

## Couples looks to break through in US Senior Open

Written by Associated Press  
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### Associated Press

OMAHA, Neb. — Fred Couples feels like he's overdue for a win.

He's played seven events on the Champions Tour this year, has been in the top five in six of them and comes into the U.S. Senior Open today off three straight runner-up finishes.

"I would like to win something," he said Wednesday, adding that he even came in second in a member-guest tournament in California last month.

Couples' most recent victory was just under a year ago at the 2012 Senior British Open. He looked ready to win two weeks ago in the Senior Players Championship but a back-9 collapse left him tied for second behind Kenny Perry.

Couples added his bothersome back is feeling fine, so if the man nicknamed "Boom Boom" for his prodigious drives can find the fairway at Omaha Country Club, no one would be surprised if this is the week he breaks through.

"Fred still hits the ball a tremendous distance," Bernhard Langer said. "He hasn't lost any distance; maybe gained some with the equipment and all that. He's capable of producing very low scores. Wherever he tees up, he's one of the main favorites, no doubt about it."

Couples, Perry, Langer, Tom Watson and David Frost are among the top contenders at the 6,700-yard, par-70 Omaha Country Club.

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The fourth of the five senior majors will be a test of stamina for the 50-and-over golfers, especially with weekend highs forecast in the low 90s with high humidity. The course is hilly, featuring elevation and topographical changes that belie the popular image of the central plains.

“Nebraska, you’d think flat and hot,” Perry said. “I got the hot part right but it’s the hilliest golf course I’ve ever been on.”

Drives in the fairway will be at a premium with the rough cut high and the greens small and sloped. The 312-yard 13th hole is drivable but the course features the second-longest par-3 in U.S. Senior Open history in the 230-yard third hole and the third-longest par-4 in the 494-yard 10th.

The 53-year-old Couples’ scaled-back schedule begins to ramp up now. After the U.S. Senior Open, he plays the British Open at Muirfield and Senior British Open at Royal Birkdale in consecutive weeks — “which might be a little much,” he said.

For a man with a notoriously bad back, the schedule is taxing, in no small part because of the challenge the Omaha Country Club presents. Even in the best of circumstances, golfers will find themselves with a good number of side-hill and downhill lies. And then there’s that gnarly, 4-inch rough.

Roger Chapman will try to become the first defending champion to repeat since Allen Doyle in 2006. Chapman, who also won the Senior PGA Championship last year, has not been able to recapture his 2012 magic. He has one top-10 finish in 13 events.

Notable first-time entrants are Colin Montgomerie, who turned 50 last month and tied for ninth in the Senior Players Championship; Rocco Mediate, who lost a playoff to Tiger Woods in the classic 2008 U.S. Open at Torrey Pines; and Duffy Waldorf, who has six top-10s in 11 Champions Tour events this year.

Perry, the Charles Schwab Cup points leader, is looking for his second win of the year in a senior major. He shot three straight rounds in the 60s to win the Senior Players Championship

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by 2 shots over Couples and Waldorf in Pittsburgh.

Playing on the regular tour last week in West Virginia, Perry was three shots off the lead after two rounds of the Greenbrier Classic before ballooning to 73 on Saturday and finishing tied for 41st.

Watson shot in the 60s in three of his four rounds at the Greenbrier but tied for 38th after a 72 on Saturday. The 2014 Ryder Cup captain has two top-10 finishes in six Champions Tour events.

“Hot and cold,” Watson said, describing his game this year. “I struggled yesterday and today in practice rounds here. Then I got on the practice tee and at the end of the session I started hitting the ball well again. Whether it’s going to work on the golf course tomorrow is anybody’s guess but at least it’s on the upswing. If I can keep the ball on the fairway and get there on Sunday, that’s all I’m trying to get to.”

Langer, the Champions Tour money leader, is trying to regain the form that helped him win twice in the spring. Langer, who won the U.S. Senior Open in 2010 and tied for second last year, limited his practice to two 9-hole rounds because of the heat and humidity. He added the rough is as thick as “anywhere in the world” and even if there’s no wind, a golfer could be in contention shooting par.

## **Stricker the man to beat at John Deere Classic**

SILVIS, Ill. — Steve Stricker might be the only golfer on the PGA Tour who isn’t peeking ahead to Muirfield and next week’s British Open.

Stricker’s single-minded focus on TPC Deere Run, combined with his recent dominance of the course, makes him the man to beat at this weekend’s John Deere Classic.

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Stricker, 46, is playing a reduced schedule this season — and he's skipping the Open Championship to celebrate his wedding anniversary with his wife Nicki in Wisconsin.

But Stricker won the John Deere Classic three times from 2009-11. He's not about to pass on a shot at a fourth title just down the road in Illinois.

"I owe a lot to this place. It's a special place for me," Stricker said.

Stricker and Zach Johnson, who grew up about 100 miles across the Mississippi River in nearby Cedar Rapids, Iowa, are the unquestioned headliners this week.

That's largely because most of the world's top golfers are already concentrating in Scotland.

There's no Tiger, Rory or Phil in this field. In fact, the only golfer ranked in the top 10 in the world that'll play Deere Run is Louis Oosthuizen — and he's 10th.

Just eight of the world's top 50, including Stricker, Johnson, Keegan Bradley and Nick Watney, have committed to the tournament. But what the field lacks in star power it should make up for somewhat in depth, as nearly half of the top 100 on FedEx Cup points list will tee off today.

Johnson also serves as an executive board member for the tournament.

Johnson broke Stricker's 3-year winning streak here in 2012 but enters his hometown event in a bit of a slump. He followed up a third-place finish at the Crowne Plaza Invitational in late May by shooting 13-over par at the Memorial Tournament and missing the cut at the U.S. Open at Merion Golf Club.

Johnson added that although his putting remains "up and down" — a worrisome sign because

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of how many birdie chances Deere Run presents — he's feeling more and more confident in his driver.

Johnson also notched top-5 finishes at Deere Run in 2009 and 2011 before beating Troy Matteson on the second hole of a playoff last year.

Stricker's reduced schedule also appears to be doing wonders for his game in 2013. He has four top-10s in seven events — including a memorable eighth at the U.S. Open.

Bradley will be making his Classic debut and is seeking his first win of the year. Watney will also be looking for a breakthrough after missing three straight cuts from mid-May to Merion.

Jonas Blixt initially announced he intended to return to his native Sweden after winning last week's Greenbrier Classic but remains scheduled to tee off today with Watney and Oosthuizen.

Perhaps no one in the field will have more fun this weekend than Oosthuizen.

The South African is a self-described "farm boy" with an affinity for John Deere equipment. Oosthuizen celebrated his 2010 British Open by buying a John Deere tractor and even brought family and friends to the Quad Cities this week so they could tour the company's facilities.

## Mickelson looking to finally conquer links golf

INVERNESS, Scotland — Just when he thought he'd finally understood the unique nature of links golf, Phil Mickelson arrived at last year's British Open and missed the cut for the first time at a major in five years.

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“I don’t know what to say,” Mickelson repeated as he prepared to leave Lytham two days earlier than expected.

Fresh off another disappointment — a sixth second-place finish at the U.S. Open last month — the American is back for another go on a links course as he plays the Scottish Open starting today, a week before the British Open at Muirfield.

Any self-belief must be in short supply whenever he flies to Europe — he hasn’t won here in 20 years, since a victory in a second-tier Challenge Tour event in Paris in which he narrowly beat Steve Elkington.

But links golf is something that continues to appeal to Mickelson. And while Woods, McIlroy and the rest of the world’s top seven have headed to courses across Britain to prepare for the British Open in non-competitive conditions, the eighth-ranked Mickelson will be at Castle Stuart this week practicing his bump-and-runs and low drives into the wind with a title and prize money at stake.

Mickelson is a regular at the Scottish Open and came closest to winning it in 2007 when he lost a playoff to Gregory Havret. Mickelson is one of only four Americans in the field.

He has reasons to be optimistic. He says his driving and putting — what he claims have been the “weaknesses” in his game for the past five years — are now his strong points.

His decision to put five putting greens in his garden back home, all with different surfaces, appears to be paying off.

Mickelson has had a difficult past month. Still coming to terms with the “heartbreak” of losing out to Justin Rose at the U.S. Open, he missed the cut at the Greenbrier Classic last week in his first outing since Merion.

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Maybe a trip to Scotland, with his wife and kids in tow, will do him some good.

Mickelson plans to visit the local battlefields from the middle of the 18th century during his time in northern Scotland.

## Weather shortens Ohio Amateur to 54-hole event

CANTON — The leader never even showed up at the course.

Corey Richmond, who posted an 8-under 63 before the heavy stuff came down in Tuesday's first round, maintained a 3-shot lead without having to leave his hotel on Wednesday while others battled the elements in the 107th Ohio Amateur.

With the threat of heavy rains, rumbling thunder, crackling lightning and dangerous weather peppering Brookside Country Club, tournament officials finally conceded to Mother Nature and shortened the tournament from 72 to 54 holes.

"It's been the theme of the summer," explained Jim Popa, executive director of the sponsoring Ohio Golf Association. "It seems like everywhere we go we've battled the weather — and this week it's gotten the best of us."

With thunderclouds the color of a bad bruise hovering overhead, Popa and the OGA suspended play early in Wednesday's second round. Half of the field hadn't even teed off and the other half was on the course, many not even halfway done.

Those players will return to soggy Brookside Country Club this morning at 8:30 to complete their rounds. The second wave of 72 players — keep in mind, half of the field has yet to even tee off in the second round — will then play starting at 11 a.m.

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When everyone has finished the second round, there will be a cut to the low 60 scores and ties. The survivors will return on Friday for the final 18 holes.

It will mark the first time since 1990 at The Sharon Golf Club that the prestigious event hasn't gone a full four rounds.

Warm, humid and dry weather is forecast for both today and Friday.

The 21-year-old Richmond, who also had a hole in one in his glittering opening round, is being pursued by 2010 winner Michael Bernard, an Ohio State player from Huber Heights, and Andrew Dorn, a junior at Coastal Carolina from West Chester.

Chase Wilson, a former High Point College player from Zanesville, completed his first round early on Wednesday and finished with a 67. He had just gotten started with his next 18 when the weather hit.

Also at 67 was Tyler Light of nearby Massillon, who tied for low amateur in last week's Ohio Open at Westfield Country Club.

Bowling Green graduate Parker Hewit of Westfield Center was at 69, with Dublin's Nathan Clark and Akron's Dan Belden the only other players with subpar rounds.