

Survey Says!

By: Nathan Crace Date: March 27, 2007

The one thing (okay, so there are more than one) I have tried to avoid in this column for the past five years is predictions en masse. Not putting together a list of who will win each of the four majors for the year. You never know who will be peaking at the right time before each major and many things can happen in the course of a year to change that fact. Sire, I have called some winners in the month before a major—Mickelson's first green jacket and Furyk's U.S. Open win, most notably. But it simply does not make sense to try and call all four winners in March when the PGA is still five months away. That being said, two of my editors have just emailed me to let me know they need my column tonight and, since it is almost midnight, I have polished off the old crystal ball. Here we go!

The 2007 Masters: I try not to go with the obvious—unless it's too obvious—and that would be Tiger for the Masters. But not for the reason many of you may think. I actually like Henrik Stenson for the Masters this year; however, there is a monkey wrench in the plan: the impending birth of Tiger's first child. If he is half as attentive a father to his child and Earl was to young Eldrick, Tiger will not take a chance on missing the birth of his first born—due in the summer of 2007. That potentially puts the US Open, the British, and the PGA Championship "Tigerless" for the first time in a l-o-n-g time, depending on when the baby comes and how much time he plans on taking off for maternity leave. This being said, I think Tiger will be all the more motivated to get his major of the year in early and wrap up yet another green jacket at Augusta this year before Tiger, Jr. makes his (or her) appearance.

So that brings us to the US Open in June. I like Charles Howell III for this one, but I also like him for the Players' Championship to now be played in May. I just don't think the golf gods will let him win both in one year. So I like Phil Mickelson to redeem himself from last year's debacle. He's slimmer, smarter, and ready to avenge himself. And I think Oakmont is a good track for him. Look for Lefty's winning ways to return in the majors this summer in Pennsylvania.

Ah, the Open Championship—or as we on this side of the pone call it, the British Open. For the rest of the golfing world it is THE Open. And that brings me back to Henrik Stenson. I don't really know why, other than he can hit it a long way, hit it very high, and has a really strong short game. Whoever wants to walk away from Carnoustie with the Claret Jug this year will need all of that and more and the way Stenson has been playing thus far, why not pick him? After all, this is the major that has brought us first time winners Ben Curtis, Todd Hamilton, and Paul Lawrie and it could be Henrik's time to break through. OF course, it also brought us the painful mental dismemberment of Jean Van De Velde. That even hurts to think about still today.

Finally, the PGA Championship. This year the course is Southern Hills in Tulsa, Oklahoma. It would be easy to say Vijay Singh or Ernie Els, but I'm looking for someone with more accuracy than length off the tee. As much as I would love to see Fred Funk walk away from 2007 with a Major, I'm inclined to believe that it will more likely be in the senior set than on the regular tour. So for the PGA, I like Justin Leonard....yes, Justin Leonard. You heard it here first. He has the accuracy on a course where it will be a premium and his Texas pedigree gives him the repertoire of shots the winner will need to cheat the wind of Oklahoma in August.

We have months to figure some of this out and Tiger may only lay out one major (or none) and skew my data. But due to publishing deadline and the time needed to actually print and ship the magazines, most of you will not see this column until the Masters is either underway or finished. So feel free to give me a hard time if Tiger does not win. If not, I just hope Stenson will be wearing his first green jacket so I don't look like a total fool.