

All you need to know about The Open



Flashback to last year: Members of the BIGGA support team with champion Nick Price

THE OPEN CHAMPIONSHIP

Age: 123 and still growing!

Appearance: Totally cosmopolitan, wind-blown, interesting – yet at the same time retaining its traditional feel.

Where will you find it? At St Andrews this year. Only 14 courses have ever hosted an Open and that list has dwindled to a regular select band of eight. Of those, however, Carnoustie, venue in 1999, has not hosted the Championship since 1975 – when Tom Watson won his first Major.

Where was the first one played? At Prestwick, which hosted the first 12 Opens and 24 in all – St Andrews breaks its record when it hosts its 25th Open this year.

Why don't they still go back to Prestwick? It was discarded as a venue in 1925 because it was too small to cope with the large crowds and the course is also too short for the modern day player

Which courses are on the rota? St Andrews, Royal Lytham & St Annes, Royal Birkdale, Muirfield, Royal Troon, Royal St George's, Turnberry and Carnoustie.

Why always an established seaside course? Traditionally The Open is only played on a links course but if any new seaside course were to meet the criteria for the Championship – quality of course, good road network,

space for the extensive tented village – it would be considered by the Championship committee. Turnberry was the last course to join the rota in 1977.

Has it always been played on mainland Britain? No. In 1951 it was played over Portrush in County Antrim, Northern Ireland. It was won by Max Faulkner and remains the only time it has been played outside Scotland or England.

Who have been the most successful players? Well, Harry Vardon has the most victories with six between 1896 and 1914 while his two fellow members of the Great Triumverate have five wins each. Australian Peter Thomson also won five times in the 50s and 60s while Tom Watson has the best of the modern day records also with five wins between 1975 and 1983 although he was still in contention as recently as last year.

Anyone else made significant contributions? Tom Morris Jnr won the original prize, a belt, three times in a row in between 1868 and 1870 and kept it. He then won the claret jug, the trophy which is still played for today, in its first year. Legendary American Arnold Palmer, who plays his last Open this year, is credited with the modern day success of the Championship by making a point of playing in it and winning twice when he was the greatest player in the world and the top Americans had been reluctant to cross the Atlantic to play in it.

Greatest triumph in The Open: Tom Watson

winning the Dual in the Sun with Jack Nicklaus in 1977 at Turnberry when they both played at the top of their form and finished miles ahead of the rest of the field.

Greatest tragedy in The Open: Doug Sanders missing a short putt on the final green at St Andrews in 1970 and losing the play-off to Jack Nicklaus. The missed putt is possibly the one which has been shown most often on TV since. Sanders has recovered though. "I sometimes go a whole five minutes without thinking about it," he says.

Most likely to happen at The Open: The BBC camera will zoom in on a lone seagull and Peter Alliss will make a stream of "funny" remarks using a fake Cockney accent and rhyming slang.

Least likely to happen at The Open: The BBC will interrupt coverage of the Grand Prix to bring us an extra half hour of golf.

Most likely to be heard: "Wilbur, darling. I've just bought the most gorgeous sweater and it only cost me 250 English pounds. That's under a 100 dollars, right?"

Least likely to be heard: "No I'm afraid we don't take American Express."

Who is going to win this year's Open? Bernhard Langer.

What will be the winning lottery numbers on the Saturday of Open week? 4, 12, 23, 27, 37 and 41.