

25 Boston Bruins top Rangers with Patrice Bergeron's hat trick



26 Svitolina eases past Pliskova in WTA finals



27 Salah fires Liverpool to comeback win over Spurs



Tiger equals Snead's 54-year-old record

Woods wins Zozo Championship for his 82nd US PGA Tour victory



CHIBA: Tiger Woods of the US holds a victory trophy during the awarding ceremony of the PGA ZOZO Championship golf tournament at the Narashino Country Club in Inzai, Chiba prefecture yesterday. — AFP

INZAI: Tiger Woods made golf history yesterday when he won the Zozo Championship in Japan for his 82nd US PGA Tour victory — equalling Sam Snead's 54-year-old record and adding to his long list of achievements.

The 15-time major winner held off the challenge of home favourite Hideki Matsuyama to win by three shots at the weather-delayed tournament, his first outing since arthroscopic left knee surgery in August.

Woods broke into a huge smile after he birdied the 18th to complete a three-under final round of 67 and finish 19-under par at Accordia Golf Narashino Country Club. "It's just crazy. It's a lot," the 43-year-old Woods said of his 82nd official PGA Tour victory. His first came 23 years ago this month in Las Vegas, when he was 20.

"It's been a long week, five days at the top of the board is a long time. It was definitely stressful," said Woods, who pocketed a cheque for £1.755 million. Woods led from gun to tape in the inaugural US PGA Tour event in Japan, which saw Friday's play washed out by the fringes of a typhoon that dumped almost 10 inches (25cm) of rain on the course 50 miles (80km) from Tokyo, forcing play into an extra day.

"It's about consistency and doing it for a long period of time," Woods said of tying Snead, who died in 2002 four days before his 90th birthday. "Sam did it into his fifties and I'm in my early to mid-forties. I've been very fortunate to have had the career I've had so far." US PGA Tour Commissioner Jay Monahan was watching at home in the US. "It was just one of those 'wow' moments," he told AFP by telephone. "He doesn't fancy ties too much. So he's already on to: 'How do I get to 83?'"

Woods said it was "cool" that, with the addition of his latest title in Japan, he had now won US PGA Tour events in seven different countries. "I've always been a global player. I've always played all around the world and to tie the record outside the United States is pretty cool," Woods told reporters.

Woods resumed his final round, suspended due to

darkness on Sunday, at 7:30 am on the long par-12th but saw his overnight three-shot cushion over Matsuyama immediately cut to two.

Matsuyama inexplicably spurned an easy opportunity to reduce the deficit to one as he missed a four-foot birdie putt on 14, but Woods made no mistake on the same green from 20 feet.

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Woods missed a further birdie chance, from 10 feet, at the 15th and was watching from the 16th tee 181 yards away as Matsuyama walked in a 20-footer to get to 16-under.

Matsuyama kept up the pressure but on the final hole his bunker shot flew past the flag and when he missed the long putt back his brave challenge ended at 16-under for the tournament after a final-round 67. "This was big," said a smiling Woods. "Hideki made it tight. It was a lot closer than what people probably thought."

"It was a very long week because I was tied for the lead for the better part of five days. I made a mistake right away at 11 and it became a pretty good ball game." Playing partner Gary Woodland said he had been privileged to have a front-row seat for the last two rounds as Woods played "unbelievable" golf. "Obviously the majors speak for themselves, but 82's just a crazy number," said the 35-year-old US Open champion who himself has won four times on the PGA Tour. "You look at the guys that have won 10 times and it's pretty special, let alone to come out here and win 82 times. "To battle through the injuries he's dealt with, gosh, he's young and he's playing unbelievable."

"The ball-striking exhibition I've seen the last two days is a joke. So I don't see him stopping anytime soon. Eighty-two's pretty special. I think there's a lot more in store." World number two Rory McIlroy finished birdie-birdie for a 67 and a share of third place on 13-under par with South Korea's PGA Tour Rookie of the Year Im Sung-jae who carded a fine five-under 65. — AFP

Astros rout Nationals to reach brink of World Series title

WASHINGTON: A masterful pitching performance from Houston ace Gerrit Cole sparked the Astros to a 7-1 victory over the Washington Nationals on Sunday, lifting them to the brink of their second World Series title in three seasons.

Yordan Alvarez, Carlos Correa and George Springer each smacked two-run homers as the Astros seized a 3-2 lead in Major League Baseball's best-of-seven final. "If we win in front of our fans, it's going to be so special," Correa said. "I think I'll black out for the first time in my life."

Cole struck out nine and surrendered only one run on three hits over seven innings as the Nationals dropped a third straight home game, having batted only .175 in the span. But after dropping the first two games of the series at home, the Astros are far from overconfident. "These next 27 outs we're going to have to get to wrap this thing up are going to be the hardest we've had to get all year," Cole said. Game six is set for today in Houston, where a seventh game would be played tomorrow if necessary.

"We've got a lot of fight in us left. I know we do," Nationals manager Dave Martinez said. "We're going to fight. We're going to finish this thing." The Astros can secure a second title in three seasons Tuesday when Justin Verlander takes the mound against Washington's Stephen Strasburg.

The Nationals must win twice in Texas, as they did in the first two games of the series, to capture the first title

in the franchise's 50-year history and the first for Washington since 1924.

"It has been pretty even this series. They are a game up with two games left. Let's worry about today," Martinez said. "I like our chances." The Astros could become only the third team in World Series history to lose the first two games at home and win the title, the first since the 1996 New York Yankees.

In sweeping three games at Washington, where the World Series hadn't been played since 1933, the Astros outscored the Nationals by a combined 19-3 after falling twice by a combined 17-7 in Houston.

Cole allowed five runs on eight hits over seven innings in a game-one loss but mystified Nationals batters Sunday, throwing 71 of his 110 pitches for strikes with only Juan Soto's solo homer in the seventh spoiling a shutout effort. "The stuff was crisper," Cole said. "I thought we executed more pitches." The Nationals suffered a major setback hours before the start when scheduled starter Max Scherzer was pulled due to neck and trapezius muscle spasms, leaving 26-year-old right-hander Joe Ross to pitch on short notice.

Doctors say Scherzer might be available for Washington if the Nats can force a seventh game. "He's going to try to figure something out," Martinez said. "He wants to get himself ready."

Cuban-born 22-year-old Alvarez, who went 3-for-3 at the plate, smashed a two-run homer into the center-field stands off Ross in the second inning after Yuli Gurriel had hit an infield single.

Soto singled and took third on Howie Kendrick's single in the second but Cole struck out Ryan Zimmerman and induced a double play to end the threat. Correa followed an Alvarez single in the fourth with a two-run homer off Ross to left field, lifting the Astros ahead 4-0.

Soto snapped a hitless streak of 5 1/3 innings for the Nationals by smashing a solo homer just over the center-field wall in the seventh, trimming Houston's lead to 4-1. But the Astros answered in the eighth as Springer doubled, took third on Jose Altuve's ground out and scored on a Gurriel single.—AFP