

Odds are in Tiger's favor

Woods outclasses the field when it comes to betting

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The most asked question in golf — perhaps all of sports — is whether Tiger Woods will win the Grand Slam.

If Las Vegas is any indication, it's a pretty good bet.



Tiger Woods tees off on the 8th hole during a practice day for the British Open Championship at Muirfield near Edinburgh, Scotland on Monday, July 15. *AP photo*

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Two different Vegas oddsmakers give Woods 7-2 odds to win this week's British Open at Muirfield in Scotland and complete an unprecedented sweep of golf's four professional majors next month with a victory at the PGA Championship at Hazeltine National Golf Club in Chaska, Minn.

To put that in perspective, consider that Las Vegas Sports Consultants and The Palms Casino Resort give the second choice this week, Phil Mickelson, 8-1 odds to win the British Open only.

That means Woods has better odds of winning the next two majors right now than everyone else has of winning just once.

"It's hard to put into words," said Cesar Robaina, odds manager for Las Vegas Sports Consultants, which provides odds to virtually all the legal and licensed sports books in Nevada and others around the world.

"For us to make him that low when you think of how many guys he's got to beat, it's not like baseball where you only have to beat one team," Robaina

said. "It really is an incredible feat and an incredible price to see out there at 7-2.

"He's got like a 22-24 percent chance to win two tournaments in a row, where Mickelson is about a 9 percent chance just to win this tournament alone. He has almost three times as much better a shot at winning two (majors) as Mickelson has to win this one."

Such is the dominance — and the impact — of Woods.

Before Woods' arrival, golf tournament favorites typically received odds to win of 8-1 or 10-1, at the lowest. The Palms and Las Vegas Sports Consultants, a subsidiary of Vegasinsider.com, both make Woods the 7-5 favorite to win this week at Muirfield in Scotland.

That means a \$5 bet would net only \$7 in return should Woods win.

"That's unheard of," Robaina said. "All the best players in the entire world are going to be there. If he wins the first one, he's going to be a ridiculous number to win the PGA Championship. He's going to be even-money or better.

"He will have won three in a row and everybody in the world will bet on him. Nobody's going to bet against him. The public is going to be all over him. (And) from what I understand that course is tailor made for him. It's long, very long, and kind of wide open."

Woods' impact on golf wagering goes beyond the outlandish odds he receives. It also has led to unprecedented amounts of money being wagered on the sport.

Jeff Sherman, race and sports book supervisor for The Palms and a golf oddsmaker at Las Vegas casinos for eight years, said the Palms has had more money wagered on this year's British Open than he has seen during his previous years working at other Vegas casinos.

Similarly, the amount wagered on this year's Masters, won by Woods in April, "far exceeded" Sherman's expectations for the nine-month-old casino's first year in operation.

"It's all been because of him," Sherman said.

Sherman estimated the amount wagered on the British Open this year is five times what it was before Woods showed up in professional golf in 1996. Robaina said some casinos didn't even except wagers on golf pre-Tiger.

"He's just been phenomenal to the sport," Robaina said. "Golf was not a real popular betting option. People didn't really want to get into it too much. It was kind of boring, from a betting standpoint.

"When he plays a major, it's almost like an NFL game," Robaina said. "I'm talking like an NFL playoff game or a Monday night game. The volume is incredible."

Wagering in Great Britain, where gambling has been legal since 1962, also reaches peak levels this week.

With Muirfield playing to a relatively "short" distance of 7,034 yards — shortest of this year's four major championship venues — some think the British Open may be Woods' toughest stop along the road to the Grand Slam.

Longer hitters like Woods won't be able to hit driver very often for fear of running into Muirfield's ultra-high rough, and some say even Woods won't be able to power the ball out of the rough, as he did on occasion at Bethpage State Park's Black Course during his U.S. Open victory last month.

Those factors play a part in the odds set by oddsmakers. Other factors include a golfers' recent playing history, past performances on a specific course and even public perceptions.

"We're trying to spread the action out on everybody," Sherman said. "We just try to look into what people think."

"Fifteen percent of it really is feel," Robaina said. "You've got to have mathematics behind certain odds. ... But the bottom line is, you've got to have an instinct and idea of how people are perceiving (golfers)."

If Woods doesn't win this week, his odds will drop at the PGA Championship, Robaina said. But as with any event in which Tiger competes, he'll still go in the unquestioned favorite.

"If he loses this one, then all bets are off," Robaina said of Woods' potential PGA Championship odds of around even-money if he wins this week. "That motivation (to win the Grand Slam) is maybe a little bit gone. Not totally, because the guy still loves to win majors.

"He'll probably be 8-5 or 9-5. You can't give out too good a price on him because people will bet him."