history at 12-9, before a tough 87-82 loss in Chicago on Dec. 14. Despite some bumpy spots where players have had public exchanges with Cowens over decisions and personnel, they're still enthusiastic.

"We're looking forward to doing a lot of firsts here, you know this team has really come together, the camaraderie is good, the mental aspect is good and we believe in the defense and that's what's going to do it for us," said Mason, who has blown up at Cowens as well as his teammates.

The Hornets are above .500, despite spending nearly two weeks away from home, on a grueling seven-game road trip followed by a five-game West Coast trip. Playing on the road helped the team bond, says center Vlade Divac.

"I think that road trip of two weeks helped us to know each

other, to see what's going on here," he said. "Basically we know our goal, how far we can go. We have no fear of playing against the best teams in the league."

Charlotte has played solid basketball of late, posting wins over first-division teams like Seattle, New York, Detroit and Indiana. They also have wins over the L.A. Lakers and Washington. Veteran forward Dell Curry was surprised to learn the Hornets were off to the best start in franchise history but knows there's room to improve.

"You always feel you can play better and have a better record but with our schedule," he said. You have to be pretty much pleased with what we've done so far and putting in a new system with new players, so I think we're happy with it but you always make room for improvement."

Center Matt Geiger, who has been sidelined with a bad back, feels great about the Hornets quick start. It's not too early to start talking playoffs in the very competitive Eastern Conference, so the Hornets will need every win they can get.

"It definitely puts you in a position to establish yourself, which is something you want to do," Geiger said.

"You want to try and get in

the playoff hunt early and stay in there all season and try and maneuver your way as high as you can, so it's good to get a good start."

The Hornets could be even better, if they hadn't blown leads and lost at the L.A. Clippers and come up flat in Toronto. If Muggsy Bogues' injured knee allows him to contribute and Geiger's absence is minimized, the Hornets could improve their standing in the East.

"When you win you have fun, no question," laughed Divac.

Panthers prepare for next year

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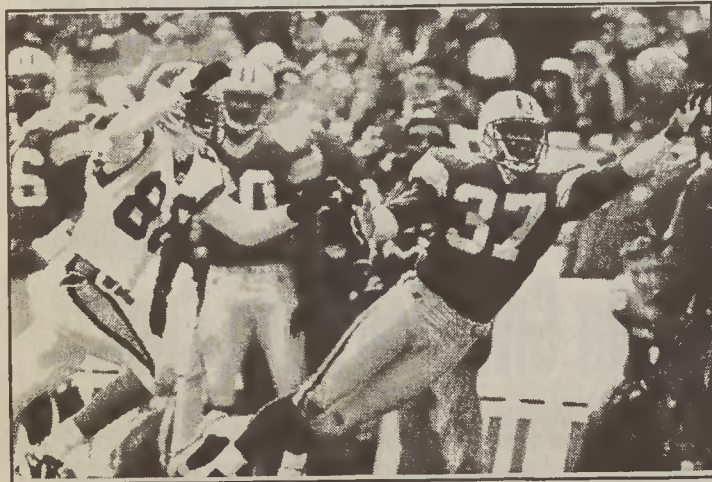
choices were injured for much of the year, both should be healthy in time for the start of next season. Not only would that give them a fresh start, but it would add depth to the Panthers' growing youth movement.

"It will be like having two drafts in one year," Capers

said.

The Panthers will need all the help they can get. Their success this season will translate into a tougher schedule for 1997, including regular-season games with the Cowboys and Packers.

"I know that we'll be back," Capers said.



PHOTO/WADE NASH

Carolina receiver Willie Green, (left) trying to defend against Green Bay cornerback Tyrone Williams, retook his starting position from injured rookie Muhsin Muhammad late in the season.

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