

The History of the Open Championship at Muirfield



Tomorrow the Open Championship returns to Muirfield after an 11 year absence, and all of the world's top players will compete over four days for the prestigious claret jug.

The Edinburgh Reporter looks back at the fifteen previous occasions when the tournament was played at Muirfield and takes a look at this year's potential winners.

Old Tom Morris designed a 16 hole course over 117 acres in 1891, which was extended to 18 holes for the first Open to be played over 72 holes the following year. The tournament was won by Harold Hilton with a score of 305.

Four years later, the great Harry Vardon took the honours, scoring 316, then the next two championships were won by James Braid, in 1901 and 1906 with scores of 309 and 300 respectively. Six years later, Ted Rae won with a score of 295 as scores began to drop.

It would be 17 years before the tournament returned to East Lothian, and in 1923, a further 50 acres were added to the north of the course, following recommendations from course designer Harry Colt who introduced 14 new holes and his design which included two loops of nine holes, Muirfield was transformed into one of the finest courses in the world.

In 1929, the great Walter 'who's gonna be second?' Hagen from the USA became the first overseas winner at Muirfield with an impressive 292, and seven years later Alf Perry won the trophy with a 283.

In 1948 Henry Cotton won with a score of 284 then 11 years

later, South African legend Gary Player did likewise with an identical score, although at the time a 6 on the last hole convinced him that he had lost.

In 1966 the great Jack Nicklaus from the USA won the championship shooting 282 after using a one iron instead of a driver off the tee to avoid the punishing rough. He developed such a life-long love and admiration for the course that he named his own course in Ohio, Muirfield Village.

Nicklaus started a sequence of three American winners, and was followed by wise-cracking Lee Trevino whoever-so-casually chipped in from behind the 71st green to save an unlikely par and go on to beat Tony Jacklin in the 1972 Open, finishing on 278. Eight years later, Tom Watson carded 271, the lowest winning score ever recorded at the course.

Nick Faldo (Now Sir Nick) brought the title back to the UK, winning consecutive championships in 1987 and 1992, scoring 279 and 272 respectively. His last round in the 1987 win was completed with a par in each hole.

The last winner was Ernie Els in 2002, after a four-man play-off and subsequently sudden death against Frenchman Thomas Levet, having finished on 278.

So all eyes will be on Muirfield for the remainder of this week, but who will emerge triumphant?

Tiger Woods has been installed as the bookmakers' favourite as he continues to seek major No. 15, whilst Phil Mickelson who claimed the Scottish Open last week is sure to approach this Open in a far better state of mind than ever before.

After winning the U.S. Open at Merion, Justin Rose's stock has risen dramatically, and he's rightly seen as a genuine contender this year to follow in the footsteps of Britain's Andy Murray, whilst Adam Scott who has also won a major this year has resulted in him being ranked as fourth favourite to

lift the claret jug on Sunday.

Other contenders include Northern Ireland pair Graeme McDowell and Rory Mcilroy and England duo Luke Donald and Lee Westwood.

In addition, Sergio Garcia and Ernie Els won't be far away and Henrik Stenson can never be ignored.

With ideal weather conditions predicted, the competition is sure to be closely fought.