

RACING

DAYTONA BEACH, Fla.
Ganassi team gets
Rolex win in Daytona

It didn't take long for new Chip Ganassi Racing teammates Scott Dixon and Dan Wheldon to find their driving styles mesh well.

Joined by Casey Mears, who drives for Ganassi in NASCAR's Nextel Cup series, the two Indy Racing League champions raced to a hard-earned victory in the Rolex 24, America's most prestigious sports car endurance race.

"This race is so difficult, so hard to win," Dixon said. "I can hardly believe we won it. But Chip gives us a great team and great equipment. Dan and I were also fast in the Phoenix (IRL) test earlier this week and I think there are going to be a lot more wins this year."

Reigning IRL champion and Indianapolis 500 winner Wheldon, in only his second Rolex start and first since leaving Andretti Green Racing for Ganassi's team, gave all the credit to his teammates.

"Those guys, particularly Scott, did just a great job," Wheldon said. "It's another good win to add to the Indy 500. It's amazing."

BASEBALL

SAN DIEGO
Piazza agrees to
\$2M deal with Padres

All-Star catcher Mike Piazza agreed Sunday to a \$2 million, one-year contract with the San Diego Padres, giving the defending NL West champions a marquee player they think can still contribute.

Piazza, 37, had been interested in signing a free-agent deal with an AL team to become a designated hitter. Instead, he'll stay in the NL and return to the West Coast for the first time since the Los Angeles Dodgers traded him to Florida in 1998.

The 12-time All-Star holds the major league record for most career home runs by a catcher (374). He has 397 homers overall, and is a career .311 hitter.

The deal is expected to be announced today. It includes a mutual option for 2007 at \$8 million.

Piazza became a free agent after last season, when he hit .251 with 19 homers and 62 RBIs in 113 games for the New York Mets. It was his lowest batting average since he hit .232 in 69 at-bats with the Dodgers in 1992, his first season in the big leagues.

Woods wins shootout at Buick

BY DOUG FERGUSON
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

SAN DIEGO

A new decade for Tiger Woods looks a lot like the last one: making clutch putts, letting his opponents break down and hoisting the trophy at a golf course that feels as if it's home.

Woods holed an 8-foot birdie on the 18th hole Sunday to get into a three-way playoff, then won the Buick Invitational with simple pars as Australian rookie Nathan Green and two-time Masters champion Jose Maria Olazabal made crucial mistakes.

Olazabal played a splendid bunker shot on the par-3 16th, then missed a 4-foot par putt on the second extra hole at Torrey Pines to hand Woods a victory that was only easy at the end.

For Woods, it was the fourth time in 10 years that he won in his first PGA Tour event of the year, and he became the first four-time winner at the Buick Invitational on a course he played regularly as a kid.

The finish was reminiscent of the American Express Championship in October at Harding Park, where John Daly lost on the second extra hole by missing a 3-foot putt to give Woods the victory.

Just like then, Woods bowed his head and slowly walked over to shake hands.

It was a somber way to end a dynamic afternoon along the bluffs of the Pacific Ocean, where 11 players had a share of the lead at one point and there was an eight-way tie with six holes to play.

Woods, who three-putted three times in his final round of even-par 72, finally made the one that mattered on the final hole of regulation en route to his 47th tour victory.



Tiger Woods watches his tee shot at the seventh hole on Sunday during the final round of the Buick Invitational in San Diego. Woods won the tournament on the second hole of a playoff.

Woods turned 30 at the end 2005 and is starting his 10th full season on tour, and this was an ideal place for him to get going. This is the fourth tournament he has won at least four times, the others coming at Augusta National, Firestone and Bay Hill.

Green did all he could to pull off an improbable victory in only his second PGA Tour start.

The 30-year-old rookie from Australia, who once worked in a crematorium man-

aged by his parents, shot into the lead by holing a wedge for eagle from 77 yards on the 13th hole, held on for dear life and got into the playoff by making a 7-foot birdie putt on the 18th.

But he didn't last long.

The only player to hit the fairway on No. 18 in the playoff, his 3-wood went into the grandstand. After taking a free drop, his pitch didn't reach the green and he chunked the next one, moving it only

inches and making bogey.

That sent Woods and Olazabal to the 16th, and the 39-year-old Spaniard appeared to escape trouble with a magnificent bunker shot that hopped into the first cut, then the fringe, then trickled downhill toward the cup. He had 4 feet to head to the next hole, but started walking in disgust as soon as the ball left his club.

Olazabal, whose most recent victory came four years ago at Torrey Pines, was the first to finish at 10-under 278 by two-putting for birdie on the 18th for a 69.

Green, who briefly had a two-shot lead after his eagle on No. 13, had five consecutive putts in the 8-foot range, all for par except the last one, which gave him a 72 and put him in the playoff.

"There's nothing to be disappointed about," Green said. "I've been an over-achiever for the week."

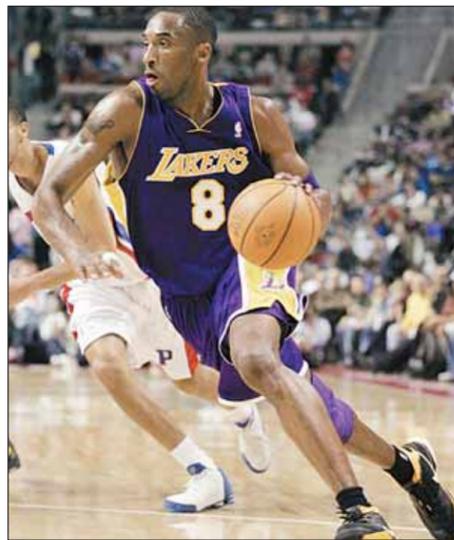
Woods was one shot behind when he hit 5-wood into 75 feet on the 18th, only to see his eagle putt run too fast through the break, 8 feet by the cup. It was the longest putt he made all day.

He had a putt from about the same distance on No. 18 on the first playoff hole, but pulled it badly.

Two players were inches away from joining them in the playoff.

Lucas Glover had a 65-foot eagle putt on the 18th that was headed for the center of the cup, but stopped just short. In the same group, Arjun Atwal left himself a 5-footer for birdie, but he pushed it right of the cup.

Woods skipped the season-opening Mercedes Championships, and for those who didn't think the PGA Tour began until he showed up, the No. 1 player was part of a terrific show.



Lakers guard Kobe Bryant, right, drives to the basket past Detroit's Tayshaun Prince during their game Sunday.

Pistons continue to dominate

The Associated Press

AUBURN HILLS, Mich.

Detroit's balanced team was once again too much for Kobe Bryant and the Los Angeles Lakers.

Rasheed Wallace paced five Pistons in double figures with 24 points, and Detroit pulled away in the third quarter on its way to a 102-93 victory against the Lakers on Sunday night.

With its season-high 11th straight win, Detroit improved to an NBA-best 37-5 and tied the fourth-best record through 42 games in NBA history.

In the 2004 NBA Finals, the Pistons dominated Los Angeles — with Kobe Bryant and Shaquille O'Neal — in five games for the title with the same starters they have this season.

"They still have the defense as their calling card, but they have released and liberated the offense," Los Angeles coach

Phil Jackson said before the game.

The Lakers are still reeling from their decision to deal O'Neal to the Miami Heat two years ago, leaving Bryant with a lackluster supporting cast. Jackson's return after a year away from basketball has not managed to make much of a difference.

Bryant had 39 points on 12-of-28 shooting, a week after scoring 81, the second-highest point total in NBA history. Chris Mihm, Bryant's only teammate with more than nine points, had 16 points and 14 rebounds.

In other action

Cavaliers 113
Suns 106

CLEVELAND — LeBron James scored 32 of his 44 points in the second half, bringing Cleveland back almost all by himself as the Cavaliers rallied for their fifth straight win

against the Phoenix Suns.

James added 11 rebounds and seven assists for the Cavaliers, who were trailing by 17 midway through the third quarter when their third-year superstar took control of the game.

Heat 101
Rockets 95

HOUSTON — Dwyane Wade had 32 points and nine assists, and Shaquille O'Neal added 24 points and 14 rebounds for Miami.

O'Neal also hit a season-high 12 free throws, although he missed five of his final six attempts.

Bucks 83
Celtics 79

MILWAUKEE — Michael Redd overcame a slow start to score 15 fourth-quarter points, leading the Bucks to their second straight win.

Redd, who sat out much of the first quarter with two fouls, made just one of his first nine shots but finished with 21 points for Milwaukee.

• Trojans

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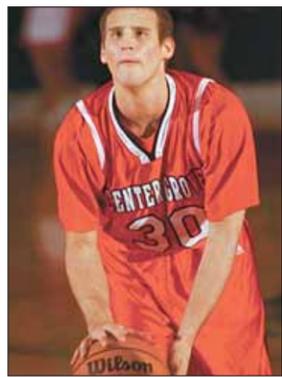
During the second quarter, the game took an unexpected turn and tensions rose when Center Grove's James Nussbaum, a 6-foot-2 senior, fouled Conley hard on a fast-break layup.

Coaches from Lawrence North crossed half court and yelled for Nussbaum's ejection. But the result was an intentional foul on Nussbaum and a technical on the Lawrence North bench. Wildcats' assistant coach Jim Etherington was ejected.

While Lawrence North fans and coaches felt the foul was worthy of ejection, Hawkins said Nussbaum was just playing hard.

When calm was restored and the game ended, Lawrence North coach Jack Keefer applauded Center Grove's effort and praised the work of his own team, which had the rare challenge of battling back from an early deficit.

"Not many teams have been able to do that against us," said Keefer, whose team has won 22



STAFF PHOTO BY MATT COLEY/mcoley@thejournalinet.com

Center Grove senior Tyler Kitchel prepares to shoot a free throw during the Trojans' 76-55 loss Saturday at Lawrence North. Kitchel led the game in scoring with 25 points, including sinking six 3-pointers.

straight games. "I liked it because our kids had to work hard, keep their heads in the game and step up, and that's what they did."

In the long run, Oden and Conley were too much for the Trojans. They scored 22 points each and combined for 20 rebounds.

Throughout his career, Oden has remained humble despite the media frenzy that constantly surrounds him.

"I have to work a lot harder because everyone is going to give me their best game," Oden said. "I come in and work hard and shoot a lot of shots in practice. And I do it for my team because I am expected to do well and I want to help them the best I can."

For Center Grove, junior Tyler Kitchel led the way with a game-high 25 points, a total that included a season-high six 3-point baskets.

Despite the loss, Kitchel liked the way the unranked Trojans competed.

"Even though it showed 21 (points down) on the scoreboard at the end of the game, it didn't feel like that," Kitchel said. "We battled as hard as we could, and I feel like we played them well."

Hawkins agreed, and he is pleased with Trojans' seasonlong progress.

"I think we have shown a lot of skills," Hawkins said. "We are handling the ball well and shooting well. I think we have some great kids and I'm very proud of them."

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