

Golfweek

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SAME OL' ERA: TIGER SWEEPS UP

Associated Press—Doug Ferguson

ATLANTA – The FedEx Cup didn't change anything but Tiger Woods' bank account. The PGA Tour's "new era in golf" came to a familiar conclusion Sunday when Woods captured the Tour Championship in record-setting fashion, closing with a 4-under 66 for an eight-shot victory at East Lake and his seventh title of the season.

The only difference?

This was the first time Woods walked away from one tournament with two trophies.

Along with winning the Tour Championship and its \$1.26 million prize, Woods was a runaway winner of the FedEx Cup and the \$10 million that goes into his retirement account.

If this was supposed to be the "Super Bowl" of golf, Woods spent most of the final round running out the clock.

He stretched his three-shot lead to four at the turn, and the only drama was whether he would break the 72-hole scoring record on the PGA Tour. He had to settle for a 23-under 257, his career low on tour and breaking the Tour Championship record by six shots.

"I hit it good this week," Woods said. "It's been a phenomenal week"

The FedEx Cup was a points began in January, with the points reset after the majors for a four-week stretch of the PGA Tour playoffs. Woods skipped the first playoff event in New York, tied for second outside Boston, then won the last two tournaments to win by an overwhelming margin.

PGA Tour commissioner Tim Finchem first presented Woods with the crystal trophy from the Tour Championship. Before handing him the FedEx Cup trophy, Finchem alluded to the Tour's promotion of the FedEx Cup by noting it had never been kissed.

And it still hasn't.

Woods simply held it aloft as the thousands around 18th green cheered.

"Once you got into the playoffs, you're playing against the best guys and the hottest players. You have to play well," Woods said. "We had some great drama. In the end, it was a lot of fun for all of us."

There was no drama at East Lake, not with Woods hitting on all cylinders to wrap up another phenomenal season. He won seven times in 16 starts on the PGA Tour, and was close to unbeatable the last two months of the season. Woods was 75-under par in his last five tournaments, four of them victories.

Woods' primary objective is winning majors, and he already has 13 of those. The World Golf Championships were created in 1999, and he has won 14 of 25. And now the FedEx Cup.

"It just makes it harder for the rest of us," Johnson said. "Why give him another thing to try to achieve. He's a very driven man. When you add another element to that drive, what are you going to do?"

It was the 61st career victory for Woods, which makes him at 31 the youngest player to reach that mark. Jack Nicklaus was 35 when he captured his 61st Tour victory.

And while he has to wait at least until he's 45 to tap into the \$10 million from the FedEx Cup, the \$1.26 million in cash he earned Sunday pushing his season total to \$10,876,052, the second-highest mark in PGA Tour history. Woods came up \$29,114 short of the record set by Vijay Singh in 2004, although Singh earned that in 29 tournaments. Woods played in only 16 this year.

Woods' previous low for 72 holes was a 21-under 259 at Firestone in 2000, when he won by 11 shots. This was the eighth time in his career that Woods has won by at least eight shots, and the margin set the record at the Tour Championship.

Woods has never lost any tournament as a pro when leading by more than one shot going into the final round. The only historical hope for anyone Sunday was that Woods twice failed to win with a share of the 54-hole lead, both times at East Lake.

But that hope didn't last long.

Calcavecchia birdied the first hole to get within two shots, and while that was as close as anyone got to him all day, there were a few nervous moments.

Woods took bogey on No. 2 when his short par spun out of the cup, then his wedge to the third flew over the green and into a bed of pine straw. It looked like a sure bogey, which would cut his margin to one, but he hit a beautiful flop shot 8 feet and the putt caught just enough of the lip to drop in for par.

The pivotal shot, if there was one, came on the par-3 sixth hole. The tee was all the way back, a 200-yard carry over the lake, and Woods hit his tee shot to 3 feet for birdie. He slapped hands with caddie Steve Williams walking off the tee, and the rest became a formality with a few peculiar twists.

Johnson, who flirted with a 59 on Saturday to get back in the mix, made three consecutive birdies and was standing over a 30-foot eagle putt on the ninth that would have pulled him within two shots of the lead. But he was interrupted by the thud of a ball landing on the front of the green, and Johnson's caddie looked back toward the fairway waving his hand.

It was Woods' second shot from the left rough, from 286 yards away. Johnson ran his putt 4 feet by the hole and three-putted for par, and Woods got up-and-down for birdie to stretch his lead to five.

Woods hustled to the green to apologize, and everyone left with smiles.

The only drama remaining was how low Woods could go, a record that likely will never be broken at East Lake given the unusual circumstances. The greens were nearly died a few weeks ago from record heat and a drought, and while the tour staff did an admirable job getting them playable for the Tour Championship, they were soft and slow, and the pins were kept away from the barren spots around the edges of the greens.

It was target practice from the opening shot, reflected it in the record scoring.



Isleworth's Tiger Woods