

Taylor Wood puts a caddy on call as USC's lone NCAA Championship contender

Ashley Zeldin | June 7, 2006

Los Angeles, CA (CSTV U-WIRE) -- At 11 a.m. Tuesday, USC men's golf head coach Ted Gleason was making phone calls, trying to find a caddy for recent graduate Taylor Wood.

While Wood had finished his solid career as a Trojan just days before at the NCAA Men's Golf Championships, tying for 27th place, he had qualified for the 2006 U.S. Open at Winged Foot Golf Club June 15-18 in Mamaroneck, NY.

Wood qualified by finishing second at sectional, qualifying at Lake Merced Golf Course in Daly City with a two-round 139, capped by six birdies and a three-stroke eagle on the 14th on his way to a 64 for his morning round. In the afternoon, he struggled, pulling out a 75.

Gleason said the qualifying rounds for the U.S. Open did not detract from Wood's performance at the NCAA championships.

"If anything, it helps because it makes you more competitive," he said. "The more competition you get, the better. He just needs to keep learning about himself and I think he'll have a successful career."

Despite his 27th-place finish, Wood had a strong outing in the NCAA championships at Crosswater Golf Course in Sunriver, Ore. He shot a total 289 (+1) over four days on the par-72, 7,630-yard layout.

"He really played 63 holes of solid golf," Gleason said. "Overall he did a nice job preparing."

Oklahoma State golfer Jonathan Moore won the tournament with a 12-under 276, leading the Cowboys to a 3-stroke team win. Oklahoma State also won the Central Regional.

Wood swung his way to a consecutive 1-over 73 his final day, overcoming early struggles and an early tee-time, 8 a.m. After a birdie on the third, Wood double-bogeyed the fourth and bogeyed the ninth holes to finish 2-over on the back nine, the first time he was not under-par after nine holes. He finished his round on the front nine, bogeying the 11th but recovering with birdies on the 13th and tough 17th, both par-3.

Ranked No. 34 by Golfweek.com, Wood made it to the final round after surviving a seven-man playoff that ran until after dark Friday and continued early Saturday morning with two holes to play.

Wood also shot a 73 on day three, improving his rank to a 21st-place tie at even-par 216. He had a consistent round, going 2-over on the front nine and 1-under on the back nine, which he played first. He birdied the par-3 third and par-5 sixth to stay just nine strokes back of Moore at 207.

"All of the golfers in the morning got more rain, and it was more difficult to shoot a low score in rainy conditions," Gleason said of Wood's 1-over 73. "He had a very respectable round given the conditions."

After a promising and competitive start, Wood faltered to a 5-over 77. He started on the 10th at 9:20, shooting a 6-over 42 over the back nine. He recovered with a 1-under 35 on the front nine for an overall 1-under 143, eight shots behind then-leader Kyle Reifers of Wake Forest.

"He needed to shoot a good third round," Gleason said. "The first nine on the second day made it much more difficult for him to stay in contention. He opened with 42 his first nine. He started off a little tight, but got himself together on the back nine."

Wood finished the first day of competition tied for second, firing a 6-under 66, just one stroke off the lead of Reifers. He had no bogeys and birdied the second, fourth, eighth, 12th, 15th, and 18th holes on his way to a season low round; his career low is a 65, which he shot last year. Wood teed off at 2:35 p.m., well after Reifers had returned to the clubhouse.

"He managed himself flawlessly (the first day)," Gleason said in a statement. "He only needed his driver a few times. He hit his irons well and made the putts he needed to keep his momentum and had no bogeys."

Not competing as a team was a bit discouraging at first, Gleason said.

"The first half-day or day of practice it was tough seeing teams there while he was only there as an individual," Gleason said. "Once we were there, it was all about trying to get him ready to play."

Wood advanced to the NCAA championships after finishing in a second-place tie at the NCAA East Regional with a 4-under 212.

-

Ben Hayes, a 2005 graduate, tied for the lead at sectional qualifying at Brookside Golf and Country Club and Lakes Golf and Country Club in Columbus, Ohio, firing rounds of 67 and 64 for a total 131.

Fellow alumnus David Oh also qualified, shooting a 67 and 70 for a two-round 137 at Canoe Brook Country Club in Summit, NJ.

Oh finished well ahead of Michelle Wie (68, 75) in her failed attempt to become the first woman to qualify for the men's U.S. Open.

Incoming freshman Rory Hie (142) and junior Jordan Nasser (147) failed to qualify alongside Wood at Lake Merced.

(C) 2006 Daily Trojan via CSTV U-WIRE

<http://www.cstv.com/sports/m-golf/uwire/060706aab.html>