

Odds in Doral's favor for duel

Woods, Mickelson ready for another hard-fought battle

By DOUG FERGUSON
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

MIAMI

Phil Mickelson has a hard time forgetting the bitter end to his duel at Doral with Tiger Woods. He was just off the 18th green, facing a 30-foot birdie chip to force a playoff at worst and possibly win the best showdown of the year. The chip came off perfectly, ran true toward the cup and then broke sharply across the hole and spun out of the right side.

Woods made his 6-foot par putt to win.

Mickelson might be able to put that out of his mind if he wouldn't turn on the TV in his room at Doral.

"Unfortunately, they have the video running on one of the channels here at the hotel, so I get to see it every night," he said.

It was great theater, no doubt. This generation of golf rarely produces such duels between the top players, with such a fine line between so much talent.

The Ford Championship at Doral got one of the moments that are sheer magic, and it produced a buzz that even drowned out the parade of jetliners descending over the Blue Monster.

Woods reached the 12th green with a 3-wood that traveled 293



Defending champion Tiger Woods hits from the 18th fairway during a Pro-Am event at the Ford Championship at Doral in Doral, Fla., on Wednesday. The course is made for power hitters such as Woods.

yards in the air to make eagle. Mickelson fired back with consecutive birdies to catch him.

Each made 27 birdies in four days, and Woods got the final one, a 30-footer on the 17th that was the difference in his victory.

Rare as that was, odds are in Doral's favor of that happening again because of sheer numbers.

Nine of the top 10 players from the world ranking are gathered at the Blue Monster, a course that favors power hitters with lush fairways that don't have a lot of roll and rough that is thicker than last year, but still not terribly troublesome for players with a wedge in their hands.

Vijay Singh tied for third last year. Also in the field is Ernie Els, who joins Woods as the defending champion because the Big Easy won the most recent time he was at Doral in 2002.

That was another showdown of sorts, although Els played in the group ahead of Woods. He saw an eight-shot lead dwindle to one before Els pulled away.

Anyone ready for an encore?

"I would love to get in that position again," Mickelson said.

"I want to have a chance to win the tournament, obviously.

"It would be great if I had a chance to go head-to-head with Tiger. It would be great to have a

chance to go head-to-head with anybody in the top 10."

Woods gets those opportunities more often than most.

There was that incredible matchup with Els at Kapalua in 2000, as good a show this side of the majors.

He has gone up against Singh in the final round at the '03 American Express (which he won) and the '04 Deutsche Bank Championship outside Boston (which he lost).

He tied for the lead with Retief Goosen at the '02 Masters, where the Goose finished three shots behind and asked if he got green trousers for finishing second.



Poland's Jacek Krzynowek, right, and the United States' Steve Cherundolo fight for the control of the ball as heavy snow falls during a soccer match in Kaiserslautern, southern Germany, on Wednesday.

U.S. freezes out Poland for win during blizzard

By BARRY WILNER
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

KAISERSLAUTERN, Germany

The last time Clint Dempsey played in a snowstorm, the match was reduced to a penalty-kick shootout rather than going the full 90 minutes.

That was in Texas when he was playing club soccer. On Wednesday night, Dempsey and the U.S. team defied the elements and beat Poland 1-0 in a World Cup tuneup played in blizzard conditions.

In a scene more befitting Lambeau Field than a soccer field, Dempsey scored the only goal off a misplay by Poland's goalie in the 48th minute.

"I never played in a game when that much snow came in at the same time," Dempsey said. "I never saw little flurries turn into big snow like that.

"The ball kept bouncing around here and there."

It bounced perfectly on Dempsey's fortuitous goal. Eddie Lewis made a superb long pass from the left wing into the penalty area. Goalkeeper Artur Boruc, who entered to start the second half, tried to punch it away.

Instead, the ball deflected off the head of U.S. forward Taylor Twellman directly to Dempsey.

All Twellman's teammate with the New England Revolution had to do was head it into a gaping net.

"The defender thought the goalie was going to get it, and it caused him to hesitate a bit. And I was able to get behind him and get one in the back of the net," Dempsey said.

"He apologized for his mistake, but that's not enough," Poland coach Pawel Janas said of Boruc.

The next time the United States plays at Fritz-Walter-Stadion, it probably will be 50 degrees warmer, with no sign of snow and a frosty wind.

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