

SPORTS

GOLF

Day wonders why Woods was behind the wheel in DUI arrest

AUGUSTA, Georgia — Tiger Woods was a big part of the conversation Monday at the Masters without even being at Augusta National. His absence, stemming from his arrest on suspicion of driving under the influence, brought a degree of criticism from Jason Day.

Florida authorities on March 27 determined Woods was impaired when his Land Rover struck a trailer and flipped on its side on a residential street. They found two painkiller pills in his pocket. Woods was arrested and briefly jailed for refusing to submit to a urine test.

“He’s just a human being like everyone else and we have struggles,” Day said. “It’s unfortunate. The only thing that I don’t understand is that it’s a little bit selfish of him to drive and put other people in harm’s way, as well.

“But when you’re the player that he was and how strong-willed he is, he thinks he can do almost anything,” Day said. “And that’s probably why he’s driving and a little bit under the influence.”

This is the second straight year Woods has missed the Masters, under entirely different circumstances. He had ruptured his Achilles tendon in March last year and didn’t even make it to the Masters Club dinner for champions.

Woods entered a plea of not guilty last week, and then sought — and was granted — a motion to seek treatment outside the country.

“He was my hero — he is my hero,” said Day, the Australian who reached No 1 in the world a decade ago. “The reason why I play golf is because of this tournament and Tiger. It’s hard to see him go through what he’s going through, and especially under the microscope. It must be hard to be who he is and have everything, everyone look on, kind of down on him.

“Some people want him to fail. Some people obviously want him to succeed,” Day said. “It’s really difficult for me to go through that and watch him, and I know that he’s getting the help now, which is good. I’m just hoping he comes out on the other side and is better.”

Woods is a five-time champion at the Masters, the last one in 2019 to complete a most remarkable comeback in golf. In the 14 years between winning Green Jackets, he had reconstructive knee surgery (2008) and four back surgeries (2014-17), and one arrest for taking what he said was a bad mix of painkillers when he was found asleep behind the wheel of his running car (2017).

Since winning his last Masters, his right leg and ankle were crushed, when, in 2021, his SUV going about 137km/h ran over a median and tumbled down a hill on a coastal road in Los Angeles. He also had surgery on the Achilles tendon and a seventh back surgery last year.

Nick Faldo was particularly critical of Woods in an interview with Britain’s Daily Telegraph last week when he said: “There are two sides to this right now. There’s one side that’s like ... let’s care for Tiger. And then there has got to be a responsibility and an accountability side as well.”

“Forget about golf. We are not meant to be on the streets with two pills in our pocket,” Faldo said. “The bottom line is that I really think that this is a serious issue and something should be done that is a little bit more serious than waving him off to a tropical island and saying, ‘welcome back,’ in three or four months or whatever it might be.”

Phil Mickelson, a three-time Masters champion who was a runner-up in 2023 at age 52, also is skipping the Masters as he deals with a family health matter at home. It’s the first time since 1994 neither Woods nor Mickelson was at Augusta National for the first major of the year.

Mickelson is with LIV Golf and plays on a big stage only four times a year at the majors. Jacob Bridgeman, one of the 22 newcomers to the Masters, didn’t know Mickelson wasn’t playing and is young enough in golf to have only played two majors with him last year.

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SOCCER



Paris Saint-Germain hopes Ousmane Dembele (left) will be firing on all cylinders when it meets Liverpool again in the Champions League in Paris on Wednesday. Liverpool skipper Virgil van Dijk will be working hard to ensure that he doesn’t get too many chances. AP / REUTERS



PSG could pile more misery on Reds

Familiar foes prepare for another Champions League tie, but with a very different outlook to last time

When Paris Saint-Germain and Liverpool last met in the Champions League a year ago, the Anfield outfit was marching toward the Premier League title and was described as “an almost perfect team” by the French club’s coach Luis Enrique.

Fast forward to this season, and a formidable PSG appears a clear favorite as the sides clash again in the Champions League quarterfinals, with the first leg in Paris on Wednesday.

PSG’s triumph on penalties against Liverpool in the last 16 last season was pivotal on its run to a first-ever Champions League title.

It had to overturn a 1-0 defeat at home in a first leg it completely dominated before holding its nerve at Anfield, and the two teams have set off on different trajectories since.

Arne Slot’s side somewhat ran out of steam after that, albeit having done more than enough to get

over the line in the Premier League.

This season has been a huge disappointment, however, and it returns to Paris in especially downbeat mood after a chastening 4-0 defeat against Manchester City in the FA Cup quarterfinals.

‘So tough’

That had Slot saying his team lacked fighting spirit, while captain Virgil van Dijk suggested it had given up, and admitted it would be “very difficult” for Liverpool to lift itself against PSG.

“But, we have a responsibility, not only to ourselves, but especially to the fans and, if we want to make something out of this season, we have to try and do something special in the next three games,” he said, with the Champions League tie taking place either side of an awkward Premier League clash with Fulham.

“The matter of fact is now, PSG are waiting for us. It will be so

tough again. So we have to be ready mentally,” Van Dijk added.

Liverpool has won just one of its last five matches and has suffered 15 defeats in this campaign.

Securing a return to Europe’s top table for next season has to be the main aim now for a team currently sitting fifth in the Premier League.

PSG, in contrast, has had a tricky season at times due to injuries, but looks like it might be returning to its very best form at the right time.

A 3-1 win over Toulouse on Friday, featuring one marvelous goal from reigning Ballon d’Or holder Ousmane Dembele, helped it extend its lead atop Ligue 1 to four points from nearest challenger Lens, with a game in hand.

But, the Champions League is what really matters — the French league even accepted its request to postpone this Saturday’s key trip to Lens to allow it to concentrate fully on Liverpool.

“I think we have shown for a long

time that we are ready, regardless of the competition, but there are obviously things we can improve,” warned Enrique.

Dembele is fully fit and firing, but Khvicha Kvaratskhelia was the inspiration in the last round, when PSG destroyed Chelsea 8-2 on aggregate.

Wednesday’s game will be PSG’s 14th against Premier League opposition since January 2025.

Ekitike back in Paris

There is one obvious weakness in PSG’s ranks, however — it has not successfully replaced goalkeeper Gianluigi Donnarumma, the hero in last season’s shootout against Liverpool who is now at Manchester City.

Lucas Chevalier was signed as the Italian’s successor, but has lost his place to Matvey Safonov, the Russian who made two glaring errors to cost his side a goal over the weekend.

“A goalkeeper is like any other player. They can make mistakes, because that’s normal in football,” said Enrique.

The key for the visiting side, meanwhile, could be Hugo Ekitike, Liverpool’s leading scorer this season with 17 goals, who comes up against the club where he failed to make an impact earlier in his career.

Ekitike, 23, joined PSG from Reims in 2022, but scored just four goals in 18 months before leaving for Eintracht Frankfurt.

He struggled to break into an attack featuring Kylian Mbappe, Lionel Messi and Neymar, but returns to his homeland as a genuine contender to start for France at the World Cup.

“Hugo is a great player. He is really in form, so we are just hoping he won’t be against us,” said Dembele, his international teammate.

AFP

Atletico’s Griezmann heads back to Barca in search of winning bow

Antoine Griezmann’s Barcelona story ended in the depths of misery, but as he returns to Camp Nou in the Champions League quarterfinals, the French forward is desperate to close out his time with Atletico Madrid on the greatest of highs.

Diego Simeone’s side, defeated in the 2014 and 2016 finals, has never lifted the trophy, and veteran forward Griezmann, who will move to MLS side Orlando City at the end of the season, has not won a trophy with Atletico since the 2018 Europa League and subsequent UEFA Super Cup.

Griezmann switched to Barca from Atletico in 2019, lasting just two years in the Catalan capital before returning to Simeone’s side on loan, before making the return permanent in 2022.

During that short stint in Barca col-

ors Griezmann missed out on Atletico’s La Liga title win in 2021, a trophy that has eluded him through his career.

At Barca, he was on the receiving end of the brutal 8-2 thrashing by Bayern Munich in the 2020 Champions League quarterfinals, and failed to fit into the team alongside Lionel Messi.

Griezmann wants to leave Atletico, where he is the all-time top scorer with 211 goals, with major silverware in his hands at last, to add to the 2018 World Cup he won with France.

The first step toward that, since announcing the decision to depart last week, is at Camp Nou on Wednesday in the fifth meeting between Atletico and Barca this season.

Orlando wanted him to join by the end of March, but Griezmann said he would stay at Atletico, in no small part

for a final shot at the biggest trophy in the club game, as well as the Copa del Rey final.

The 35-year-old, one of Simeone’s most-committed soldiers during the coach’s 14-year reign, combined the work ethic the Argentine demanded with immense skill and quality.

“Griezmann is a maverick, it’s unbelievable how he plays football,” enthused Barca coach Hansi Flick last week. “It seems so light, it’s like he’s dancing.”

Griezmann may not have won as many trophies as he would have liked, but he has often dazzled with his elegance and vision.

“I hope we can do something big,” said Griezmann after helping Atletico crush Spurs 5-2 in the last-16 first leg, netting his side’s second goal.

Griezmann has rocked Barca before, scoring twice in the 2016 quarterfinals a decade ago to send Atletico through and knock out Messi, Luis Suarez and Neymar, although that campaign ended in tears in the Milan final at the hands of rival Real Madrid.

After Griezmann started in the 2-1 La Liga defeat to Barca on Saturday, there is the chance he may be used from the bench on Wednesday.

For much of this season, Simeone has been sparing with his minutes, perhaps tipping him toward the decision to leave.

Another Atletico player who might one day follow the Frenchman’s path to Barcelona is striker Julian Alvarez, who is likely to start at Camp Nou and has been frequently linked with the Catalan giant.

The Argentine caused consternation in the Spanish capital earlier this season when he said “maybe yes, maybe no” over whether he was planning to stay at the club beyond the summer.

Barca may not be able to produce the hefty transfer fee the Rojiblancos would demand, after Alvarez arrived from Man City for \$108 million in 2024.

Alvarez has had a mixed bag of a season, but Simeone has repeatedly backed the forward, who is in better form after a winter drought.

Five-time winner Barca may be the favorite for the tie, but between Griezmann’s desire for a grand finale and Alvarez’s chance to dazzle his suitors, Atletico has the tools it needs to cause an upset.

AFP

Title defense still on for Napoli after dispatching AC Milan

Napoli is still in the hunt to retain its Serie A title after the reigning champion beat Scudetto rival AC Milan 1-0 on Monday.

Matteo Politano came off the bench and, with 11 minutes remaining, lashed home the only goal of the game in front of delighted fans in Naples, as the host racked up a fifth straight win.

Napoli leapfrogged Milan into second place, but still has a battle on its hands to deny Inter a 21st league crown, sitting seven points off the pace with seven matches remaining.

Antonio Conte’s team was superior at the Stadio Diego Armando Maradona, where Politano’s second goal of the season decided a largely stodgy contest, not helped by Milan only being able to select star attackers Rafael Leao and Christian Pulisic.

“It’s a happy moment for us because we’re back in second place, I thanked the boys for what they’ve

done this season, as it could have finished badly,” said Conte of his side’s injury-ravaged campaign.

“We’ve got back to what we were like last season, we’ve got to keep going without getting ahead of ourselves.”

Milan now trails its local rival Inter by nine points and will, in all likelihood, have to be content with a return to the Champions League.

“I think we’re done with the Scudetto race. We’re nine behind Inter and Napoli are ahead of us now,” said Milan manager Massimiliano Allegri.

“We’ve got an advantage of a few points for the Champions League, let’s try to keep it that way by winning some matches.”

Napoli’s win came without Romelu Lukaku, who has incurred the wrath of the club hierarchy after staying in Belgium for treatment for a hip injury, while Denmark striker Rasmus Hojlund was ruled out with a stomach bug.



Napoli’s Matteo Politano celebrates scoring the decisive goal in a Serie A match against AC Milan in Naples, Italy, on Monday. REUTERS

Winter signing Giovane forced Milan keeper Mike Maignan into the best save of the match in the 50th minute with a stinging drive from distance, and there was little more goalmouth action until Politano pounced on Koni De Winter’s

weak headed clearance with a powerful, and decisive, first-time finish.

Juve eyes UCL spot

Juventus moved to within a point of Serie A’s Champions League places with a 2-0 win over Genoa, as the top-four battle heats up.

Taking advantage of fourth-placed Como’s goalless draw at Udinese earlier in the day, Juve notched the three points in Turin thanks to Gleison Bremer’s fourth-minute header and a 17th-minute strike from the ever-reliable Weston McKennie.

United States star McKennie’s fine finish took his Serie A tally to five, equaling his best-ever haul in a single league season back in his first campaign with Juve in 2020-21.

But he showed no interest in that personal statistic when speaking with DAZN after the match, saying “the important thing is getting into the Champions League”.

Home fans had to thank substi-

tute goalkeeper Michele Di Gregorio for a superb double save that stopped spirited Genoa from getting back into the game, first pawing away Aaron Martin’s penalty and then keeping out Vitinha’s volley.

Di Gregorio has had a tough second season at Juve, dropped from the first team in February following a series of clangers. He was only in goal on Monday due to starting keeper Mattia Perin coming off at halftime with a calf injury.

“He has some good moments and some tough moments, but we always knew that he was a quality goalkeeper. He knew that his moment would come,” said Bremer.

Di Gregorio’s stops helped put some distance between fifth-placed Juve and Roma, which trails Luciano Spalletti’s team by three points in sixth place after being thumped 5-2 at Inter on Sunday.

AFP