"The atmosphere is going to be fantastic out there tomorrow, due to him being in the mix," McDowell said. "There's going to be a nice amount of expectations on him tomorrow, trying to complete the comeback.

One swing cost Tiger Woods a comfortable lead at Bay Hill. All that mattered to him was his name atop the leaderboard at the end of the day, leaving him one round away from winning on the PGA Tour for the first time in 30 months.

If anything, Saturday showed that it won't be easy in the Arnold Palmer Invitational.

In two holes, Woods went from a four-shot lead to briefly tied with Graeme McDowell after a bizarre chain of events that featured a young man passing out and a woman screaming, all in the middle of Woods' swing on the 15th tee.

But he followed the double bogey with a birdie from a fairway bunker on the par-5 16th to restore his lead, and then hung on for a 1-under 71 that gave him a one-shot lead over McDowell going into the final round.

McDowell didn't make a birdie until the 17th hole, but he was bogey-free on a tough day for a 71.

Woods is 37-2 when he has the outright lead going into the final round, and Sunday will show if he has regained his status as the most formidable closer in golf.

Woods, who was at 11-under 205, last won on the PGA Tour on Sept. 13, 2009, at the BMW Championship. That also was the last time he had the outright lead at a PGA Tour event after 54 holes.

He has never had a better chance to end the drought than now - in the lead and on a course where he has won a record six times.

"I enjoy it," Woods said of his place atop the leaderboard. "It means I've played well to get there. It's not like I'm slashing it all over the place and happened to be at 11-under par. If you're in the lead, you've done some good things. That's how I've always looked at it, and it's a nice position to be in."

Woods has such control of his golf ball that he went 38 consecutive holes with a putter in his hand for a birdie attempt.

The last time Woods and McDowell played in the final group of any tournament, McDowell rallied from four shots behind and beat Woods in a playoff in the Chevron World Challenge at the end of 2010.

"The golf course is going to be the main competitor tomorrow," McDowell said.

Indeed, it might not be just them.

Ernie Els rekindled his hopes of getting into the Masters with six birdies in a round of 67 that left him only three shots behind. Ian Poulter had a 68 and also was tied for third, while Charles Howell III (68) and Sony Open winner Johnson Wagner (69) were four behind.

Els played the opening two rounds with Woods and didn't get much out of his game. That changed Saturday during a strong run up the leaderboard that at least gave him a reasonable chance to get into the Masters - and possibly win Bay Hill for the third time.

The Big Easy is at No. 62 in the world and needs to crack the top 50 after Sunday to get an invitation to Augusta. He could get there by finishing alone in third place - provided Matteo Manassero doesn't win in Morocco on the European Tour, or Howell doesn't finish alone in second place at Bay Hill.

It gets complicated with the world ranking, even without a calculator. Els hasn't even bothered to do the math.

"I know I've got to finish ... really, almost winning. I've got to almost win, or something like that," Els said. "But if I'm in, I'm in. And if I'm not, I'm just glad my game is coming around. Whatever happens, I feel like I can have a good year now. I feel like the hard work is starting to pay off."

Els rolled in a 30-foot birdie putt on the ninth hole for a 32 on the front, getting him into the picture. His lone lapse came on the 15th, and he did well to escape with bogey. His ball was sitting slightly down in a fairway bunker, and Els hit the lip with his approach, the ball coming back into the sand. He blasted the next out onto the green and two-putted.

But he birdied the 16th, got up-and-down from a front bunker on the 17th, and knocked in a 15-foot birdie on the 18th. Even then, he was five shots behind against Woods, his longtime nemesis and a six-time at Bay Hill.

"I don't want to talk too badly about Tiger, but hope he makes a couple of bogeys and I have a bit of a chance tomorrow," Els said.

He laughed, and he got his wish.

After reaching 13 under, Woods pulled his tee shot on the par-3 14th - so tough Saturday it yielded only one birdie - and caught a buried lie. He blasted out across the green and had to get up-and-down for bogey.

On the 15th tee, Woods was in the middle of his swing when an 18-year-old passed out, and a woman screamed when she saw it. Woods couldn't stop his swing, and his tee shot hooked so far left out of bounds that it was closer to a swimming pool in someone's backyard than the white boundary stakes of the golf course.

Woods made double bogey, and McDowell caught him atop the leaderboard with his first birdie of the round on the 17th. It didn't last long. From a fairway bunker on the 16th, Woods ripped it over the water to about 20 feet for a two-putt birdie.

He got up-and-down from the bunker on the 17th and two-putted for par on the 18th.

Charlie Wi was tied with Woods for the 36-hole lead, but not for long. He started off pushing his shots to the right, made three bogeys out of the gate and fell back. Wi wound up with a 76 and was five shots behind.

He wasn't the only one.

Jason Dufner, who turned 35 on Saturday, had a birthday to forget. After driving into the water on the par-5 sixth and making double bogey, he followed with three straight bogeys for a 42 on

the front nine. He shot 77.

Bubba Watson was hanging around until he three-putted from just outside 3 feet for double bogey on the 11th. Doral winner Justin Rose twice made bogey on par 5s in a 74. Vijay Singh and Sergio Garcia each shot 75.

McDowell was the only player who never left the lead pack, even though he made only one birdie. He got some help from Woods in the final hour, however, and now gets another shot at him.

"The atmosphere is going to be fantastic out there tomorrow, due to him being in the mix," McDowell said. "There's going to be a nice amount of expectations on him tomorrow, trying to complete the comeback.

"He's still got to win," McDowell said. "Still got to go win tomorrow, like the rest of us have to."