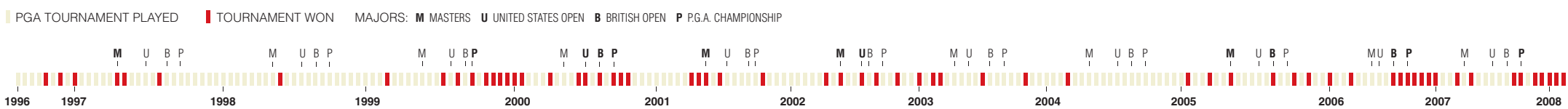


GOLF

CAREER VICTORIES



KEEPING SCORE

Woods's Success Starts With Finishing Touch

By MARK SWEENEY

When Tiger Woods tees off in the Masters on Thursday, he will be in the all-too-familiar position of the heavy favorite. In fact, his dominance over the rest of the field appears to be gaining steam, with Woods winning seven of the past nine tournaments he has entered.

But how does he win so convincingly nearly every week? A look at his statistics shows some pretty average rankings in categories like driving accuracy and sand saves, yet some pretty impressive rankings in categories like greens in regulation, putting and approach proximity.

It can be confusing to look at these categories in isolation because scoring is the result of the relationship among several factors. For example, Woods was a lowly 152nd in driving accuracy in 2007, yet José Coceres, who was first, finished 131st in the Official World Golf Ranking. The fine ball striker Jeff Gove ranked third in greens in regulation, but he was 395th in the world ranking and lost his PGA Tour card.

Woods, the runaway leader in earnings and world ranking, has mastered better than anyone else the magic ingredients of performance that lead to low scores. He ranked first in greens in regulation and fourth in putting last year and was the leader in those categories after his most recent tournament, at Doral.

A statistical model I designed to predict scores based on performance factors finds that greens in regulation and putting combined to account for 55 percent of the predictive power of scoring, and if scrambling is added in, the score prediction is 78 percent.

Interestingly, driving distance and driving accuracy each add only 1 percent predictive power for tour players.

As much as golfers love to hit more fairways, Woods has proved that it is a relatively insignificant part of his game — and everyone else's on the tour. Woods is not only mastering the parts of the game that have the most impact, but also distancing himself from everyone else in these categories.

Woods outperforms the field average from nearly every approach distance, and remarkably so from beyond 150 yards, where about 56 percent of his approach shots originate. Additionally, the average tour player shows an accelerating drop-off in his ability to hit greens from beyond 150 yards, yet Woods shows a decelerating drop-off.

The average tour player shows a 23 percent drop in his percentage of greens in regulation when moving from 125 yards to 200 yards, but Woods shows only a 3 percent decline.

When his high rate is combined with his consistently low driving accuracy, it is clear that even though Woods is hitting more greens than anyone else, he is often doing it from the trees, the sand, the rough or the cart path. It illustrates that Woods has a broad assortment of shots that he can summon when necessary.

Woods is also the best once he is on the green. And he is not only sinking more short putts as a result of good approach-shot accuracy. His putting-distance profile shows that he had virtually the same percentage of shots from each distance as the tour average.

What really differentiates Woods from everyone else is his ability to make more putts from the critical range of 10

Mark Sweeney does statistical analysis for some PGA Tour players.

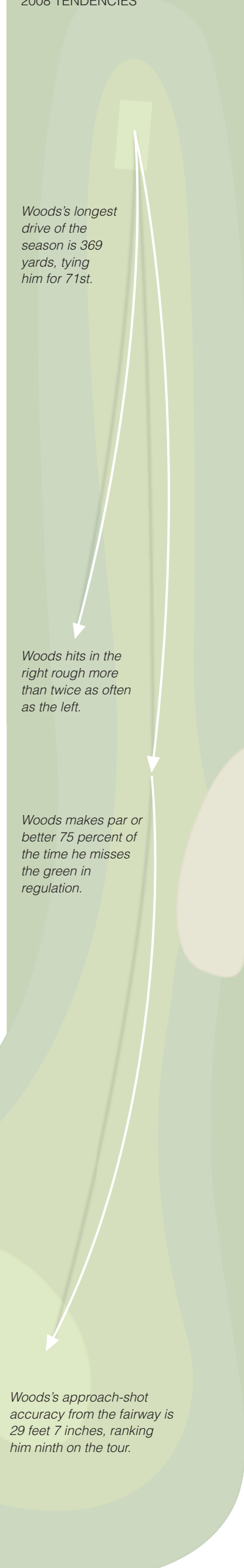
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to 25 feet. In fact, when he wins, he makes 30 percent more putts than the field from 10 to 15 feet, 68 percent more from 15 to 20 feet and 58 percent more from 20 to 25 feet.

As with greens in regulation, Woods manages to maintain a much higher level of accuracy at distances when the field average begins to significantly falter.

This all adds up to a dominating 2008 scoring average of 67.3, which is two strokes a round (and eight strokes a tournament) better than that of the world's second-best player, Phil Mickelson (69.4). And if more proof of dominance is needed, Woods scores four strokes a round better than the tour average. That is 16 strokes a tournament better.

2008 TENDENCIES



Ranking the Best (2008 rankings through Woods's most recent tournament, the WGC-CA at Doral)

PERCENT PREDICTOR OF SCORE	GREENS IN REGULATION	PUTTING	SCRAMBLING	GOING FOR IT	DRIVING ACCURACY	DRIVING DISTANCE
	28%	27%	23%	3%	1%	1%
2008 RANKINGS						
Tiger Woods	1	1	2	18	167	38
Phil Mickelson	43	54	9	8	171	17
Ernie Els	139	69	177	134	157	48
Steve Stricker	9	80	10	76	93	82
Jim Furyk	24	42	83	99	14	169
Adam Scott	58	20	8	12	99	3

A statistical model used to predict scores based on performance factors reveals what is important to scoring and why Tiger Woods is so dominant. The top six players in the Official World Golf Ranking after Woods's last tournament.

GREENS IN REGULATION means being on the green in par minus two. SCRAMBLING means making par or better after missing the green in regulation. GOING FOR IT means trying for the green in two on a par 5 or in one on a par 4.

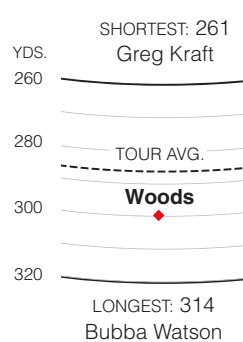
Woods, From Tee to Green

(Statistics from 2007 through Woods's most recent tournament, the WGC-CA at Doral)

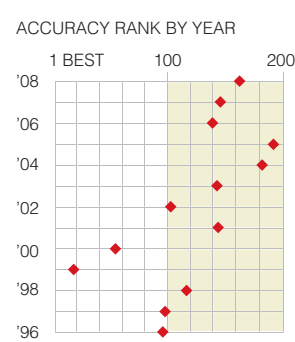
OFF THE TEE



AVG. DRIVING DISTANCE



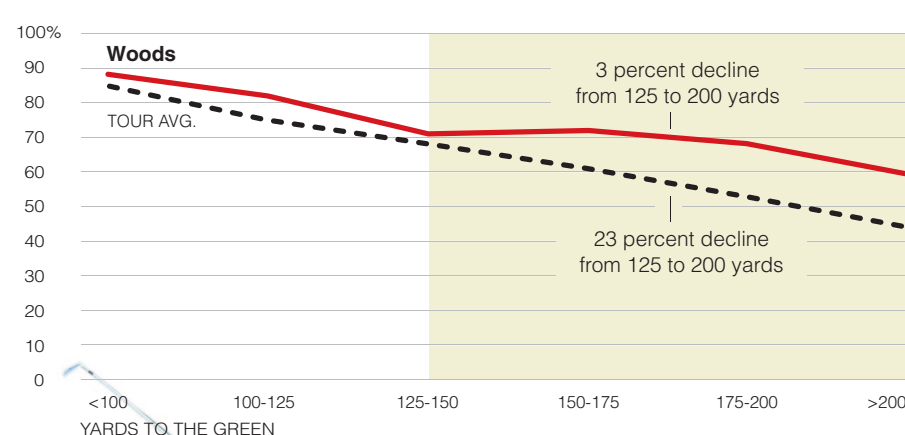
DRIVING ACCURACY



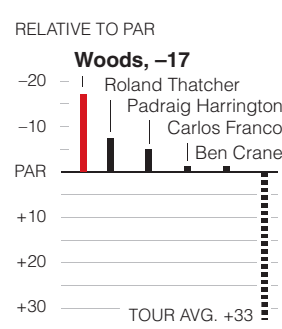
Woods's driving distance of 300 yards is about his career average. His driving accuracy has consistently been below average, and he has hit only 57 percent of fairways the past five years.

APPROACHING THE GREEN

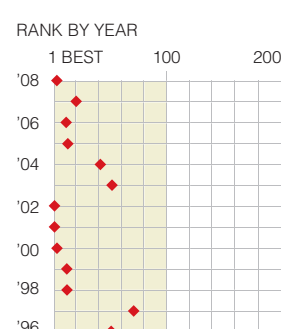
GREENS HIT IN REGULATION



SCORING FROM THE ROUGH



SCRAMBLING

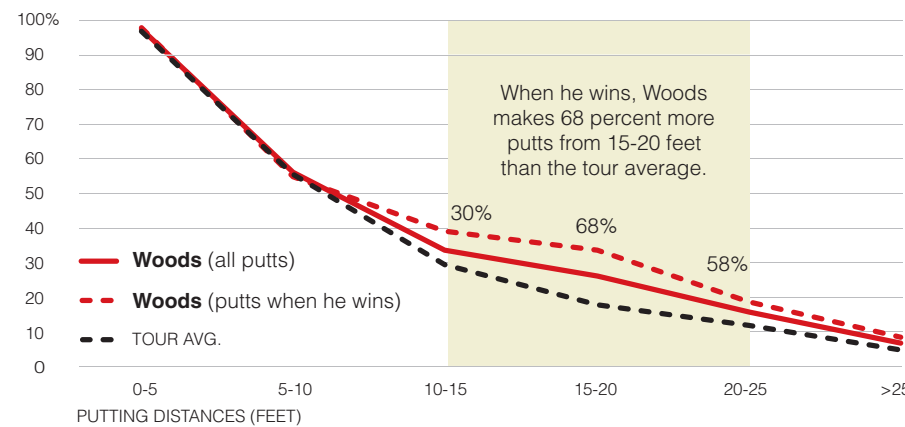


Despite inaccurate drives, Woods is on the green in regulation at high rates, especially for longer distances, where the field average declines more drastically.

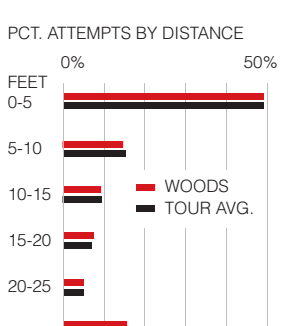
Woods leads the five players since 2007 who are under par on holes played from the rough. He is a remarkable 50 shots better than the Tour average. Woods has repeatedly been at or near the top of the scrambling rankings.

ON THE GREEN

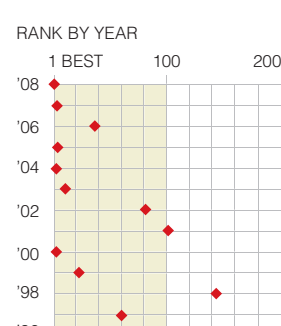
PERCENTAGE OF PUTTS MADE FROM EACH DISTANCE



DISTANCE PROFILE



CAREER PUTTING



As with greens in regulation, Woods maintains his putting accuracy at high levels from greater distances. When he wins (which is often) he far outperforms the tour average from 10 to 25 feet.

Woods has virtually the same percentage of putts from each distance as the tour average. His accuracy ranking is consistently near the top, especially over the past six years.

Sources: Mark Sweeney, AimPoint Technologies; ShotLink

JOE WARD AND BEDEL SAGET, ILLUSTRATION BY MIKA GRANDAHL/ THE NEW YORK TIMES