

## **Masters Preview**

**-Joel Katz**

This Thursday, the greatest event in golf returns again. The best golfers in the world gather at Augusta National in Georgia to fight for the most prized possession in professional golf: the green jacket. Speaking of green jackets, four-time winner Tiger Woods is in the field looking for a win. Woods hasn't won at Augusta since 2005, and his last victory at a major was his dramatic win over Rocco Mediate in the 2008 U.S. Open. However, Woods seems to have returned to form after his victory two weeks ago at the Bay Hill Invitational.

Besides Tiger, there are several other storylines waiting to play themselves out during this year's Masters. Can Rory McIlroy, golf's youngest sensation, recover from last year's collapse? McIlroy has commanded attention in the sport after racking up wins and top five finishes over the past year. Some people are calling him the Tiger of a new generation.

Other golfers in this year's field include three-time Masters champion Phil Mickelson, and the number one ranked player in the world, Luke Donald. Mickelson has proven his excellence at Augusta, and fans would be surprised not to see him in contention this year. Donald has been somewhat overlooked for a world's number one golfer, but has shown he is a force to be reckoned with. With strong finishes early in the year, including a win the WGC-Accenture Match Play, he has earned the right to his number one ranking.

But the most compelling player in this tournament has to be Tiger Woods, hands down. Plagued by injury and engulfed in scandal, Woods has really not been himself since he was still winning tournaments in 2008 and 2009. And at 36 years old, it is a simple fact that Woods' age is a factor in making a possible return to dominance much more difficult. Some critics say that Tiger's window for breaking Jack Nicklaus' record of 18 Major victories has already passed. Woods currently has 14 of them under his belt and you can be sure that he is dying to have another.

To put these golfers' chances of winning in a different perspective, Vegas has Woods as the favorite with 4-1 odds. Next is Rory McIlroy at 5-1, followed by Mickelson hovering around 10-1. There is definitely substance to the hype surrounding Woods and McIlroy, as they are both extremely talented players with the ability to make an outstanding shot at any moment. Tiger's win heading into the Masters, and just his participation in the event itself, helps the sport of golf tremendously. Although his personal life has been called into question, Woods is an icon in the sporting world and let's face it, TV ratings are astronomically higher when he's playing. However, injury appears to be much more of a concern for the aging superstar than it used to be. Woods has shown some inconsistency in the past few years; he could dominate the field or crash and burn on any given day. But if Tiger stays healthy this week, he is poised to make a dramatic

return to greatness. Look for his name near the top of the leaderboard on Sunday—after all, he is Tiger Woods.

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