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Abu Dhabi HSBC Championship Preview



The Abu Dhabi HSBC Championship is the sixth event of the European Tour season but, in many ways, this is where it really starts.

For players of the official European Tour fantasy game, that's actually a statement of fact as, once more, this is the event which marks the opening event of the season-long challenge.

As one of the eight Rolex Series tournaments, it carries a hefty purse (\$7m) and offers three-and-a-half times as many Race to Dubai points as last week's South African Open.

In other words, this very first week is a key one for gamers if they want to set the tone for a good year.

The event is part one of a three-week Desert Swing that also takes in the Dubai Desert Classic and the Saudi International.

Some stellar American names, including World No. 1 Brooks Koepka, line up this week, as does defending champion Shane Lowry, who used this as a springboard for his Open Championship success last year.

An American, Chris DiMarco, won the first edition but Europeans have won 12 of the other 13. The other exception was Rickie Fowler in 2016.

Shane Lowry took victory last year after shooting 62 on the opening morning.

Past Winners and Stats

2019 -18 Shane Lowry (DD: 30, DA: 55, GIR: 26, Scr: 38, PA: 2, AA: 21)

2018 -22 Tommy Fleetwood (DD: 19, DA: 6, GIR: 1, Scr: 4, PA: 13, AA: 1)

2017 -17 Tommy Fleetwood (DD: 15, DA: 9, GIR: 1, Scr: 27, PA: 45, AA: 4)

2016 -16 Rickie Fowler (DD: 27, DA: 4, GIR: 10, Scr: 10, PA: 16, AA: 1)

2015 -19 Gary Stal (DD: 54, DA: 12, GIR: 13, Scr: 28, PA: 3, AA: 6)

2014 -14 Pablo Larrazabal (DD: 21, DA: 59, GIR: 30, Scr: 4, PA: 8, AA: 7)

2013 -14 Jamie Donaldson (DD: 7, DA: 17, GIR: 6, Scr: 6, PA: 23, AA: 1)

2012 -13 Robert Rock (DD: 11, DA: 37, GIR: 8, Scr: 24, PA: 4, AA: 1)

2011 -24 Martin Kaymer (DD: 7, DA: 7, GIR: 1, Scr: 1, PA: 3, AA: 1)

2010 -21 Martin Kaymer (DD: 18, DA: 33, GIR: 18, Scr: 6, PA: 3, AA: 3)

Notes: This is regarded as a ball-striker's track and Tommy Fleetwood ranked 1st for GIR in both his victories. Five of the last ten winners have also been in the top three for Putting Average and Shane Lowry added to that trend last year. Some accuracy off the tee has helped too although Lowry piped less than 40% of the fairways last season.

The Course

A par 72 playing 7,583-yards, the **Peter Harradine** design is often praised for its conditioning by the players. In four of the first six runnings the scoring went really low, but tweaks to the course and the wind (which is a genuine factor) started to alter that. However, the last three years have been won with -17, -22 and -18 so the players are winning the battle again. The fairways and rough are a mix of Paspalum and Bermuda with Tifdwarf Bermuda on the greens. Ten holes feature water hazards including the 562-yard par-5 18th. The other long holes come at 2 (599 yards), 8 (597 yards) and 10 (582 yards).

The Weather

Conditions have been unusually wet in the build up with roads in Abu Dhabi being flooded due to heavy rain. However, the forecast for tournament week looks better with most days described as sunny and mild (temps in the high 60s/early 70s). Wind speeds are around 8-12mph. We'll have to see how much the course dries out but there's a fair chance it'll play softer than usual so there's a chance to make a good start, hitting into receptive greens Thursday morning.