Open underway with Woods as favorite

Friday, 20 July 2012

LYTHAM: The 141st British Open got underway at Royal Lytham and St. Annes on Thursday with Tiger Woods intent on lifting a 15th major title to end a four year winless drought in golf’s crown jewel tournaments.
The 36-year-old American has three Open wins to his credit—at St Andrews in 2000 and 2005 and at Hoylake in 2006—and victory on Sunday at the famed Lancashire links course would see him back to the world top-ranking.

Woods has gone quietly about his business this week, saying that he is prepared to take everything the bunker-strewn course and the fickle English summer weather can throw at him in order to stay in contention for Sunday afternoon’s finale.
Tiger Woods AFP FILE PHOTO
It’s an atmosphere and a challenge he relishes after missing last year’s Open due to a fourth round of knee surgery.

“I know this is probably I think the smallest piece of property we have in The Open rotation. Not as many people, but it feels like they’re a little bit closer to you,” he said.

“Definitely not like St. Andrews, where they’re hundreds of yards away. It’s a very intimate atmosphere and I think that’s fantastic for us as players.”

A win for Woods would leave him three shy of the majors milestone mark of 18 set by Jack Nicklaus in 1986 and it would complete a clean sweep of golf’s four top tournaments for Americans for the first time since 2004.

That situation came about following wins for Keegan Bradley at last year’s US PGA Championship, Bubba Watson at the Masters and Webb Simpson at the US Open, a remarkable turnaround for US fortunes after going six majors without a win.

The competition for major glory at Royal Lytham will be ferocious, however, with the top three ranking golfers in the world all being British.

No.1 Luke Donald and No. 3 Lee Westwood are both long overdue a win in the majors, having failed to do so a combined 93 times in the past.

World No. 2 Rory McIlroy will be in his fifth British Open at the age of 23 and looking to rebound from his poor showing at Royal St George’s last year when he let his frustrations with the bad weather affect his play.

Fellow Ulsterman Darren Clarke will be trying to rediscover the zen-like attitude that brought him a huge upset win last year, while other former winners looking to mount a challenge include Padraig Harrington and Louis Oosthuizen.

Woods heads out at 9:42 a.m. (0842 GMT) in the company of Justin Rose and Sergio Garcia while Westwood will start two groups and 22 minutes ahead of them.

Donald has an afternoon start at 2:43 p.m. (1343 GMT) with Phil Mickelson and Geoff Ogilvy.

All will start at the 205-yard par-three first as they head out to tackle the 7,086-yard, par-70 course which last staged the Open 11 years ago, when David Duval won by three strokes.