

Woods' popularity boosts Charlotte golf tournament

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it was benefiting from having names like Phil Mickelson and Vijay Singh and Davis Love III. And, yes, the Wachovia Championship was sold out before Tiger decided he would play in the tournament.

But the stakes are higher when Tiger plays. Consequently, in a relatively new tournament, the profile gets a major facelift, all because Tiger is here.

"You can expect much bigger crowds in the area around the golf course because of Tiger," said Jahmal Pullen, president of New Jersey-based Seven Under, a new publication that touts itself as the only national magazine dedicated to black golf enthusiasts.

"Everyone is going to benefit from him being there. Tiger doesn't play a lot of tournaments. So when he comes to a tournament, attendance is 30 to 40 percent higher than normal. Also, he brings in what isn't the diehard golf fans. I don't know if Wachovia is doing it, but a lot of tournaments even give him appearance money. It could be big for Charlotte and the surrounding area."

Although Pullen and the magazine's chief executive officer, James Oliver, are not North Carolina natives, both are graduates of the Kenan-Flagler Business School at UNC Chapel Hill. They keep a close eye on golf in Charlotte.

"There are a lot of African-American golfers in Charlotte and in South Carolina who will go to the tournament to try and get a glimpse of Tiger," Pullen said. "That will help give the

tournament more visibility in the African-American community, even among people who don't normally follow golf.

"In addition, the TV networks will be there to keep track of Tiger, and that will lead to discussion about how nice Charlotte is. ESPN will be talking about the tournament. This could be a major step. The Wachovia Championship could become one of the big ones, because the city has so much to offer besides the golf."

No, Tiger's being here this week won't boost the local economy the way, say, the 1994 NCAA men's basketball Final Four did. But it certainly won't hurt. I know it sounds goofy, but right now I bet there are people in town who drove to the area just to be close to Tiger. They will eat in our restaurants and stay in our hotels and shop in our malls.

Tiger is that big. Oliver, Seven Under's CEO, said Tiger alone is responsible for his picking up the game of golf back in 1997. Oliver said the same thing could happen for black kids in Charlotte when they hear that the best golfer in the game is in town.

"Tiger creates a buzz, even

among people who aren't all that interested in golf," said Oliver, a Morehouse College graduate. "That says something. So if Tiger is in contention on Sunday, watch it. It could be major for that tournament."

What was that phrase Tiger used at the press conference in which he announced he was turning pro? "Hello, world?"

From a golfing standpoint, Charlotte just might be able to borrow the phrase after this week.

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THE CHARLOTTE POST (USPS 965-500) is published weekly for \$40.00 per year by the Charlotte Post Publishing Co., 1531 Camden Rd. Charlotte, NC 28203-4753. Periodicals postage paid at Charlotte, NC. **POSTMASTER:** Send address changes to **THE CHARLOTTE POST**, PO Box 30144, Charlotte, NC 28230

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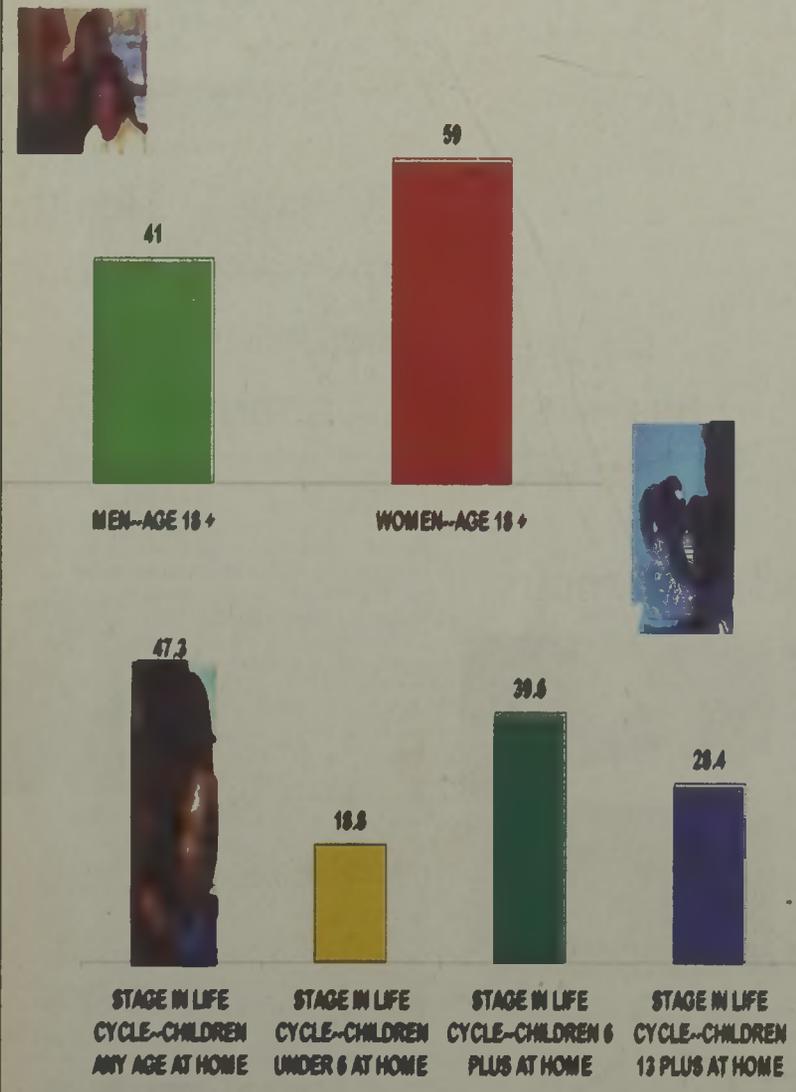
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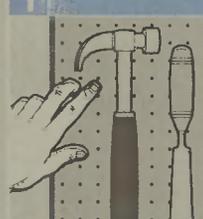
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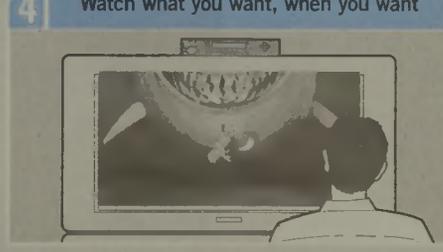
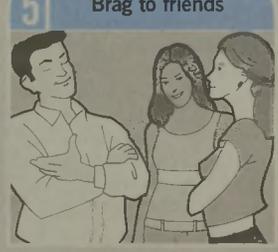


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