Beat: Sports

Tiger Woods To Play Masters Tournament

First Since Accident Last Year

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USPA NEWS - No one would have been surprised if Woods never played golf again after a car crash in Los Angeles that damaged his right leg so badly he said doctors raised the prospect of amputation. Out of the public eye for nine months, Woods sent hopes soaring last November with a video of him swinging the club with a simple message, “Making progress.”

At the Augusta National, making a Monday practice round feel like Sunday at a major because of the gallery, walking the steep slopes, swinging well and making it clear he has every intention of playing in the Masters. When asked at his news conference if he thinks he could win, his answer was “I do.” It has been 508 days from the last time he played a tournament where he had to walk, and now he returns to this Masters with screws and rods still holding the bones in place in his right leg. Woods also is 46 years old. He would be the oldest Masters champion by three weeks over Jack Nicklaus.

The big question is how he will hold up over 18 holes for four straight days. Woods walked 18 holes last week during a scouting trip with 13-year-old son Charlie, including a stop at the Par 3 course. He played the back nine on Sunday, the front nine on Monday. Woods plans nine more for Wednesday and then it’s “game time.” He is to tee off at 10:34 a.m. Thursday with Louis Oosthuizen and Joaquin Niemann. “I can hit it just fine. I don’t have any qualms about what I can do physically from a golf standpoint,” Woods said. “Walking is the hard part. This is normally not an easy walk to begin with. Now given the conditions that my leg is in, it gets even more difficult. Seventy-two holes is a long road and it’s going to be a tough challenge,” he said. “And a challenge that I’m up for.”

“I think 82 is a pretty good number,” Woods said. “And 15 is not too bad, either.” His 15 majors are second only to Jack Nicklaus and his 18, the gold standard in golf. He is tied with Sam Snead for the PGA Tour career record with 82 wins. “I love competing,” Woods said. “And I feel like if I can still compete at the highest level, I’m going to. And if I feel like I can still win, I’m going to play.” “I don’t show up to an event unless I think I can win it. So that’s the attitude I’ve had,” he said. “There will be a day when it won’t happen, and I’ll know when that is.”

Shortly after he spoke, the starting times were released. Woods is helped by being part of the early-late rotation, meaning he will have some 22 hours between rounds. As long as Woods has been part of Masters lore, Nicklaus and Arnold Palmer once predicted he would win more green jackets than both of them combined (10). “I think that the fact that I was able to get myself here to this point is a success,” Woods said. “And now that I am playing, now everything is focused on, ‘How do I get myself into the position where I’m on that back nine on Sunday with a chance?’ Just like I did a few years ago.” That was 2019, his fifth Masters title that followed four surgeries the previous five years on his lower back.

There was the return from reconstructive knee surgery after his 2008 U.S. Open victory. He won seven times worldwide the following year. There was a return to No. 1 following the implosion in his personal life, and before the back surgeries. Nothing compares with this one, mainly because of the walking involved on a leg so badly damaged that Woods spent three months in a hospital bed before advancing to a wheel chair, crutches, a compression sleeve and still the occasional limp. “It’s amazing if you think about where he was at a year ago to now,” Jordan Spieth said. “I don’t know how many people, if anybody, could be out here. And this is not an easy walk. So to be out here and not to throw his age in the mix, but I don’t think that helps much for that recovery. But is anybody surprised?”

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