

The Shark's on the prowl at Memorial

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DUBLIN, Ohio -- Greg Norman didn't have a set time to come back on the PGA Tour after he took time off after missing the cut in The Masters.

But at the Memorial Tournament at Dublin's Muirfield Village, the Shark has decided to once again attack and defend the championship he won last year.

"You know when it's time to come back," said Norman, who shot a one-under par 71 in Thursday's first round. "For a while, I didn't touch a club. Then I'd be walking through the house and pick one up and waggle it. Soon, I was doing it five and six times a day. I knew it was time, and I'm glad to be back."

Nicknamed "the Shark" for his aggressiveness, Norman has won several tournaments, but he has never won a major tournament in the United States. He captured the British Open in 1986 and has become notorious for getting dumped on by a great shot.

Larry Mize, Bob Tway and Scott Sampson have all pulled miracle shots in the past to defeat Norman.

"That's all behind me," he said with his Australian accent. "If it takes great shots to beat me, then I have to live with that. I play my game."

And Norman's game was intact – sort of – Thursday.

The only flaw in his game was on the green.

"I didn't putt well," he admitted. "I 3-putted three greens. But I think that's due to my not playing for six weeks. I thought I played really well today except for my putting. But I'm sure I'll figure it out before the weekend is over."

Even though Tway has defeated Norman before, he still is aware of the Shark's bite.

“If he’s in contention come the last day, watch out,” said Tway. “You know he’s coming after you, and you can’t do anything about it.”

Thursday, Norman missed one fairway and two greens. His drives were deadly long and accurate. His approach shots were high and sharp.

The defending Memorial champion feels no extra pressure to repeat.

“The only good thing about it is that you know you’ve played the course well,” he said.

Norman’s trademark long-ball was fine. He went for all par-fives, hitting one and just missing the others claiming two birdies.

During Norman’s sabbatical, he took time to return to his native Australia and vacationed in Mexico. He bought a 4,000 plus square-foot home one mile from Lee Trevino’s home in Florida and is in the process of building a 65-foot yacht.

“Jack (Nicklaus) has one that’s 58 feet long,” Norman said. “And I had to outdo him.”

Norman was last year’s leading money leader. This season he’s broken the top 20.

He admitted that he was in a slump prior to the Masters, especially after his four irons were stolen out of his bag during a practice round.

“I knew it was time to take a break after that,” he said laughing. “But now I feel real refreshed and ready to go. I couldn’t say that two months ago. And I was pleased with my first round in two months. I’m just a few shots off the lead.”

Norman is definitely back. Signs of that showed on the No. 3 par-four.

After he hit a sand-wedge 136 yards to the green, he had a 15-footer for birdie. The putt rolled completely around the cup before falling in as Norman demonstrated his body language.

“Anything to get it in,” he said. “That was a big putt for me. I knew I was hitting well, and I needed that to boost my confidence.”

He looked up in the air for a few seconds and said with a smile, “I need another boost.”