

U.S. Open course promises high scores

Els' back problems provide obstacle for defending champion; Woods poised for run

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — Ernie Els shifted in his chair and gently rubbed the lower part of his back with his left hand, as if he were trying to push something into place.

Suddenly, the question for the man who has won two U.S. Opens in four years was not whether he could win for the second year in a row, but whether he was physically fit to play at all.

"It is not the way you really want to feel like playing in a major tournament," Els said Tuesday at The Olympic Club. "But I am defending here this week."

Els, who withdrew from the Buick Classic last week because of his back, is working with the same therapist who helps Fred Couples and Davis Love III.

"It is still a day-to-day thing," Els said. "I can't, for one thing, sit down too long."

He also cannot practice as much as he would like and the kind of standing around that is common in the usually slow first two rounds of a U.S. Open tends to make the back stiffen.

There is, however, reason to believe that Els might be fit by the time he has to tee it up in Thursday's first round.

A week ago Els could barely swing through the ball. That's not a problem now, but if there is any kind of layout that it not good for someone with a bad back, it is a U.S. Open venue.

He will have to play a golf course with typical U.S. Open rough that is not only more than 6-inches high but also very thick because of the unusually heavy El Niño rain this year.

"This rough is the worst rough, most difficult rough, that I have seen in the U.S. Open, I think ever," Tom Watson said, who has played in the Open 26 times.

Els is one of several players coming into the Open with back problems.

Couples, who has won twice this year and has to be considered a favorite, has had a problem with his back for years but seems to have stabilized the situation with exercises and a reduced travel schedule.

Love, the PGA Championship winner and another top contender here, had his back problem flare up about six weeks ago and, as with most players, it bothers him most when he has to sit for a long time, like in an airplane.

Woods, who knows the Olympic course very well from his days at Stanford University, withdrew from the Kemper Open two weeks ago because of a sore back and at the time it was feared that it might be the beginning of a chronic situation. But now he thinks it was more from running too much.

"It's fine — 100 percent," Woods said Tuesday after he played a practice round with Casey Martin and Joel Kribel, two guys who also played college golf at Stanford.

While Woods' back was fine on Tuesday, his wallet experienced a little pain.

"I was taken for some cash," he said with a smile. "Casey played well. He made some birdies and got in my pocket."

Martin, who successfully sued the PGA Tour

for the right to ride in a cart because of a circulatory problem in his right leg, won another cart-related fight on Tuesday.

The USGA changed its mind and decided to let Martin use a regular cart in the Open instead of the one-man cart it required him to use in the qualifier and in practice rounds here.

Martin felt the cart wasn't safe.

While Martin will be able to cruise the fairways in the cart of his choice, it will be keeping the ball in the fairway that will likely be the deciding factor when the Open starts on Thursday.

Hitting the ball straight will count for a lot this week and playing the wise shot when a fairway is missed will also be a key.

"You better use your head coming out of the rough," Watson said, who finished second here in the 1987 U.S. Open.

"You better be thinking of your shot after the shot that comes out of the rough," Watson said. "You better be playing that shot as precisely as you would any shot that you really needed to make."

Watson said he likes Colin Montgomerie's chances at Olympic, both because he hits a lot of fairways and because his left-to-right game works well on this course.

He also thinks Woods' length will work to his advantage at Olympic, even though he will be hitting almost no drivers off the tee because of the many dogleg holes.

"He can lay up with a 2-iron on a lot of holes here and still hit it out here with me with my driver," Watson said.

Shula forms buyers alliance in order to invest in Browns

CLEVELAND (AP) — Don Shula remembers cheering from the frozen end zone seats in Cleveland Stadium as Lou Groza kicked a field goal to give the Browns their first NFL title.

Now, nearly a half-century later, the league's winningest coach wants to build the organization that brings the Browns back to his hometown.

"When Cleveland lost its franchise I felt like I was losing part of my own personal history," Shula said Tuesday.

"I want to use my expertise and experience in the NFL to help put a winning team together in Cleveland."

Shula was in town for a news conference to announce his alliance with two brothers — local lawyer Larry Dolan and Cablevision Systems Corp. Chief Charles Dolan — and Bill Cosby in their effort to buy the expansion Browns.

Shula, who compiled a 347-173-6 record and won two Super Bowls as coach of the Miami Dolphins and Baltimore Colts, would own 5 percent of the team.

He also has signed a five-year deal with the Dolans to be executive vice president of the team, if the group's bid to buy the franchise from the NFL succeeds.

Shula would give up his post as

vice chairman of the Dolphins and for hiring the Browns general manager, head coach and other staff.

Dolphins owner Wayne Huizenga said he was happy for Shula's blessing.

"I indicated to him my blessing," Huizenga said. "I applaud his desire to help bring the Browns back to Cleveland."

Larry Dolan said Shula is a huge asset as Cleveland builds a decent team in the city it will have after the NFL ownership question but its first game in 1999.

"Don Shula has no curve," Larry Dolan said. "His brothers first contacted Shula three weeks ago."

There was no immediate word from Cosby, who came to Cleveland for a news conference on Tuesday. A message was left with a spokesman for the comedian.

Cosby would also own 5 percent of the team, the Dolans would own 30 percent and Shula would be held in trust for the team.

The NFL has said it is serious candidates to buy the Browns. Most estimates of the franchise price will be between \$100 million and \$350 million.

English violence in France dominates exciting World Cup

PARIS (AP) — In the wake of what the French are calling the nightmare in Marseille, the off-field focus at the World Cup has switched to Toulouse.

That's where England plays its next game, facing Romania on Monday. About 1,000 English fans were already reported in France's fourth-largest city, prompting officials to postpone a weekend music festival until July 11. Thousands more are expected before the match, and French authorities are considering closing bars early and forgoing setting up large TV screens like the one on a Marseille beach where ticketless English fans and local youths fought Monday.

"The security measures will be upgraded and strengthened wherever it is a matter of public order, and the other matches of England will lead to beefed-up security measures there," Jacques Lambert said, managing director of the World Cup organizing committee.

France Interior Minister Jean-Pierre Chevènement signed an order Tuesday to immediately deport five English fans and a Tunisian. He threatened more expulsions if soccer violence returns.

"It's a message of firmness toward the troublemakers," Chevènement said, who defended police actions. "No excesses will be tolerated."

Things were far more peaceful on the field, thankfully, where Brazil beat Morocco 3-0, becoming the first team to advance to the second round — for the second straight tournament — and Scotland stayed alive by rallying to tie Norway 1-1.

The U.S. team, reeling from its decisive opening defeat against Germany and facing the politically charged match with Iran on Sunday, planned some lineup changes.

Frankie Hejduk, the only American who came close to scoring, will start in midfield, as will playmaker Tab Ramos. Coach Steve Sampson might make some other moves, too, as he seeks more offense.

Ramos criticized Sampson's deployment of players against Germany, saying there wasn't enough experience on the field.

"It's hard to believe when you look down the bench and see Alexi Lalas and Marcelo Balboa and Jeff Agoos, who's played just about every qualifier," Ramos said.




Brazil struck quickly as Ronaldo, the two-time FIFA player of the year, scored nine minutes in. Rivaldo made it 2-0 in the final seconds of the half, and the defending and four-time champions coasted, with veteran Bebeto getting the final goal in the rout.

"We played joyful, sparkling and efficient soccer," Coach Mario Zagallo said. "I'm happy with everything: the defense, the midfield and the attack."

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