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Carnoustie Owes Sergio Garcia An Open - By Ian Hudson

Although Sergio Garcia might not win the ultimate prize the Spanish player can be the best finisher from continental Europe. His compatriot, Rafa Cabrera Bello, has a good links record but Garcia's experience and course associations should be enough for him to win the market for top player from Europe other than Britain and Ireland. For Garcia Carnoustie has been a bitter and sweet experience in the Open Championship.

Rickie Fowler's credentials have been highlighted in the outright preview and if he wins the Open he is the top player from the United States. Carnoustie is typical of Open courses in that it is an acquired taste. It presents all the demands of a classical links course that becomes harder than the wind blows. However, driving accuracy is also required because the fairways are relatively narrow and the rough can be penal but the dry spell may have helped. Tiger Woods has course from and has won the Open three times so is a contender to be the leading US player.

A links course is designed by nature with a little help from modern technology and care. The ground is near the sea and affected by the elements. The natural terrain shapes the fairways and the dunes create an amphitheatre. Carnoustie is a different test when the wind blows and the degree of difficulty goes through the roof. Garcia has coped at times but came off second best in other situations.

The Open was played at Carnoustie in 1999 and Garcia was the new kid on the block. He had won the Irish Open on only his sixth start as a professional, Garcia turned professional earlier in the year after recording the best score for an amateur in the Masters Tournament in April. However, it all went horribly wrong because rounds of 89 and 83 meant Garcia finished last. Carnoustie had won that particular battle.

The Open was back at Carnoustie in 2007 and Garcia led from the off and looked the most likely winner for most of the week. He was the leader after each of the first three rounds and was three shots clear heading into the final day. However, Padraig Harrington came from six shots back to force a playoff which he won. Garcia had to wait another 10 years for his first major and he can contend in this year's Carnoustie Open. Other players are slightly preferred to win but Garcia can finish in the best position of the contingent from the continent.

At his peak tipping Tiger Woods in any market would not have taken much imagination. However, he has lost about two years of his career through injury and is now not a given selection. However, he has the best course form of the players from the United States and won the Open in 2000, 2005 and 2006. Winning another major may be beyond him but he ticks lots of boxes and can finish the best of his compatriots as long as Fowler does not win his first major in the 2018 Open.