"It's fun to tie the course record," he said. "And it's fun to shoot low scores."

Tiger Woods signed his card and soon was on his way to the practice green, where he rolled putts as the sun took cover behind gathering clouds at PGA National.

He finally left after some 30 minutes, too late to do anything about his 1-over 71 in the opening round of the Honda Classic, which left him in a tie for 68th and seven shots behind the leader, Ryder Cup captain Davis Love III.

For all the talk about his putting, perhaps Woods should have been on the range.

He had only two birdie chances inside 10 feet, and made them both. His other birdie, on the opening hole, was just inside 20 feet. The three times he missed the green, he failed to get up-and-down for par. His other bogey came on a three-putt from 50 feet, when he gunned it

some 6 feet by the hole and caught the lip on his par putt.

"I didn't get a whole lot of my round," Woods said. "I hit the ball a lot better than I scored and I certainly putted well, and I didn't hardly get anything out of the round. Hopefully, tomorrow it will be better."

As for not hitting it close enough to make anything?

"I agree with that," Woods said. "I hit good shots and unfortunately, I just picked some bad lines. Also, I didn't get up-and-down either a couple of times. I blew those. So a round that should have been probably 2- or 3-under par quickly turned into 1 over."

He starts his second round Friday morning in what should be calmer conditions.

That's what Rory McIlroy had Thursday, and he used it to his advantage.

"It's nice to tee off early in the morning and not have any wind," McIlroy said. "You feel like - especially when it's so soft - that the course is scorable. If I had come in today and shot 70, I would have been pretty disappointed."

Instead, he made it look easy.

McIlroy twice holed tricky par putts from about 5 feet on the first three holes, and from there gave himself plenty of looks from 20 feet and closer and made enough of them to open strongly in calm, morning conditions.

"That's been a huge improvement, especially inside 6 feet," McIlroy said. "I definitely don't miss as many as I used to. I feel a lot more confident over those putts. I've always been pretty good

from like 15 to 25 feet. I've always holed my fair share, but those putts that you should hole all the time are the only ones that I've definitely improved on.

"The more you see the ball go in from there, the more confidence you get."

His lone bogey was a three-putt from 50 feet, understandable because McIlroy had not faced a putt over 25 feet for some three hours until the 17th hole of his round.

McIlroy was joined at 66 by a large group that included Justin Rose, Ryan Palmer and Harris English, the PGA Tour rookie who won on the Nationwide Tour last year as an amateur and has yet to miss a cut this year.

Love is geared toward assembling a team and a strategy to win back the Ryder Cup this fall at Medinah, though the 47-year-old is still competitive and not giving up on yet another PGA Tour win.

Even so, he was asked what someone should read out of the opening round.

"That I got off to a good start," Love said.

He tied the course record with a 64 - it had been done nine times previously since the Honda Classic move here five years ago - with the boost coming from a 5-iron from 197 yards on the par-3 fifth hole for a hole-in-one.

He ran off three birdies to close out the front nine in 30, than after failing to get up-and-down, Love steadied himself for a big finish. He knocked in an 18-foot birdie on the 17th hole, and hit a 25-yard bunker shot to tap-in range for birdie on the par-5 18th.

Love is poised to make his 500th career cut on the PGA Tour. Then again, he had a share of the lead at The Players Championship in 2006 and shot 83 to miss the cut. The TPC Sawgrass can do that. PGA National is no bargain with so much water, though the wind has not been as strong as it can be.

"If I had not birdied the last two holes, it still would have been a good start," Love said. "My last nine at Pebble was 30, and I felt like I was starting to play better. I did some work with my short game and putting and things between Pebble and now to get ready for here. I worked on iron shots, because you've got to hit good iron shots on par 3s to survive this golf course, so it paid off today.

"It's fun to tie the course record," he said. "And it's fun to shoot low scores."

McIlroy can go to No. 1 in the world with a win this week. Even as more attention shifts to the 22-year-old from Northern Ireland, he seems to embrace it. He made the opening round look easy, rarely putting pressure on any part of his game.

He birdied the last two holes of the back nine, made the turn and picked up another birdie on the par-4 second by smartly playing short of the bunkers and firing his approach into a breeze to about 18 feet from a back pin. His final birdie came on the par-3 seventh, when caddie J.P. Fitzgerald talked him into a hard 6-iron that stopped 12 feet short of the cup.

"It was pretty stress-free out there," McIlroy said. "I hit quite a few fairways and a lot of greens and gave myself a lot of chances, and that's sort of what you need to do around this golf course."