



The Open 2026: Royal Birkdale Returns as Scheffler, Spieth and McIlroy Chase the Claret Jug

Description

The wait is over. The 154th Open Championship tees off today at Royal Birkdale, and golf’s most storied major is back on one of the game’s greatest links. A world-class field has assembled on the Lancashire coast, with defending champion Scottie Scheffler seeking to become just the fourth player in history to win back-to-back Opens, and Jordan Spieth returning to the scene of his finest hour nine years on.

Royal Birkdale hosts The Open for the 11th time this week – its first appearance since Spieth’s unforgettable 2017 victory. The course has been updated since then, with a new par-three, a lengthened par-five and alterations to the iconic 18th, all designed to test even the finest ball-strikers in the world.

Royal Birkdale: Links Golf at Its Most Demanding

Few courses in world golf demand the complete game quite like Royal Birkdale. The willow scrub rough, undulating fairways and exposed greens punish wayward driving and reward precise iron play. The prevailing winds off the Irish Sea can swing conditions dramatically between morning and afternoon tee times, making course management as important as raw ball-striking.

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THE OPEN



The official poster for The 154th Open Championship at Royal Birkdale, 16-19 July 2026.
Source: The Open Championship (theopen.com)

Players who have practised at Birkdale this week have spoken of a course in outstanding condition. [For a full breakdown of the field and course features ahead of this year's Open, see our detailed preview.](#) The consensus is that Royal Birkdale will separate the field quickly and that patience, rather than aggression, will be the defining virtue of the champion.

Scheffler's Quest: Can the World No. 1 Defend the Claret Jug?

Scottie Scheffler arrives at Royal Birkdale as the world number one and the defending Open champion, having won at Royal Portrush in 2025. His consistency across all four majors in recent seasons has been remarkable – he has been the dominant player in world golf for two consecutive years, and there is no compelling reason to bet against him.

Scheffler's ball-striking accuracy and elite scrambling ability make him well-suited to links golf. He has missed very few fairways under pressure this season, and his iron play from awkward lies – a prerequisite at Birkdale – is the best in the world. If he plays to his standard, he will be in contention come Sunday afternoon.

Spieth's Homecoming, McIlroy's Quest and Fleetwood's Hope



Jordan Spieth returns to Royal Birkdale nine years after his iconic 2017 Open Championship triumph. Source: The Open Championship ([theopen.com](https://www.theopen.com))

If there is one player the Royal Birkdale galleries will be cheering most loudly, it is Jordan Spieth. The 32-year-old Texan won The Open here in 2017 with one of the great final-round performances in major championship history — recovering from a squandered three-shot lead on the 13th hole to birdie, eagle, birdie, birdie the next four holes and win by a stroke from Matt Kuchar.

Spieth has spoken openly about the emotional pull of returning to Birkdale. —Winning The Open was a significant highlight of my life, he said at his pre-championship press conference. —It is arguably the best tournament in the world and the greatest trophy in the world to attain.— Now injury-free after years of wrist trouble, Spieth believes his game is better in several measurable respects than when he was ranked world number one. He has been grouped with Tommy Fleetwood and Jon Rahm for the first two rounds — a marquee grouping that will attract the week’s largest galleries.

Rory McIlroy arrives at Birkdale with unfinished Open business. He has finished in the top 10 at The Open seven times but last lifted the Claret Jug at Royal Liverpool in 2014. McIlroy won The Masters in 2026 to complete the career Grand Slam, and adding a second Open title before he retires has been articulated as a clear ambition.

Tommy Fleetwood, playing on a course he has known since his youth on the Southport coast, is another compelling contender. The home crowd factor is not to be underestimated at a links Open, and Fleetwood has the patient, methodical game that Royal Birkdale rewards.

The Singapore Connection at Royal Birkdale

There is even a Singapore story at this year's Open. Jeongwoo Ham and Cameron John qualified via the OQS Singapore – the Singapore Open presented by The Business Times in April – joining the field at Royal Birkdale. Their presence is a reflection of Singapore's growing standing in world golf, and something the local golf community can take genuine pride in.

What to Watch in Round 1

Round 1 tee times are staggered across the morning and afternoon, and players in different halves of the draw may face vastly different wind conditions – a lottery that has decided many an Open Championship before the weekend. As always at The Open, the draw can prove as consequential as the swing.

The leaderboard after Round 1 will tell us much about the likely winner. History shows that Open champions rarely come from outside the top 10 after the first day. Watch for who manages their round intelligently under whatever conditions Birkdale dishes out. That composure, more than any individual shot, tends to separate champions from contenders.

The 154th Open Championship runs from 16 to 19 July 2026. Follow Little Big Red Dot for coverage of golf's greatest major throughout the week – and, if past editions are any guide, be prepared for the unexpected.

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