Player says Woods important for golf

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Gary Player said Tiger Woods is "awfully important" to the game of golf, but he doesn't know how Woods' infidelity scandal will affect the sport.

"I've been asked hundreds of times by press people now, and what I've done is I've always said I have no comment on it because we don't know the implications of it," Player told *The Greenville News*. "Everybody's giving a different opinion."

Nonetheless, Player said Woods' superstar status is unquestionable and he is "one of the five most recognized names on the planet today."

"You can go into the villages of Africa and they know Tiger Woods," Player said.

"You can go into India. You can go to China. The name Tiger Woods — they know it."

"He's awfully important" for golf, Player said.

Player, one of golf's most successful players, said Woods isn't the greatest in the sport's history — yet.

"He's still got to prove that," Player said. "If anybody can do it, it's Tiger Woods. But he's still got to do it."

Woods, 34, become a professional golfer in the late summer of 1996.

He has won 95 tournaments worldwide, 71 of those on the PGA Tour, including 14 majors, four short of the record held by Jack Nicklaus.

Woods has withdrawn from competition and said he is seeking therapy to resolve his personal problems. He recently told a global audience he's not sure when he'll play golf again.

For his part, Player is concerned about golf's popularity, but he believes it is prone to cycles like interest in other sports.

"I take it as part of history," he said. "Everything goes up and down. Nothing ever goes up all the time."

"If you look at when Arnold (Palmer), Jack and I came to the scene, television was coming to the fore," he said.

They each won several major championships. The competition among the three golfers was spirited and, with the additional exposure, interest in the sport surged.

"It came at the right end of the all-competitive, beating-each-other equally, so it came up," Player said. "And then it goes down a bit, and now it comes up again. This is what's going to happen."