



Jason Set To Have His Day

Queenslander Leads Aussies' US Open Charge

Oakmont is littered with tales of US Open heartbreak and heroics. PAUL PRENDERGAST looks back on history and wonders if Australian Jason Day can write another chapter in Oakmont's rich history by winning his second major.

Australian golf fans have much to look forward to with our chances for the 2016 US Open title as strong as they have been in our history. With Jason Day holding down the No1 ranking and Adam Scott

inside the top10, our stocks have never looked brighter.

Five Australians finished inside the top-20 at Chambers Bay last year, three inside the top five. Four of those players (Day, Scott, Cameron Smith and Geoff Ogilvy) are automatic exemptions again

this year, with two others - Mark Leishman and Steve Bowditch - also qualified ahead of the flurry of late sectional qualifying that will fill the remaining places in the field.

Momentum from those results at Chambers Bay is impossible to maintain over

PHOTOS: GETTY

**ONE LETTER
DEFINES DISTANCE**



**IF YOU'RE NOT PLAYING IT,
YOU'RE PLAYING AGAINST IT**

TaylorMade
M2
THE UNFAIRWAY



12 months but the confidence and belief gained from performing well in the toughest test of golf set each year, is certainly something our players can take to the first tee at historic Oakmont.

To say Oakmont is a golf course and club that is steeped in history is stating the obvious. Located to the east of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, the Henry Fownes creation from the early 1900s is famed for many reasons, not the least being the unique church pew bunkers which extend for 60 yards along the left of the third fairway.

Oakmont fast earned a reputation as a penal examination of golf under Fownes' and then son William's firm guidance through to the 1950s and hosted a plethora of major championships over the first half century of its existence.

Perhaps the most notable championship to be held at Oakmont in the modern era occurred as a result of the rise to prominence of Pennsylvania native Arnold Palmer in the late 1950s and early 60s, culminating in a classic US Open duel in 1962. It would shape the careers of Palmer and Nicklaus for the rest of their lives.

Back in 1962, Palmer was the game's No 1 player, an iconic figure

BOTH PALMER AND NICKLAUS HAVE BEEN NAMED HONORARY CO-CHAIRMEN OF THE 116TH OPEN AND WILL REUNITE ONCE MORE AT OAKMONT.

with sports fans the world over, and was the reigning Open Champion and Masters Tournament winner when he came 'home' to Oakmont to contest the US Open.

However, 'The King' was upstaged in a famous battle with rookie professional, 22-year old Nicklaus, in an 18-hole playoff - much to the chagrin of those in 'Arnie's Army' who were aggressively willing their man to a second Open title, two years after his first.

A rivalry between the two was formed that week at Oakmont which evolved over time into a deep mutual admiration and friendship. Professional golf has never looked back as a result.

With the golfing world having recently celebrated the 30-year anniversary of Nicklaus' final major in his 1986 charge to victory at Augusta,

Oakmont marks the return to the scene of Nicklaus' first major in that 1962 Open, which also doubled as his first win as a professional and the catalyst for his monumental career.

Both Palmer and Nicklaus have been named honorary co-chairmen of the 116th Open and will reunite once more at Oakmont come June.

"I have treasured Oakmont since I played there for the first time when I was just 12 years old," Palmer said at the announcement of their appointment,

"I certainly look forward to being back at Oakmont even though I won't be playing. It should be a great championship on the course as it now exists."

Oakmont was also the setting for Palmer's emotional Open farewell at the 1994 championship, won by Ernie Els, and has also heralded champions

of the calibre of Ben Hogan, Sam Snead, Gene Sarazen, Bobby Jones and Johnny Miller in major championships dating back to 1919.

Oakmont last played host to the U.S. Open in 2007 when Angel Cabrera outlasted Tiger Woods and Jim Furyk to take the championship with a score of five-over par 285.

In that year, Oakmont revealed a vast tree removal project that had taken place over the previous years. The change opened up the course considerably and restored Fownes' early vision for how the layout should look and play, that is in more of a classic links tradition.

Ahead of the 2016 Open, further tree removal has occurred allowing for a near uninterrupted aspect of every hole from the highest vantage points on the property.

Oakmont and the USGA have also embarked on a project to reduce rough height from the sides of fairways to bring the fairway bunkers more into play. It was noted in 2007 that stray tee shots were snagging in the secondary rough, rather than plunging into the strategically positioned hazards which present a far greater range of challenges.

However, the most significant change to the golf course that will



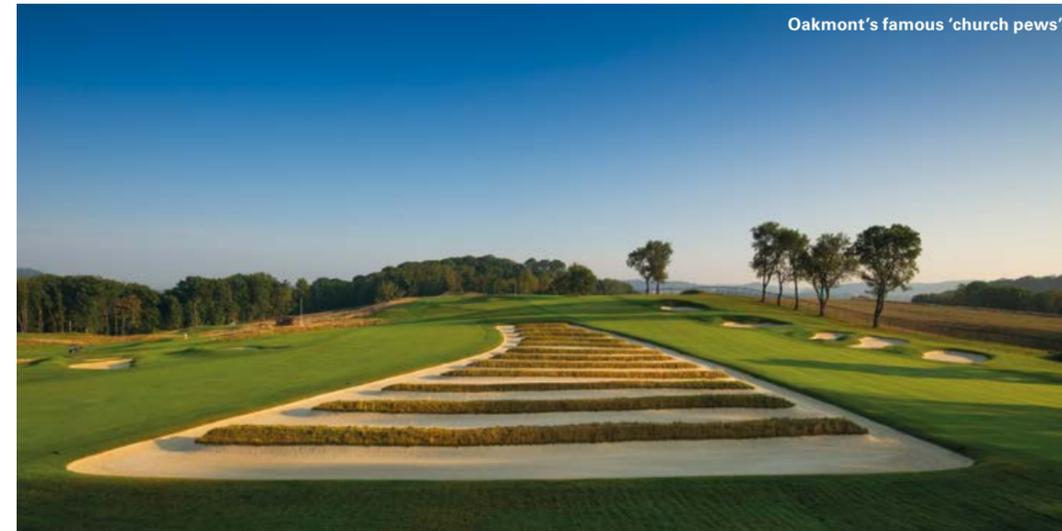
Lifelong rivalry: Nicklaus and Palmer at the 1962 US Open



'Hamming' it up: Jack and 'Arnie' pose for the press



Stern examination: the Oakmont clubhouse and 18th green



Oakmont's famous 'church pews'

affect the course playability ahead of this Open could be the complete restoration of the putting surfaces, making them firmer and faster.

Oakmont already has a deserved reputation for its fearsome greens, striking fear into the hearts of players over the years because of their frightening pace, tilt and undulation. Many of the putting surfaces have quite unique slopes and furrows, while a good number slope from front to back and are robustly guarded by penal bunkering.

Palmer once said of Oakmont: "You can hit 72 greens in regulation and still not come close to winning the championship", adding that if the right weather conditions permit, a

monumental test looms and Cabrera's five-over par tournament total will be more than competitive again this year.

Like many links courses and other classic tests of golf such as Royal Melbourne, Oakmont has no reliance on water hazards or anything overly contrived to preserve par. In fact, the layout retains the same hole routing today as when Henry Fownes constructed the course by a combination of manpower and a team of donkeys in 1903.

Downright difficult holes are in the majority at Oakmont. In 2007, there were two par-fives that could be extended to over 600 yards and a par-three that was a handful of yards shy of 300. However there will be

TOUR360 BOOST
LEGENDS
AREN'T BORN,
THEY'RE
CRAFTED.



THE BIGGER. THE BETTER.



LARGER HEAD.
LARGER SWEET SPOT.
MORE STABILITY.
= MORE PUTTS MADE
TaylorMade OS



opportunities for some 'risk reward' golf should the USGA allow it by the manner in which it sets up the course.

The 340 yard par-four second and the short, uphill par-four 17th are cases in point, with the 17th being reachable in the right conditions but at the same time defended by bunkering and rough. Only those who execute their shots correctly will be rewarded..

USGA Executive Director Mike Davis and his team have shown a willingness in recent years to set up their golf courses to accommodate and reward some degree of bold play, with no better illustration coming just last year in Sunday's final round by Jordan Spieth and others at Chambers Bay.

The design of the course also allowed for a wild fluctuation in tee locations on certain holes throughout the week but on Sunday in particular, the USGA set many pins in 'gettable' locations.

In their careful deliberations on course setup for this year, Davis and his team will not necessarily want a repeat of Johnny Miller's famous last round 63 to win the 1973 Open at Oakmont. But if players are able to remain patient during those periods when the course is raining blows as it inevitably will at a US Open, they'll be afforded a fighting chance to separate themselves from the field.

Despite criticisms levelled at Chambers Bay and the USGA's preparation of the golf course in 2015, there can be no doubting the cream rose to the top by the conclusion of the championship. Jordan Spieth was the pre-championship favourite after his record setting-performance at the Masters in April and duly prevailed over a chasing pack of the most accomplished of players, including Dustin Johnson, Louis Oosthuizen, Adam Scott and Rory McIlroy.

In that sense, the USGA can't be faulted in their efforts to set a test that would identify the best players at their national championship. Oakmont will be a return to a sense

of US Open normalcy for the USGA and the golfing public. But the nature and purpose of the examination will be no different.

Expect the best to once again find a way to rise to the top at Oakmont.

AUSSIES AT OAKMONT.

Jason Day

After a relatively slow start to the year, Day has returned to his winning ways from the back end of 2015 and has once again resumed the World No.1 mantle he shared back and forth with Jordan Spieth last year.

It goes without saying that Day's US Open chances are very strong based on current form, self-belief and his pedigree in past Opens. At his best, he's arguably the best driver of the ball in the game, a facet Oakmont will demand of players.

Who can forget Day's herculean performance last year at Chambers Bay following his dramatic physical collapse on his final hole of the second round, later diagnosed as benign positional vertigo?

To be able to come back Saturday and take a share of the lead during the

third round and into the fourth despite being clearly debilitated, before fading to finish tied for ninth, was staggering to behold, let alone comprehend.

If anyone deserves the title based on what they endured last year, it's Day.

Adam Scott

Like Day, Scott is in outstanding touch in 2016 and leads the PGA TOUR's FedEx Cup standings on the back of consistent performances highlighted by successive victories in March, including a World Golf Championship event.

His game is in considerably better shape than at the same point prior to his 2015 Open, where he rattled home with a six-under 64 on the final day at Chambers Bay to tie for fourth place behind Jordan Spieth.

A disappointing Masters (T42) might be just the spur he needs to kick his game up a notch or two to contend for his second major title. His vastly improved putting in 2016 will need to continue if he is to be a factor on the undulating surfaces at Oakmont.

Cameron Smith

An epic performance from a US Open qualifier and major



Always a chance:
Adam Scott

championship rookie in 2015, Smith set the platform for a potential long-term career on the PGA Tour with his tied fourth result at Chambers Bay, capped off by a spectacular tap-in eagle on the 72nd hole.

Smith impressed all by maintaining a calm beyond his years and remaining unflustered by the enormity of the stage and huge Seattle crowds. A few months later, Smith showed it was no fluke by backing up with a T25th finish at the USPGA in his first appearance in that event.

Oakmont is a completely different golf course but Smith's

sound, uncomplicated game and solid short game seem well suited to these sorts of tests.

Marc Leishman

One of the only Aussies to 'miss out' at Chambers Bay last year, missing the halfway cut primarily on the back of a stretch of holes when he was caught in the worst of the windy conditions that blew up on the first day.

Leishman showed he was not far off playing well and reinforced that a month later at St Andrews when he was within a whisker of becoming Australia's latest winner of the claret jug, losing a three-way playoff to Zach Johnson.

Has been a little up and down so far this season after an impressive victory in Sun City in December but, hopefully the fun will all begin for him over the northern summer.

Geoff Ogilvy

The 2006 champ has struggled for form and motivation at times in 2016 but there can be no doubting his interest will be piqued at a US Open and especially at this venue. I once asked Ogilvy which course he'd most like the chance to set up for a championship and his reply, was Oakmont.

Ogilvy performed very solidly at Chambers Bay with a number of sub-70 rounds on his way to a tie for 18th place, a little more than a handful of shots from the winner.

He takes inspiration from strategic tests of golf and shot making challenges and in Oakmont he will find all that he desires from those perspectives.

It's hard to be confident in his chances based on recent form but a repeat of last year's result would not surprise.

Steven Bowditch

The 32-year old Queenslander is a two-time winner on the PGA Tour now but will be making his maiden appearance at a US Open at Oakmont.

Left wrist tendonitis and several root canal surgeries at the heart of what has been a fairly dismal 2016 so far for Bowditch, which hit low points with four rounds in the 80s at the WGC Cadillac Championship and shooting 79-82 at The Masters.

Still, Bowditch is a resilient character who accepts that he's been a hot and cold golfer all his life. With some relief on the injury front, Bowditch has the game and putting touch to do well on Oakmont's treacherous putting surfaces. **📍**



SCAN PAGE TO WATCH
JASON DAY
COLLAPSE IN
2015 US OPEN
insiteapp.com.au

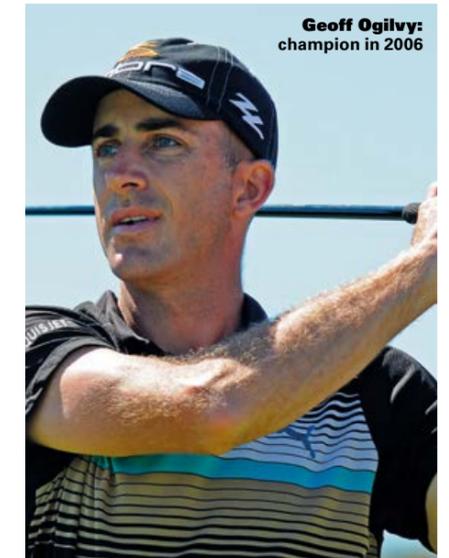
Jason Day: chasing his second major at Oakmont



Cameron Smith:
big effort last year



Marc Leishman:
missed cut at
Chambers Bay



Geoff Ogilvy:
champion in 2006

TaylorMade
TECHNOLOGY
IS OUR CRAFT.



ONE LETTER
DEFINES DISTANCE

