

GOLF EXCLUSIVE

4 DAYS TO GO



Rory's a driving force *

BUT HE NEEDS TO BE PITCH PAR-FECT

MASTERS OF NONE ... Rory McIlroy has to keep his motivation strong to win his first Masters crown



HOPE... Tiger yesterday

Tiger will make a late call

By DAVID FACEY

TIGER WOODS took a step closer to a sensational return as he practised at Augusta yesterday.

And the 15-time Major champion promised a "game-time" decision on whether he will play in this week's Masters.

But the odds seem in favour of him competing after he jetted back into Augusta and played nine holes following a practice round there last week.

The golf legend did not go to such lengths just to prepare for Tuesday's Champions Dinner, and the Par Three contest the following day.

Woods, 46, has not played a competitive round for more than 500 days — and he admitted he was lucky to be alive after suffering horrendous leg injuries when he crashed his car in Los Angeles 14 months ago.

As recently as February, he claimed a Tour return was a long way off.

But he took to Twitter yesterday to give fans hope he will be back in action for the first time since November 15, 2020 — the final round of that year's Covid-delayed Masters.

The American wrote: "I will be heading up to Augusta today to continue my preparation and practice. It will be a game-time decision on whether I compete."

Woods, 46, did play in the PGA Tour's Father and Son Challenge in December, finishing second alongside Charlie. But he was able to ride in a buggy, and dismissed it as "hit and giggles" golf.

Just a couple of months ago the iconic star suggested a competitive return was a long way off.

Speaking as host of the Genesis Invitational in Los Angeles, he said: "I can still play, but I'm in a cart. But walking a golf course, that's a totally different deal. I've got a long way to go."

FALDO ON RORY

IT'S fair to say everyone assumed Rory would win a Masters long before now. But it hasn't quite happened and time soon goes by.

It's nearly eight years since his last Major and that means there's a lot of negative scar tissue to look through when you tee it up.

So you've got to believe in yourself. Rory has to find that comfort zone where he gets in his own world.

Rory is swinging beautifully with the driver. It looks fabulous. He just has to keep his motivation up there.

Any time he hits a couple too many poor short irons and doesn't take the opportunities he's created, you see how it affects him because he's such an emotional guy.

When he's playing well you can physically see the spring in his step. I want to see that and also that he doesn't knock himself out or can deal with it if things go wrong and get himself back up again. That's the important thing.

It's all about that eight or nine iron into the green at The Masters. Those short irons have got to be perfect. Then you have to steer it a



NICK FALDO knows more about the challenges of Augusta than most having won The Masters on three occasions. He is also one of only three men — with Jack Nicklaus and Tiger Woods — to have successfully defended the Green Jacket.

The six-time Major winner (left) tells SunSport's MARTIN LIPTON why Rory McIlroy is running out of time to deliver his first Augusta win to complete the Grand Slam — and why he is so desperate to see if Woods makes an astonishing return.

little left or right of the flag to keep it safe.

But we are likely to have rain on Tuesday and Wednesday, so the course will probably be a little more playable for the first two days.

Someone, maybe Rory, might go screaming off before things dry up. There will be so much attention on other players, people like Scottie Scheffler, Dustin Johnson and Collin Morikawa, let alone Tiger Woods if he plays.

That could help Rory. (right) He has a good chance to just sneak in and do his thing in practice, come in under the radar, say he's fine and ready and keep it to that.

FALDO ON TIGER

The thought of Tiger playing this week is astonishing.

How can he go from last February with a 50-50 chance of losing his right leg to potentially teeing it up?

He went in for a practice round last week for one day but we still don't know what that means.

Tiger (left) was testing the leg out as it's a really tough walk, one of the toughest in golf. You walk downhill so much you come off with shin splints that week, even the fit golfers. We were told he might lose the foot, then never walk again, to need a cane to walk and not playing golf again... to this.

The man is one of the really few people on planet Earth who can use that

amount of sheer determination to fuel their goal.

The mental and physical pain barrier he's had to bring himself through is something most of us couldn't comprehend.

FALDO ON THE EUROPEANS

Tyrrell Hatton has actually played very well. He's a very good ball striker and doing a lot of good things.

But we all know he can lose his head. If he can make sure that losing his head is just for entertainment and doesn't affect the next shot, then he would be, with his ball striking, keeping himself around.

I really like Shane Lowry in the Majors. He's a good, gutsy player. He did well in the PGA at Valhalla last year. He's sneaky and plays nicely.

Of the other Europeans, Victor Hovland and Jon Rahm are looking great and pounding away.

Tommy Fleetwood is in there, too but he hasn't quite put himself under that pressure at the weekend when you are huffing and puffing.

WHY AUGUSTA IS SPECIAL

You are really in awe of the place when you go for the first

time. It is amazing. You drive along Magnolia Lane and past the little clubhouse.

Even in 1979, when I went for the first time, you look at the grass and think 'wow!' It's 150 acres and the grass is exactly the same.

Now it's 40-odd years on and the condition of the course is always absolute perfection. It's even perfection inside the fence line.

It is amazing. Such a special atmosphere. Nine times out of 10 you play under that gorgeous blue sky. It's just an incredible place.

You won't believe what perfection is until you've been to Augusta. You play and you're looking at the course but also the grass, the sand... it's the whole atmosphere.

People turn up and the first thing they think is they can't believe the hill up on the tee. It is really special.

For the players, it's fantastic because you're the only two inside the ropes, just you and your caddy. Everybody knows their place and it's beautiful there.

FALDO'S 2022 MASTERS TIPS

Scheffler is playing so well and has such a good short game and is a great putter.

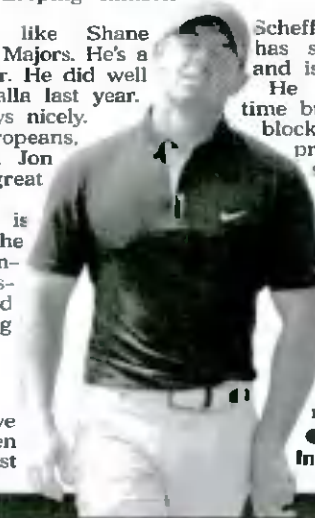
He plays the draw all the time but we have seen him still block a few right under pressure. If he can get himself in the deep end by Sunday, we'll see what happens.

Sam Burns is going great, Will Zalatoris was going well last week. Morikawa has gone a little quiet and Johnson has come back into form.

But I'd also look at 23-year-old Joaquin Niemann and Brooks Koepka.

Follow Nick Faldo on Instagram @faldo006

I like Lowry — he's sneaky



Legal Notices

SOUTH DUBLIN COUNTY COUNCIL

Mbanga Tuzinde is applying for Planning Permission for New ground floor extension to rear, New porch area to front, Dormer extension to rear at first floor level, new first floor gable window at side; 2No. roof windows to front elevation, internal modifications, new 30m² Storage / Office Space to rear with all associated site works at 39 Dalepark Road, Oldbawn, Tallaght, Dublin 24. This application may be inspected or purchased at a fee not exceeding the reasonable cost of making a copy, at the offices of South Dublin County Council during its public opening hours of 9am - 4pm, Mon-Fri, and a submission or observation may be made to South Dublin County Council in writing and on payment of the prescribed fee (€20.00) within the period of 6 weeks beginning on the date of receipt by South Dublin County Council of the application.