

SPIETH INTENT ON HAVING A BIT OF FUN

ST. ANDREWS: Jordan Spieth was practicing a shot he hopes he won't need this week, banging a few wedges off the wall on the famous Road Hole in the fading sun at this, the birthplace of golf.

Dead tired after winning yet again in Illinois before flying all night to get here for what could be a defining moment in golf, Spieth was still intent on having a bit of fun.

"Who wants this?" he yelled out, signing a ball and then tossing it left-handed toward the 50 or so fans still around Monday night.

It caused a bit of a frenzy, but just for a moment. There weren't many fans around, and those who were seemed as if they were still trying to figure out this young Texan who has the golf world buzzing.

They're not alone. Those in a sport that has been fixated for the better part of two decades on Tiger Woods are still trying to decipher Spieth themselves.

What they do know is that he's 21, and in the midst of greatest stretch of golf anyone has seen since Woods burst on the scene and transformed the sleepy game into must-see TV. Forget the fact that part of the Woods mystique was that he was a rare player of color in a mostly lily-white game. Woods caused more of a stir by doing other things no one had ever seen before, thrilling fans with his booming drives and winning with clutch putts punctuated by his signature fist pump.

Spieth is no Tiger Woods. Doesn't try to be, though they do share the same habit of talking angrily to themselves during a round.

He doesn't overwhelm a crowd with his presence, doesn't intimidate other players while wearing a red shirt on Sunday. In a game dominated by Woods and the power hitters who followed, he's not even in the same neighborhood as the big boys with a driver in his hand. What Spieth does do is win. This year he's done it on the biggest stages in golf, grabbing a green jacket at the Masters and following it with a win a few weeks back at the U.S. Open. Add in a British Open and PGA Championship title, and he would be the first player to win the Grand Slam in a calendar year.

He largely does it on his own terms, taking the title at the John Deere Classic on Sunday when others suggested he might be better served by leaving early for Scotland to discover the many vagaries of the oldest course in

golf. But Spieth has a confidence that borders on swagger and, much like Woods in his prime, a belief that his best is better than yours no matter where you tee it up.

"He beats you properly," former U.S. Open champion Geoff Ogilvy said. "He beats you with better golf. He doesn't beat you because he hits it further. Tiger's intimidation was that he always did something amazing. Jordan - don't get me wrong, his body of work is amazing - but he doesn't beat you with a crazy par, or a crazy chip-in from the back of the 14th at Muirfield (Village). He just beats you because he's better." Just how much better Spieth really is, only time will tell. His career is in its infancy still, and it's way too early to crown him as the next great player, way too soon to begin talking about whether he - and not Woods - will be the one who finally takes down the record of 18 major titles held by Jack Nicklaus.

Besides, despite the struggles of Woods in recent times, there's a reasonable chance he's still got enough golf in him at age 39 to finally get past the 14th major he won at the U.S. Open way back in 2008. "I'm still young," Woods said Tuesday. "I know some of you guys think I'm buried and done, but I'm still right here in front of you."

The tables, though, have turned. While others over the years tried unsuccessfully to stake their claim as Woods' major rival, it is now Woods who tries to get back in the conversation with Spieth, Rory McIlroy and other young players who have now firmly established themselves as the future of golf.

Almost shockingly, Woods has been reduced to almost an afterthought in the biggest tournaments. Playing by himself Monday night behind Spieth on a nearly deserted course, he was largely ignored by the handful of fans who were still hanging around. Up ahead, Spieth was finished and ready to find the nearest bed. He signed a few autographs and was heading for the exit when asked whether he was too tired to win his third straight major.

"No, I feel just fine," Spieth said. "It's a beautiful spot here." It was, indeed, especially with the sun setting over the 18th green and the town of St. Andrews behind. But even more beautiful for many in golf would be the sight of Spieth holding the claret jug that goes to the winner on Sunday. — AP



ST. ANDREWS: United States' Billy Horschel plays out of a bunker on hole 17 as United States' Mark Calcavecchia (back right) looks on during a practice round at the British Open Golf Championship. — AP

ST ANDREWS BRACED FOR JORDAN V HISTORY

LONDON: Forget about Tiger v Phil or Rory v Ricky. With respect to Messrs Woods, Mickelson, McIlroy and Fowler, the 144th British Open that begins Thursday at St. Andrews in Scotland is about Jordan v History.

Jordan as in Spieth. If the 21-year-old American phenomenon lifts the trophy, he will become the first winner of golf's first three major tournaments of the year—the Masters, the U.S. Open and the British Open—since Ben Hogan in 1953. If he also wins the PGA tournament next month in Wisconsin, Spieth will stand alone as the only man to win all four professional majors in one year, golf's fabled grand slam.

Until two weeks ago the Open, as it is referred to in Britain, promised the added allure of a Rory McIlroy-Spieth showdown.

McIlroy, 26, won the last two majors of 2014 before Spieth took the first two of 2015. But McIlroy injured his ankle playing soccer with friends and withdrew from the British Open. (Here's guessing he takes a break from soccer for, say, 25 years.)

But Jordan v History is good enough, because Britain's Open has dashed grand slam hopes before. In 1972 Jack Nicklaus won the Masters and U.S. Open, only to succumb in the British Open to Lee Trevino's miracle chip-in on the penultimate hole.

It was 30 years until anybody else started the British Open with the first two legs of the grand slam in their bag. In 2002 Tiger Woods arrived at Muirfield with a champion's momentum, but wind and rain struck the course just before his third-round tee time and he slumped to a horrible 81. "I put myself right there in contention after two rounds," Woods reminisced on

Tuesday. "Just happened to catch it (the weather) at the wrong time." In 2000-2001 Woods held all four major titles at once, but he did not win them in the same year. As for Spieth, Woods says: "Obviously he's in great form. It's just a matter of going out there and executing his game plan."

There are intriguing subplots surrounding Spieth's bid for golf immortality. One is the possible emergence of an unlikely winner like Louis Oosthuizen. Five years ago the then-unheralded South African won the last Open played at St. Andrews. This year he has played poorly in his two most recent tournaments but in last month's US Open, Oosthuizen finished tied for second, just one stroke behind Spieth.

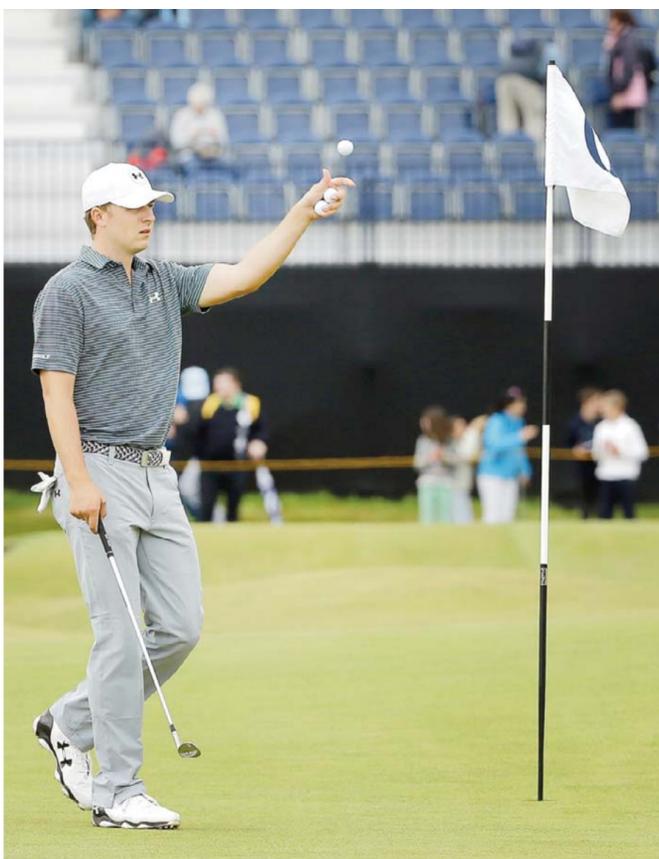
Oosthuizen carded 66-66-67 in the final three rounds on a tough links course (referring to mogul-marked ground that links land and sea) at Chambers Bay in Washington State. Had his opening round been a mediocre 75 instead of a woeful 77, Oosthuizen would have beaten Spieth. British bookies put the betting odds on Oosthuizen this week at 20-to-25 to one. Spieth is the favorite at five-or-six to one.

Oosthuizen won the 2010 Open by seven shots. He lost the 2012 Masters in a playoff. With an affinity for St. Andrews, also a links course, and a record of contending in majors, Oosthuizen is a credible challenger this year. "I feel very confident going into the week, and I just need to hit the shots I want off the tee so I put myself in good positions," Oosthuizen told reporters Tuesday. An improbable subplot would be a Battle of Generations between Spieth and one of golf's "old guns." Maybe Mickelson, 45, winner of the 2013 Open.

Or even the 39-year-old Woods, who won the Open at St. Andrews in 2000 and 2005 but now is struggling like a weekend duffer. Far-fetched? Absolutely. But American Tom Watson, a five-times Open winner who was long past his prime, was one shot away from winning the title before losing in a playoff in 2009, at age 59. Watson will play the Open for the last time this year — 40 years after winning on his debut at Carnoustie-doubtless to cheers of nostalgia. A Sunday duel between Woods or Mickelson and Spieth would rival the now-impossible Spieth-McIlroy showdown for drama. More likely would be a shootout between Spieth and another young gun, 26-year-old American Ricky Fowler. That would pit logic v loyalty. Last week Fowler did the logical thing to prepare for the Open. He flew to Scotland, giving himself time to adjust to the time difference. He played in the Scottish Open on a links course in Gullane, nearly two hours from St. Andrews, and he won the tournament.

Spieth also won last week, but in the John Deere Classic in northwest Illinois, near the Mississippi River, on a wooded parkland course, a world away and six time zones behind St. Andrews. Spieth did not arrive in Scotland until Monday. It does not seem logical, but Spieth is loyal to the Deere. In 2012 the tournament gave him a special exemption to enter.

A year later he won it to secure his first professional victory. Given the vagaries of golf and the Scottish weather, anything can happen at the Open. But if Fowler does win, Spieth's loyalty to the Deere will be second-guessed until next year's Open. And well beyond. — Reuters



ST. ANDREWS: United States' Jordan Spieth tosses the ball on the fourth green during a practice round at the British Open Golf Championship. — AP

ST HELENS FULLBACK LOOKING TO BE A WINNER

LEEDS: Full-back has been a cursed position for St Helens this season but after a dream debut Adam Quinlan is confident he is the man to finally nail down the No.1 jersey.

The 22-year-old joined Saints at the end of last month from Parramatta Eels in the NRL and scored a hat-trick of tries on debut last weekend in their 35-34 victory over Huddersfield Giants.

Shannon McDonnell last month snapped his Achilles and with Jonny Lomax and Tommy Makinson out with long-term injuries and Paul Wellens and Lance Hohaia now retired, the cupboard is looking bare at full-back. But in Quinlan - who has signed with the defending Super League champions until the end of the season - Keiron Cunningham hopes he has finally found his man with the play-offs approaching. With Warrington Wolves up next in the penultimate round of games before the Super 8s split, the youngster is desperate to prove his worth.

"Yeah you could say it was a dream debut," he said. "The ball just bounced my way, I didn't really expect that coming into the game."

"As everyone knows, the club has had a lot of injuries. They came and asked me if I wanted to come over for the rest of the season and I looked at the opportunity that was there and it was pretty much a no-brainer. "It all happened pretty quickly, I was here within a week and playing, which was great."

"There have been quite a few full-backs,

but hopefully I will be the last one and there are no more injuries. "It will be a real tough game, we know that, but it's exciting. Play-offs start this week, we want to get some momentum to take into them."

Elsewhere table-toppers Leeds will look to bounce back from defeat to Wigan Warriors last time out when they face Widnes Vikings.

In Adam Cuthbertson the Rhinos have a prop who is breaking the mould, according to Huddersfield Giants hooker Luke Robinson.

The 30-year-old broke the record for offloads in a single Super League season with ten against Wigan last time out, taking him to 97 in 2015. "He's a scrum half in a prop's body," said Robinson. "He does the lot - he can kick, offloads and has a great pre-line pass. He's fitted into their system perfectly. "Adam's difficult to play against because he's such a big bloke but he's got all the skill sets to go with it." Elsewhere Hull KR in ninth meet Hull FC in eighth in what is sure to be a fierce local derby that will go a long way to deciding the Super 8s. But the Rovers might be without the influential Albert Kelly for the clash, after an injury sustained in defeat to Castleford last time out, and coach Chris Chester is keeping his fingers crossed.

"Albert played on one leg in that second half (at Salford). We're hoping it's just a medial strain and it's nothing too serious," Chester said. "Albert wears his heart on his sleeve. I thought he played very well and we needed another 16 Albert Kellys out there." — AFP

NINE POKER PLAYERS LEFT, ONE WILL WIN \$7.7 MILLION

LAS VEGAS: For nine poker players, the dream is just beginning after outlasting 6,411 others in days of near marathon-length games to advance to the final table of the World Series of Poker's no-limit Texas Hold'em main event in November.

Alex Turyansky of Germany was the last player eliminated shortly before 1:30 a.m. Wednesday when he put the last of his chips on the line with an ace, king but faced a pair of queens held by chip-leader Joe McKeehen. That left the final nine players guaranteed at least \$1 million each in winnings and a bid to return to the World Series of Poker's no-limit Texas Hold'em main event in November for a chance at \$7.7 million.

McKeehen leads far and away in chips with 64.1 million. Zvi Stern, 36, of Israel is in second with 29.8 million. Behind him, 61-year-old Neil Blumenfeld of San Francisco, Max Steinberg of California, Thomas Cannuli and Joshua Beckley of New Jersey, Patrick Chan of New York and Federico Buttroni of Italy will all surround the table one last time November 8-9.

The favorite among fans watching in person and at home to win the World Series of Poker's ultimate championship fell short.

Poker pro Daniel Negreanu, a six-time bracelet winner nicknamed "Kid Poker," who has gotten close but never close enough to making the final table, ended his run in 11th place, the same place he landed in 2001 when he tried against a field of 613 entries. Negreanu gambled the last of his chips on an ace, four and appeared to be in the clear when chip-leader Joe McKeehen called showing a jack, three. But McKeehen slowly but surely amassed a straight as the cards on the table were flipped one by one. It was the last one, a queen, that did Negreanu in, sending him tumbling to the floor with his hands covering his face.

Ten players remain in the running for the tournament's top prize. Marathon sessions of bluffing, betting and reading opponents for any hints at their cards will soon be over at the World Series of Poker main event, when the last nine players claim at least \$1 million each and a spot at the final table in November. Shortly after midnight, the field



LAS VEGAS: Joseph McKeehen smiles after winning a pot at the World Series of Poker main event on Tuesday. — AP

shrank to a single table with players representing the United States, Germany, Belgium, Israel and Italy. McKeehen of Pennsylvania had become the runaway chip leader of the World Series of Poker no-limit Texas Hold'em main event amassing nearly 55 million in chips before knocking out Negreanu. That amount was more than twice the chips that five other players at his table, combined, had stacked in front of them.

The battle started with 6,420 players each paying \$10,000 to enter. After seven sessions of gameplay spread over 10 days, the players left standing in the no-limit Texas Hold'em tournament Tuesday night or yesterday will each be paid just over \$1 million in ninth-place money, with a chance for more at the final table that starts Nov. 8 at the Rio All-Suite Hotel & Casino in Las Vegas.

The winner will claim \$7.7 million and the

event's coveted gold bracelet, joining poker legends like Doyle Brunson, Phil Hellmuth and Johnny Chan as series champions.

The World Series of Poker has been crowning a champion since 1970, when it was by invite-only at Binion's Horseshoe and the players voted on the ultimate winner. Since then, only four players have won the main event more than once.

The series started May 27 and includes 68 events culminating with the main event. The main event had fewer entries than last year. A guaranteed \$10 million top prize was swapped for payouts to the top 1,000 finishers instead, after players pushed organizers to make the change. The series attracted more than 100,000 entries for the first time, awarding \$210.3 million in prize money, boosted largely by this year's Colossus event that cost \$565 to enter and attracted 22,374 entries. — AP

ALL BLACKS UNLEASH LINEBREAKERS

CHRISTCHURCH: The All Blacks pack has another chance to shake out the cobwebs while a potentially game-breaking combination will be blooded in mid-field when New Zealand begin their Rugby Championship campaign against Argentina tomorrow. Mindful the World Cup opener against the Pumas at Wembley Stadium is less than two months away, coach Steve Hansen has stuck with close to his best pack to take on the combative visiting forwards at Rugby League Park in Christchurch.

It is the backbone, however, that creates the most interest with Ma'a Nonu, arguably in the form of his life at inside centre, taking the number 13 shirt to allow code-swapper Sonny Bill Williams to slot in beside him. They will provide an immense punch in the mid-field to counteract Argentina's rushing defence, with Nonu's straight running likely to benefit from his partner's ability to offload in the tackle.

Attention will also be focused on debutant winger Waisake Naholo, who has impressed with a storming Super Rugby season and could be a trump card in the World Cup if he can step up to test level. Opponents of the world champions in England might be more than a little concerned at having to face the bulk and pace of Naholo and the prolific Julian Savea out wide.

Israel Dagg has been retained at fullback despite being one of the many players who looked rusty last week in stifling conditions in Samoa, where the All Blacks needed flyhalf Dan Carter's place-kicking to get them home 25-16. Carter and captain Richie McCaw will be playing their final tests in front of their home Canterbury crowd, although there will be precious little sentiment if the All Blacks manage to lose their first game to the Pumas in their 21st encounter.

Argentina will have taken heart from New Zealand's sloppy performance at the breakdown

against Samoa and experienced loose forwards Juan Martin Fernandez Lobbe and Juan Manuel Leguizamón are determined to provide another stern test tomorrow. "We have put a massive amount of detail into the breakdown," Lobbe told reporters in Christchurch this week. "Last year, we got the highest percentage of quick ball. Everyone talks that in international rugby, you have to have rucks cleared between 0 and 3 seconds. We managed to get a lot of it last year. For us, it's very important." Lobbe felt his side were far better than they were when he led them in their maiden Rugby Championship campaign three years ago.

"We try to have a lot more than just the passion and the energy," he added. "We are trying to be well-controlled and play our game plan. We are trying to play a lot with the ball, be aggressive on defence and attack. We are making little steps forward." — Reuters