



THE BRITISH OPEN BY THE NUMBERS

- The Open Championship has had winners from 11 different countries—the U.S., South Africa, Northern Ireland, Ireland, Scotland, Zimbabwe, Australia, England, Spain, Argentina and France. That's more than any other tournament.
- 27 countries were represented among the 156 players at the 2013 Open.
- The Royal & Ancient Golf Club of St. Andrews, which organizes the Open Championship, hosts 14 qualifying events in nine countries on five continents to give players worldwide the chance to qualify for golf's oldest tournament.

THE CHAMPIONS SERIES:

GLOBAL STRATEGY A WINNER FOR ELS

A well-rounded game and stable approach will come in handy during the Open Championship at Royal Liverpool in Hoylake, England. A certain South African has plenty of both—and two Claret Jugs at home to prove it

When the world's elite golfers gather at Royal Liverpool in July to compete in the Open Championship, they'll be vying for a title—Champion Golfer of the Year—that acknowledges no borders. The British Open, as Americans refer to it, was first played in 1860 and is the de facto world championship of golf, a tournament that historically attracts more international players than any of golf's other major championships. The sun never sets on the Open Championship field.

South African legend Gary Player, a three-time Open champion, was the game's first true globetrotting star. His affable countryman, Ernie Els, nicknamed "the Big Easy," has followed in Player's jet stream, taking his effortlessly powerful swing from continent to continent, testing and showcasing his game in all conditions and against all comers. Els, a Team RBC

member, has built a legendary career by constantly seeking new opportunities to perform at the highest level.

Els captured his first Open Championship at Muirfield in 2002. He was already a star, with the 1994 and 1997 U.S. Open titles to his name, but the tournament's Claret Jug rarely comes easily, and Els triumphed in a tense four-man playoff.

More than a dozen global victories followed for Els in the next decade. Despite several other close calls post-Muirfield, however, more major titles remained elusive. Winning majors often requires considerable patience and resilience, qualities that were especially tested in 2004, when Els lost in a playoff for the Open Championship to unheralded American Todd Hamilton at Royal Troon.

By the start of the 2012 Open Championship, the popular South African star

was 42, and a World Golf Hall of Fame inductee with diverse pursuits, including charitable efforts for autism awareness and underprivileged youth; golf course design; winemaking—and some, including Els himself, wondered whether, his "window had shut." But renewed commitment to practice and a strong showing at the 2012 U.S. Open restored his confidence.

"I felt more in control of my emotions," says Els. "I felt my game could stand up to the pressure again. That was a result of all the work we put in up to that point."

The firm, wind-blown seaside links that host the Open Championships are the golf equivalent of turbulent markets—they require the perspective, creativity and calmness that come with experience. With more than two decades of winning golf to call upon, Els was ready to seize the moment when it again came.

While many fans remember that Adam Scott bogeyed the last four holes, it was the Big Easy's sterling 68-68 weekend finish, including a 4-under-par 32 on his final nine holes, that truly grabbed the title. It was vintage Els, and it saw him become just the sixth man with at least two Open and U.S. Open titles.

"People were hitting me low, saying I was done, that I should hang it up," Els says. "It's amazing how this game and life reward you if you can just stay with it." •

COMING IN THE OCTOBER ISSUE: A special look at the 2014 Ryder Cup.

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ERNE ELS – TEAM RBC

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