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2010 U.S. Women's OPEN PREVIEW



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Following the Field BY STEVE FLINN



No. 1: Jiyai Shin, 22, South Korea - Three top ten victories in five starts this season.



No. 2: Ai Miyazato, 25, Japan - Top money-leader this year.



No. 3: Yani Tseng, 21, Taiwan - Earned over \$3.5 million in three years.



No. 4: Suzann Pettersen, 29, Norway - Finished no lower than seventh on the money list in each of the past four years.



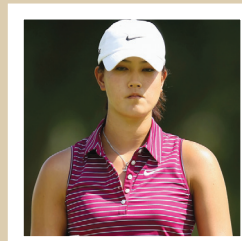
No. 5: Cristie Kerr, 32, America - Has 12 LPGA victories to her credit.



No. 6: Anna Nordqvist, 23, Sweden - Attended Arizona State University.



No. 7: Karrie Webb, 35, Australia - Nine major championships to her name.



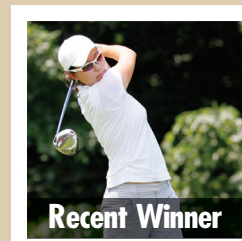
No. 8: Michelle Wie, 20, America - Earned a spot on last year's Solheim Cup team and led the team with a 3-0-1 record.



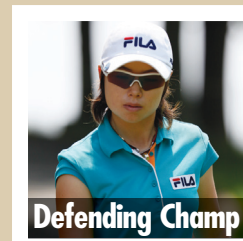
No. 9: Na Yeon Choi, 22, South Korea - Third year of playing in the LPGA.



No. 10: Angela Stanford, 32, America - Four LPGA tournament wins under her belt.



Sun Young Yoo, 23, South Korea - Won the Sybase Match Play Championship in late May.



Eun-Hee Ji, 24, South Korea - Won Open last year by sinking a birdie putt on the last hole at Saucon Valley in Bethlehem, PA.

Into the Void

BY MIKE DUDURICH

When the Tiger Woods debacle became the center of golf consciousness Thanksgiving night, the PGA Tour found itself trying to come to grips with its most serious problem since, well, 1997 – when Woods showed up as a professional golfer for the first time.

The world's premier professional golf organization was going to be without the planet's most recognizable athlete for an extended period of time, an absence due to self-inflicted wounds. The biggest question: who would ascend to the No. 1 position atop the World Golf Rankings that Woods held for 258 consecutive weeks?

Regardless of those rankings, there's no doubt as to who the best player in the world is as the U.S. Open looms later this month: Phil Mickelson. His becoming the official No. 1 is a matter of when not if.

As all of this began to unfold, the LPGA Tour was preparing to enter its own 2010 season. The women's tour was nearly two years clear of its long-time dominant player, Annika Sorenstam, retiring at an early age to get married and start a family.

Lorena Ochoa, a young Mexican player, moved into that void and quickly achieved the kind of popularity and acceptance Sorenstam enjoyed. Ochoa's game matched her personality and she, too, became dominant, holding the top spot for 158 weeks in a row.

But then came the LPGA's version of an Escalade and a trunk of a palm tree. On April 20, Ochoa announced she, too, was retiring, having married at the end of last year. Suddenly, the LPGA was faced with the loss of its top player for the second time in 36 months.

The tour was headed into the heart of the season, including next month's U.S. Women's Open at Oakmont Country Club without a true and recognizable headliner.

The top 10 players have won a total of

14 major championships. Nine have been won by one player, veteran Karrie Webb. And other than Webb, that group averages about 5 wins each on the LPGA Tour.

There is no Phil Mickelson waiting to make the ascension to the top of the LPGA pecking order and stay there. Jiyai Shin took advantage of a slip in the quality of Ochoa's play early this season and was close enough in the points to move on top with a win in Japan the day Ochoa played her final event.

But is the second-year player, with six LPGA victories, of the quality to be the face of the tour? Obviously, that's the biggest question facing the LPGA.

In the United States, the feeling is that the best possible outcome of this chase would be for an American to become No. 1. We've heard the names over the last few years: Morgan Pressel, Paula Creamer, Natalie Gulbis. More recently, Brittany Lincicome, Amanda Blumenhurst and Michelle Wie have been added to that list.

That group is a collection of very good players. Are there any great players in that group? That, of course, will be determined on fairways and greens across the world.

Just as Tiger Woods was sculpted in his formative years to be a major champion, Wie had the same sort childhood. There was plenty of sentiment that Wie was destined to be the Tiger of the LPGA Tour. That hasn't happened yet. At age 20, Wie has one victory to her credit and no majors.

The LPGA kingdom is there for her taking and if she'd do that, it would be the easiest and most popular solution. But she'll have to step up and take it.

What better time for that to happen than at Oakmont July 5-11?

Mike Dudurich is a Pittsburgh-area golf writer who hosts Inside Pittsburgh Golf with Mike Dudurich, 9-10 a.m. Saturdays from April-August on ESPN Radio 1250.

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