



PRESS RELEASE

GOLF'S ORIGINAL CHAMPIONSHIP, THE OPEN, RETURNS TO ROYAL BIRKDALE

Geneva, Wednesday 5 July 2017 – The 146th playing of The Open, a championship Rolex has been Official Timekeeper of since 1981, returns to Royal Birkdale Golf Club. This renowned and challenging venue in Southport, England will welcome the world's elite golfers from 20-23 July.

Formed in 1860, The Open is golf's original championship and is staged annually on the finest links courses across the UK and Ireland. Each of the prestigious venues delivers consistent quality and a unique setting, designed to challenge the world's best golfers to lift the coveted Claret Jug – the iconic trophy awarded to the Champion Golfer of the Year, since 1873.

Royal Birkdale is no exception. The elite players to have been crowned Champion Golfer of the Year there include one of Rolex's first golfing Testimonees Arnold Palmer, in 1961, and fellow Testimonee Tom Watson, in 1983, when he won his unprecedented fifth Open title in nine years.

Seven of Rolex's Testimonees have won The Open, and some of them on multiple occasions, for a total tally of 18 titles. Among them are legends of the game, Gary Player and Jack Nicklaus – who, together with Arnold Palmer, are known as 'The Big Three'. Zimbabwean Nick Price also earned the Claret Jug in 1994, as did Tiger Woods, first in 2000, followed by back-to-back victories in 2005 and 2006; and Phil Mickelson in 2013.

Rolex has been present at The Open since 1981, when its iconic clocks first adorned the championship links and a relationship developed into an official partnership with the championship organizers and guardians of the global game, The R&A.

Commenting on the longevity of the relationship between Rolex and The Open and more widely with golf, Martin Slumbers, Chief Executive of The R&A, said: "Like The R&A, Rolex respects the traditions and heritage of the game, making it an ideal Patron of The Open, as well as more widely for the sport of golf."



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A YEAR OF ANNIVERSARIES

In addition to being the 50th anniversary of Rolex and Golf, 2017 marks 40 years since Tom Watson and Jack Nicklaus contested The Open 1977 in a what would come to be known as 'The Duel in the Sun'. Both players played masterfully over the course of that sunny week in Turnberry, displaying the same skill that enabled them to win a total of 26 Major titles between them. The first three rounds saw Watson and Nicklaus achieve identical under-par scores, relentless in their desire to win. In the fourth round, Watson ultimately scored one shot better than Nicklaus, to reach what was then a record score of 268 (12-under-par).

Following this hard-fought contest, Nicklaus showcased his incredible sportsmanship, throwing his arm around the newly-crowned champion's shoulder as they walked towards the scorer's tent, talking and laughing. Both golfers displayed the principles of etiquette, respect and sportsmanlike behaviour that epitomize Rolex Testimonees to this day.

Some thirty years later, Watson came close to yet another historic Open moment at Turnberry, when, in 2009, at the age of 59, he just missed becoming the oldest Major winner by 11 years. This age-defying effort furthered the link between Tom Watson and The Open, a championship he played in for over 40 years.

A RECENT DUEL TO REMEMBER

Last year at The Open, spectators across the globe witnessed a similar battle, this time featuring Rolex Testimonee Phil Mickelson, as the American chased his sixth Major win at a championship that had made him feel "like the complete player" following his 2013 victory. Having watched every second of the final 18 holes of The 145th Open, fellow Testimonee Tom Watson insisted the players involved had played "better golf than Jack and I did in 1977" but that "it was very similar, in that two men were fighting it out at the end". The past is proof that The Open offers a unique setting for some of the sport's greatest contests, where the world's best players – young or old, professional or not – have the chance to showcase their abilities on a global stage.



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THE ROLEX NEW GUARD

A new wave of young golfers keen to emulate past champions and fellow Testimonees Palmer, Player, Nicklaus, Watson, Woods and Mickelson, will aim to make their own mark on the game at Royal Birkdale, by winning the Claret Jug and, in doing so, inspiring future generations of golfers to follow in their wake.

Among these exceptionally talented individuals are the most recent Major winner, Brooks Koepka, as well as former world number one golfers and Major winners Jason Day and Jordan Spieth, both of whom were in the top five at St Andrews in The 144th Open. They are joined by Daniel Berger, Matthew Fitzpatrick, Thorbjørn Olesen and Jon Rahm, all eager to win their first Major.

Other rising stars in the Rolex family to contest The 146th Open are Rickie Fowler, Hideki Matsuyama, Thomas Pieters, Justin Thomas and Adam Scott. With top 10 finishes in the first two Majors of the year, they have shown a level of performance on par with the championship's standing.

SUPPORT AT EVERY LEVEL OF THE GAME

Supporting the development of golf at all levels is necessary to ensure the future of the sport. Rolex has always understood this, which is why the brand is behind many of the game's grassroots programmes and amateur events. In this spirit, The R&A extends Open invitations to winners of The Amateur Championship, U.S. Amateur Championship, European Amateur Championship and the Mark H McCormack Medal – awarded to the player ranked number one in the World Amateur Golf Ranking after the European Amateur Championship or U.S. Amateur Championship, whichever comes last.

A chance at The Open is also offered to the 45 players around the world through The Open Qualifying Series. The Tour events – held in nine countries on five different continents over a period of nine months – are open to both amateurs and professionals, guaranteeing precious opportunities for new talent to attain recognition through exceptional golfing performance.

ENDS



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NOTES TO EDITORS

ROLEX TESTIMONEE WINNERS OF THE OPEN

Phil Mickelson (2013)
Tiger Woods (2000, 2005, 2006)
Nick Price (1994)
Tom Watson (1975, 1977, 1980, 1982, 1983)
Jack Nicklaus (1966, 1970, 1978)
Gary Player (1959, 1968, 1974)
Arnold Palmer (1961, 1962)

ROLEX TESTIMONEES QUALIFYING FOR THE 146TH OPEN (AS OF 5 JULY)

Daniel Berger
Paul Casey
Jason Day
Matthew Fitzpatrick
Rickie Fowler
Martin Kaymer
Brooks Koepka
Hideki Matsuyama
Phil Mickelson
Thorbjørn Olesen
Thomas Pieters
Jon Rahm
Adam Scott
Jordan Spieth
Steve Stricker
Justin Thomas



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ABOUT ROLEX

Leading brand of the Swiss watch industry, Rolex, headquartered in Geneva, enjoys an unrivalled reputation for quality and expertise the world over. Its Oyster and Cellini watches, all certified as Superlative Chronometers for their precision, performance and reliability, are symbols of excellence, elegance and prestige. Founded by Hans Wilsdorf in 1905, the brand pioneered the development of the wristwatch and is at the origin of numerous major watchmaking innovations, such as the Oyster, the first waterproof wristwatch, launched in 1926, and the Perpetual rotor self-winding mechanism invented in 1931. Rolex has registered over 400 patents in the course of its history. A truly integrated and independent manufacturing company, Rolex designs, develops and produces in-house all the essential components of its watches, from the casting of the gold alloys to the machining, crafting, assembly and finishing of the movement, case, dial and bracelet. Rolex is also actively involved in supporting the arts, sports, exploration, the spirit of enterprise, and the environment through a broad palette of sponsoring activities, as well as philanthropic programmes.

OFFICIAL WEBSITE

www.rolex.com

ROLEX GOLF PRESS ROOM

<https://pressroom.rolex.com/en/sports-and-culture/partnership-activities/rolex-and-golf.html>

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