

O'Meara returns to Royal Birkdale for Senior Open

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SOUTHPORT, England — Fifteen years after winning the British Open at Royal Birkdale, Mark O'Meara will be making a return to the course for the Senior British Open.

O'Meara won the British Open in 1998 and on Tuesday he was extended an "honorary membership" to the club in recognition of his achievement.

"The Open here in 1998 was a dream come true for me. To hold the claret jug here on the 18th green was the icing on the cake of my career," O'Meara said Wednesday, a day before the tournament starts. "It's going to be tough this week, especially if the wind kicks up. I've played it in really severe conditions before. You just have to be patient and sometimes par is a very good score."

O'Meara will be playing alongside defending champion Fred Couples and Colin Montgomerie for the first two rounds.

Couples shot a 9-under 271 to win at Turnberry last year but thought his 9 over for a share of 32nd place last week at Muirfield at the British Open would have been good enough to win a Senior Open.

"I honestly think if the Senior Open had been last week and I shot 9 over I would have won," Couples said. "I played well last week at Muirfield. It was as unique as any golf I've ever played. The ball was going so far. Not so much uncontrollable, just difficult to get it close."

Montgomerie, who turned 50 last month, is hoping to claim a major as a senior, an honor that

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eluded him despite a successful career on the regular tour.

"I feel I'm teeing up now with a chance of winning on the Senior Tour, which hasn't been the case in recent years on the European Tour," Montgomerie said. "Having said that it's been an eye-opener in my first few events as a senior. The standard of golf is high, yet it's been a lot of fun."

Tom Watson, who won the last of his five British Open titles at Birkdale in 1983 and is a 3-time winner of the British Senior Open, will also be in a strong field that includes Mark Calcavecchia, Tom Lehman, Tom Kite, Craig Stadler and Bernhard Langer.

Liu advances in US Junior Amateur

TRUCKEE, Calif. — Qualifying medalist Jim Liu advanced to the second round of the match play in the U.S. Junior Amateur on Wednesday, beating Matthew Lowe with an 8-foot birdie putt on the 19th hole.

The 17-year-old, the 2010 champion and 2012 runner-up from Smithtown, N.Y., needed the extra hole to finish off the 17-year-old Lowe, from Farmingdale, N.Y., after losing the 18th with a bogey.

Liu will face John Augenstein of Owensboro, Ky., in the second round at Martis Camp Club. Augenstein beat Matthew Perrine of Austin, Texas, 5 and 4.

Second-seeded Cameron Young of Scarborough, N.Y., also advanced, beating fellow 16-year-old Matt Echelmeier of Columbia, Mo., 3 and 1.

Canadians trying to end home drought

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OAKVILLE, Ontario — Mike Weir and the other Canadians in the Canadian Open field are well aware that it has been 59 years since a Canadian won the national championship.

“There is that added feel and pressure, no question,” Weir said Wednesday, a day before the start of play at Glen Abbey. “It can be a good thing though to get the crowd behind you. Get some momentum going and you can feed off the crowd.”

Pat Fletcher, born in England, was the last Canadian winner, taking the 1954 event at Point Grey in Vancouver. Carl Keffer is the only Canadian-born champion, winning in 1909 and 1914. Albert Murray, a Canadian also born in England, won in 1908 and 1913.

The 43-year-old Weir, the 2003 Masters champion, came close to ending the drought in 2004 at Glen Abbey but lost a playoff to Vijay Singh.

Canadian David Hearn lost in a playoff two weeks ago in the John Deere Classic and Graham DeLaet is the top Canadian on the money list at No. 31 with \$1,577,300.

Matt Kuchar, a 2-time winner this year, tops the field along with Brandt Snedeker, Graeme McDowell, Bubba Watson, Hunter Mahan, Dustin Johnson, Charl Schwartzel, Ernie Els, Luke Donald and 2-time winner Jim Furyk.

The Jack Nicklaus-designed course is hosting its 26th Canadian Open.

Tardy, Lee advance in US Girls' Junior

FORT WAYNE, Ind. — Qualifying medalist Bailey Tardy and defending champion Minjee Lee won their opening matches Wednesday in the U.S. Girls' Junior Championship.

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The 16-year-old Tardy, from Norcross, Ga., won the final two holes with pars to beat Abbey Carlson of Lake Mary, Fla., 1 up at Sycamore Hills Golf Club.

The 17-year-old Lee, from Australia, topped Kaitlyn Papp of Austin, Texas, 5 and 4. Lee won the Australian Women's Amateur in January.

Fans to pick hole location for final round at PGA: If Phil Mickelson and Ian Poulter don't like the hole location for the par-3 15th at Oak Hill in the final round of the PGA Championship, they might want to take it up with the fans.

After all, the fans are going to decide where to put the pin.

The PGA of America announced a contest called "PGA Championship Pick the Hole Location Challenge Hosted by Jack Nicklaus."

Fans can go to the PGA's website — www.PGA.com/pickthehole — starting Tuesday through Aug. 10 to vote for one of four options for the hole location. The idea is to educate fans on how a course setup affects strategy, show them the kind of information on hole locations the players are given each day and let them take part in their own way in the PGA Championship.

The final major is Aug. 8-11.

Nicklaus won his record-tying fifth PGA Championship at Oak Hill in 1980 by seven shots over Andy Bean. That had been the largest margin of victory in the PGA Championship until Rory McIlroy won by eight last year at Kiawah Island.

"The idea came up, we spoke to Jack and he was very excited about it," said Kerry Haigh, the chief championships officer for the PGA of America.

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The 15th hole is 181 yards with bunkers to the left and water along the right side.

The fans won't be able to put the flag wherever they want. Haigh added the 15th green has a number of options for pins and he has selected four from which the fans can choose. They will not affect where he sets the hole location for the other three rounds.

This won't be like throwing darts.

When fans go to the website, they can click one of the four hole locations to get a visual presentation, along with the audio of Nicklaus explaining the differences in how it could affect the shot.

"The chance for golf fans to interact with the PGA Championship and play a role in shaping the outcome of the final round fascinates me," Nicklaus added. "It's like being able to call the shots during the fourth quarter of the Super Bowl. ... I believe this new concept will serve as an exciting hands-on learning experience for golf fans and I'm happy to be involved."

Haigh has been in charge of setting up the course for the PGA Championship, Senior PGA and Ryder Cup since 1989.

A sweepstakes will be held in conjunction with the contest, with one prize a chance to get behind-the-scenes experience at the PGA Championship next year at Valhalla.

PGA bubble: While there is only one month left to qualify for the FedEx Cup playoffs, another points race takes place this week in Canada.

This is the final week to qualify for the PGA Championship and while it has more PGA Tour players than any other major championship, not everyone is in. The PGA of America has built a reputation of having the strongest field of the majors with most of the top 100 from the world ranking.

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There also is "PGA Points" — the top 70 get in — which is all money earned in PGA Tour events from the Bridgestone Invitational a year ago through the Canadian Open. Among those on the bubble are Roberto Castro (No. 69), Matt Jones (No. 70), David Hearn (73), Matt Every (75) and Jeff Overton (79), who only three years ago was screaming, "Boom, Baby!" after holing a fairway shot in the Ryder Cup.

The PGA of America uses this list to fill its 156-man field, which can add a number of spots.

Meanwhile, the head of the PGA's championships says he is taking a close look at Peter Uihlein and Brooks Koepka, two Americans playing in Europe. Neither had status to start the year and both now have a European Tour cards — Uihlein from a European Tour in Portugal, Koepka by winning three times on the Challenge Tour for an instant promotion.

Uihlein is No. 108 in the world, while Koepka is No. 114.

Haigh added he would consider the high ranking based on the limited tournaments they have played this year and also take into consideration their standing on money lists outside of the PGA.

Back to golf: Not to worry — Judy Rankin is not making a comeback on the LPGA Tour at 68.

But she is playing golf again.

Rankin, who worked for ESPN at the British Open, said she played for the first time since 2011 during a family trip to Ruidoso, N.M. She played 10 holes with son Tuey and granddaughter Kendall with mixed results.

Rankin is the first woman to go over \$100,000 in one year on the LPGA Tour and a member of

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the Hall of Fame.

Old championship, old winners: Mickelson contributed to an odd slice of history by winning the British Open at age 43. The last three winners of golf's oldest championship were in their 40s, a streak that has never occurred in any major.

Even back in the old days — the really old days — Willie Park Sr. kept Old Tom Morris from winning three straight in his 40s.

Ernie Els and Darren Clarke both were 42 when they won at Royal Lytham and Royal St. George's, respectively. Most of the attention going into the final round was on Lee Westwood, who turned 40 in April and started the day with a 2-shot lead.

Age doesn't mean much these days.

The next stop is the PGA Championship, where the last three winners have all been in their 20s — Rory McIlroy, Keegan Bradley and Martin Kaymer.

Divots: Angel Cabrera tied for 11th in the British Open, moving up to No. 43 to qualify for the Bridgestone Invitational next week at Firestone. ... Mickelson has made more money from three majors this year than Inbee Park in winning 15 LPGA events, including her wins in three majors. ... Even though Woody Austin won a PGA Tour event in Mississippi, he is only No. 130 on the FedEx Cup list and might not qualify for the playoffs.