

Entering its fourth decade, Glen Abbey holds golf's spotlight



THE ONCE
AND FUTURE
HOME OF THE
RBC
CANADIAN
OPEN

Mike Weir drew thousands around the Abbey's 18th hole during the 2004 Open when he finished second to V.J. Singh.

Photo courtesy of the RCGA

Ian Cruickshank

AS DIFFICULT AS IT MAY be to believe today, there was a thick haze of doubt and uncertainty hovering over the brand-new Glen Abbey Golf Club when Jack Nicklaus, iconic golfer turned course architect, hit the opening drive in June 1977.

It was his first solo design, and nobody was sure if the game's greatest player could make the cut as a golf course designer. Plus, the Abbey was to be the country's first stadium course, a radically new concept back then, built specifically to host the PGA Tour's Canadian Open and its crowds for one week each season, while serving the rest of the time as a public layout suitable for recreational golfers.

The course, like the Open itself, would be run by the Royal Canadian Golf Association, which had its headquarters on the Glen Abbey property.

In the intervening three decades, Glen Abbey has answered all those questions definitely, silencing the critics and doubters. Nicklaus Design is credited with more than 300 top-ranked courses around the globe.

And Glen Abbey is one of Canada's most celebrated layouts, known across the country and around the globe as the home of the Open, the site of some of golf's greatest moments.

This summer, from July 21 to 27, the RBC Canadian Open will return to Glen Abbey for the 24th time.

"It's an honour for ClubLink and Glen Abbey to host not only the 2008, but also the 2009, RBC Canadian Opens," says Charles Lorimer, Vice-President of Sales and Marketing for ClubLink Corp., which bought Glen Abbey from the RCGA in 1999.

"We have great respect for the RCGA and look forward to working with them to make the Open bigger and better than ever."



RCGA/Canadian Golf Hall of Fame Archive

After capturing the 1979 Open, Lee Trevino bends the ear of runner-up Ben Crenshaw. Trevino also won the 1977 event—the first Open held at the Abbey.



RCGA/Canadian Golf Hall of Fame Archive

Tiger Woods shares a light moment with caddy Steve Williams during the 2000 Open remembered for his spectacular shot from a fairway bunker on 18.

Canadian Open fields at Glen Abbey have featured a Who's Who of golf. The list of immortals who have challenged the course and come away empty-handed includes Ernie Els, Nick Faldo, Seve Ballesteros, Tom Watson, Johnny Miller, Arnold Palmer and Nicklaus. In total, Nicklaus would post seven runner-up finishes in our Open, three of them at Glen Abbey.

The lineup of champions is just as impressive. The inaugural Abbey winner was Lee Trevino, who won again in 1979 using a putter he bought from a fan in the Glen Abbey gallery for \$75.

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Greg Norman celebrates his 1992 victory, his second Open championship at the Abbey. He also won in 1984.

Greg Norman, Nick Price, Curtis Strange and Bruce Lietzke all captured multiple titles at Glen Abbey, with single wins going to such major champs as Hal Sutton, Steve Jones and Mark O'Meara, who designed Grandview Golf Club in Huntsville.

And, of course, Tiger created his own mythology at Glen Abbey. He first touched down in Toronto in 1996 courtesy of a sponsor's exemption, just as Hurricane Fran was working her way up the Eastern Seaboard.

It was only his second event as a pro and he made the gallery weak in the knees with his 350-yard drives and his mercurial game—his opening round included four birdies, an eagle, two bogeys and a double bogey. He finished in a tie for 11th.

By 2000, Tiger was playing in the golfing version of a state of grace. But Kiwi journeyman Grant Waite had his own epiphany at Glen Abbey, doggedly tailing Tiger throughout the tournament.

On the Open's final hole, it looked like Wood's coronation would be derailed when he dumped his drive into a fairway bunker. With 50,000 fans looking on, Woods blasted a 6-iron 216 yards over the water to within 18 feet of the hole. The birdie putt gave him a 65, the tournament by a single stroke, and golf's Triple Crown (the Open titles of Canada, the U.S., and Britain in the same season).

In 2004, the eyes of the golf world were again focused on the Abbey when Mike Weir started the fourth round of the Open with a three-stroke lead on the field. It looked like he was ready to break the curse and become the first native-born Canadian to capture the title in 90 years. However, he fell into a tie with close friend Vijay Singh, who went on to defeat Weir on the third playoff hole.

Glen Abbey ranked as one of the PGA Tour's toughest layouts in 2004; just ask Singh, who triple bogeyed the 11th hole twice, a record by a player who went on to win the tournament.

Grant Holcomb, the club's Director of Operations, expects the course will be even more challenging this summer.

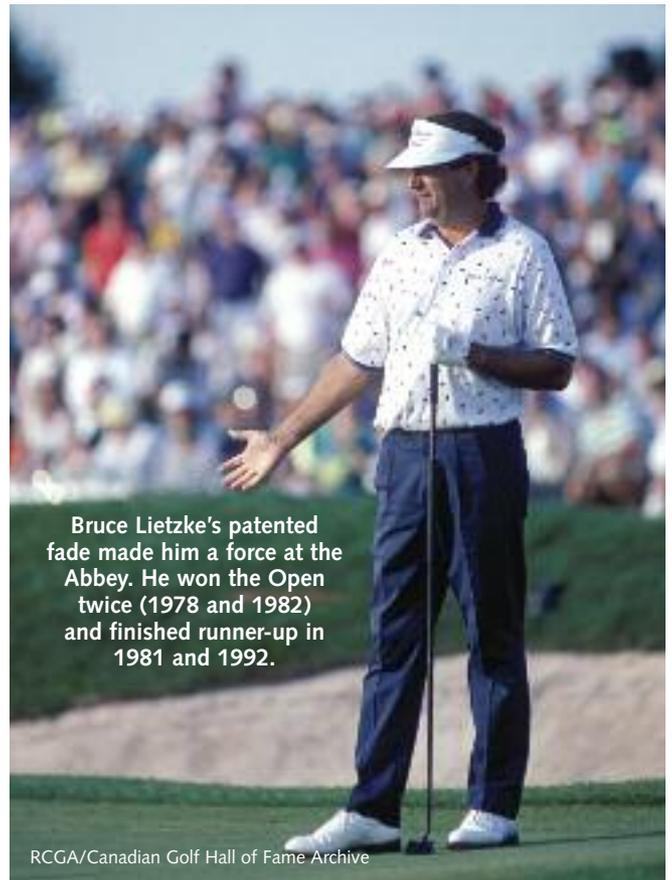
"We've made some recent changes, like adding new trees in the landing area at the ninth hole, putting in a new bunker in front of the 16th green and substantially narrowing the fairways at the fourth, 10th and 11th holes," says Holcomb, with a devilish grin.

"What's really neat is that for the next two years, all of our Members and the public will get the chance to play a course that is set up for a PGA event, for our national Open. What a great experience."

No doubt.

For information on tickets, visit www.rcga.org

Ian Cruickshank is a freelance golf and travel writer based in Toronto.



Bruce Lietzke's patented fade made him a force at the Abbey. He won the Open twice (1978 and 1982) and finished runner-up in 1981 and 1992.



Jack Nicklaus, designer of Glen Abbey, waits his turn with Johnny Miller during the 1983 Open. Miller finished second to John Cook.