



Darren Clarke of Northern Ireland poses with the Claret Jug next to the Seve Ballesteros posters on the 18th green following his victory in The 140th Open Championship at Royal St George's on July 18, 2011 in Sandwich, England.
Photo by: David Cannon/R&A/R&A via Getty Images

MEMORIES of SEVE to inspire at LYTHAM

The 141st Open Championship returns to Royal Lytham & St Annes Golf Club from July 15 – 22, eleven years since the last staging of the Open in the seaside, Lancashire town north of Liverpool. Back in 2001, American David Duval, at the height of his powers, was victorious in what was his first and only Major Championship win over Swede Niclas Fasth.

This year's defending Open champion Darren Clarke finished in a tie for 3rd in '01, one of eight European players in ties within the top 10 places. 'Lytham' has been a happy hunting ground for European players in Open

Championships but none have been more successful around this difficult, heavily bunkered layout than the late, great Severiano Ballesteros.

Royal Lytham and the Royal & Ancient Golf Club of St Andrews are planning on recognising the

late champion's deeds at Lytham and the part he played in Open history, with amongst other things, a commissioned portrait to be unveiled in his memory during the Championship.

Ballesteros' victories in 1979 – with the famous 'carpark' shot

in the final round – and his titanic battle with Zimbabwe's Nick Price in the 1988 Championship – capped off by a marvellous chip shot from the left of the final hole to within inches – will be replayed



Severiano Ballesteros (Spain), British Open Golf Champion, holding the trophy.
Photo by: Bob Thomas/Getty Images

and fondly remembered in the lead up to the event.

In a Ryder Cup year with Seve's great Cup partner José María Olazábal at the helm, there could be not better way for European players to honour his memory and book their place on the team than to secure another 'home' victory at Lytham.

In the 11 previous Opens held at Lytham dating back to Bobby Jones' victory in 1926, American winners at Lytham had been scarce until Tom Lehman's victory in 1996, with Tiger Woods the silver medal winner as the low amateur. In the 1926 Open, the great amateur Jones played a remarkable 175 yard blind shot to the green from a sandy lie on the penultimate hole,

demoralising the chances

of countryman Al

Watrous, to win his first Open in his first appearance in the Championship.

A plaque marks the spot from where Jones played this shot and the 'mashie' club he used is displayed in the Victorian clubhouse behind the 18th green.

The champions at Lytham in the intervening years were among the finest of their respective eras: Bobby Locke, Peter Thomson, Bob Charles (the first left handed Major winner), Tony Jacklin and Gary Player; before the consecutive victories by the incomparable Spaniard.

With such an impressive list of past winners, there can be no questioning the golf course's capacity to identify great champions throughout the years not to mention being the scene of some of the many memorable shots played in Open history, from an array of Ballesteros' aggressive lashes at the ball and fist pumping birdie putts in the final round in 1979, to Player's left handed putt from against the wall of the clubhouse beyond the 18th green in 1974.

Lytham is also unique for being the only course on the

Open Championship rotation to start with a par 3, a robust 206 yard (188m) opening test that is infamous for the events that occurred in the final round in 2001.

Welshman Ian Woosnam, the co-leader standing on the tee in the final round, striped his tee shot to birdie the hole only to be alerted by his caddy, Miles Byrne, on the 2nd tee that they had 15 clubs in the bag. Woosnam hurled the offending extra driver into the bushes in frustration and anger and the subsequent two shot penalty would be the death knell of not only a career on Woosnam's bag for Byrne but Woosnam's Open chances, although he fought on to finish only four shots adrift of Duval in joint 3rd place.

The golf course is a pure links test in close proximity to the ocean but urban development has resulted in the course being surrounded by housing and a railway line that borders the course, unlike other Open courses which retain a mostly uninterrupted relationship with the coastline.

Chief Executive of the Royal & Ancient, Peter Dawson, says players familiar with Lytham will notice a few changes to the golf course since 2001. 'The R&A have embarked on a program over the past 10 years of upgrading our Open venues, only slightly here and there, to give the modern professionals the best possible challenge,' he said.

At Lytham, there have been new back tees installed on two of the par fives, the 7th and 11th, and also the par four 10th. The 7th green has also been moved back approximately 30 yards to lengthen the hole to 589 yards (536m), and the new tee on the 11th will see it stretched to over 600 yards (546m).

The course upgrade work has settled in well after very good winter conditions and also includes the creation of some new dunes systems on the 2nd, 3rd and 16th holes. At 7086 yards (6378m) playing to a par of 70, Lytham

will play around 200 yards (182m) longer than it did in 2001.

Lytham is a golf course that favours the strategic, with 206 bunkers to be avoided at all costs. As Dawson says 'There's always disaster lurking (at Lytham) with over 200 bunkers. You're not going to win this Open from the bunkers, that's for sure'. Although the seaside can't be seen from the links, competitors at Lytham can expect the prospect of fluctuating weather as they would at any Open venue.

The golf course is routed so that holes play in different directions throughout the round and if the wind gets up, the course will play very differently from round to round. The aforementioned par fives for example; if one hole is playing downwind, the other will be directly into the wind. Getting through the opening 6 holes without calamity should allow for opportunities to pick up shots over the middle of the round, before Lytham bears its teeth again with a difficult finishing run of par fours from the 14th onwards.

Defending champion Clarke has relished his year as the Open Champion, getting married to his girlfriend Alison in a beachside ceremony in the Bahamas the week after The Masters and proudly touring the Claret Jug to tournaments throughout the world. Sadly, he has endured a difficult year on the course but links golf clearly brings out the best in him and he will be hopeful of a strong defence.

The chance of another European victory is of course, as strong as it's been at any time in history, with Rory McIlroy, Luke Donald, Lee Westwood, Martin Kaymer, Ian Poulter, Justin Rose, Graeme McDowell and Peter Hanson all around the Top 25 in the world and realistic chances of winning any event they play.

Included in this group on talent alone is Spaniard, Sergio Garcia, although his mindset was such after The Masters that he declared himself 'Not good

enough' to win a Major. The 21st ranked Garcia spoke to Spanish reporters at Augusta and told them 'I'm not good enough, I don't have the thing I need to have. I had my chances (over 13 years in Majors) and opportunities and I wasted them. I have no more options, I wasted my options.'

Garcia's closest shaves among 17 top 10 finishes in Majors date back to his runner up finish to Tiger Woods in the 1999 PGA Championship at Medinah, site of this year's Ryder Cup, a playoff loss to Padraig Harrington in the 2007 Open at Carnoustie and runner up again to Harrington at the 2008 PGA at Oakland Hills. Leading into the US Open, Garcia was 0 - 54 in Majors.

Were these statements at The Masters simply refreshing candour or a resigned acceptance of fate from the 32 year old? Garcia need only look back 1 year to Clarke's victory at Royal St Georges at 42 years of age however to realise that he has time on his side and to the records of Fred Couples, Tom Kite, Davis Love III, Phil Mickelson and Corey Pavin, who were his age or older when they captured their first Major.

Perhaps the 'one thing he needs' to climb the mountain at Lytham is the inspiration and presence of his Spanish hero Seve and the support of the British public, who will be pulling for him as much as any of their home grown stars should he get into contention.

After his many near misses and his impassioned Ryder Cup exploits for Europe, his would be as popular and emotional a victory as any.



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