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British Open spotlight on Spanish phenom

Sergio Garcia is only 19. You might not have heard a lot about him yet. But you're going to.

By Joe Logan
INQUIRER STAFF WRITER

CARNOUSTIE, Scotland — He swaggers into a room the same way he swaggers across a golf course — as if he owns the place.

Get used to it.

Even with the brightest lights in golf — Tiger Woods, David Duval, Colin Montgomerie, et. al — ready to tee off today in the first round of the 128th British Open, an inordinate amount of the talk and hoopla surrounds Sergio Garcia, a largely unknown 19-year-old from Spain.

Heir to Seve Ballesteros' throne is what many in Europe are calling him. The more common comparison on American shores is to Woods. Some observers have labeled him "the future of golf."

Garcia himself prefers "El Nino" — "The Kid." Or he did until recently. Now, as he made clear yesterday, he simply prefers Sergio.

"If you don't mind, I like you to call me 'Sergio' in the media, not 'Garcia,' Garcia — er, Sergio — announced yesterday.

"When I go on the golf course, they say, 'Hey, Mr. Garcia.' I don't really like that. I prefer 'Sergio, can you sign me this autograph.' And when I read the newspaper, I've always liked to be recognized as 'Sergio' or 'Sergio Garcia,' but not just 'Garcia.'

OK, so with only one European Tour win to his credit in his young pro career, the kid may be getting a little ahead of himself. If memory serves, Woods had at least two wins under his belt before he joined the small pantheon of stars instantly recognizable by one name — among them Elvis, Cher, Madonna, Pele and, least we forget, Seve.

The thing is, though, that you have a hard time scaring up more than one or two of Garcia's peers here at Carnoustie who believe that he isn't destined for one-name star status — and sooner rather than later.

"He has no fear," fellow Spaniard Jose Maria Olazabal, the Masters champion, said this week, adding that Garcia has a whole lot of game to back up his attitude.

Woods, the reigning kingpin of the game, is already getting questions about a rivalry with the budding star.

"It's always something, isn't it?" he sniffed. "You guys have got to write about something."

But in the next breath, Woods acknowledged that Garcia is already generating a lot of heat and smoke, which, of course, suggest fire.

"As far as a rivalry, I don't think there's one yet," he said. "Hopefully, there will be."

So who is this kid? And why is he causing such a stir?

Besides his obvious prowess as a player, he's young, smooth, handsome and eligible. That pretty much covers it.

Back home in Castellon, where his father, Victor, is a club pro, Garcia took up the game when he was 3. By 12, he was the club champion. Less than a year later, he was a scratch golfer.

Garcia played in his first European Tour event in 1995, in Spain, at the age of 15. He made the cut. That year, he also became the youngest winner of the European Amateur. As a 16-year-old, he headed to Royal Lytham to play in his first British Open. He shot a 76 and a 73 and missed the cut.

Garcia didn't win his first professional event until the ripe old age of 17, when he fired three successive 64s in the 1997 Catalonian Open. Remember, we're talking about a boy amateur playing against male pros.

By then, Garcia was a big deal in Europe. He was, however, barely a blip on the American golf radar screen. It was time to change that, so he headed to Oak Hill in Rochester, N.Y., last summer with designs on adding the U.S. Amateur title to his resume. He was mowing 'em down in match play until he ran into Tom McKnight, savvy, experienced and over 40, in the semifinals.

Still an amateur — not to mention still a kid — Garcia finished tied for third in this year's Byron Nelson Classic, then tied for 11th in the Memorial and for 38th in the Masters. The day after the Masters, as he said he had said he would, he turned pro.

Since then, Garcia has pretty much played the European Tour, generally finishing in the middle of the pack as he learned the ropes of the pro game. Two weeks ago, in the Irish Open, he notched his first championship as a pro, and last week, he finished second to Colin Montgomerie at Loch Lomond. Those two paychecks were been sufficient to push him to fifth place on the European Tour money list.

Even rival-in-waiting Woods took notice of that:

"I think what he has done is show the world how talented he really is," Woods said this week.

Spaniards are starting to get the message.

"People are beginning to know who he is," a Spanish sportswriter who has followed Garcia to Carnoustie said yesterday.

It's not that they don't love their sports stars in Spain. It's just that not even the likes of Ballesteros and Olazabal have been able to generate much interest in golf there.

"Football [soccer], cycling, basketball, tennis and handball are all more popular there than golf," the writer said. "Well, maybe not handball."

His lack of celebrity doesn't seem to faze Garcia — not the fact that he is hardly a household name back home, not the fact that his good looks and easy manner haven't earned him hearthrob status among teenage girls.

Not to worry. He'll get there. With his fluid, whiplike swing and the glint of a champion in his eye, Garcia — oops, Sergio — seems well on his way to superstardom.

There is not a pro at Carnoustie this week who has played with him who hasn't come away impressed with his game. The others players talk about him.

Only Olazabal, a friend, seems concerned that all the attention and expectations could set Garcia up for a fall.

Pressed for details about the kid and his game, Olazabal demurred this week.

"Without a doubt, he has the potential," Olazabal said. "But let the guy develop his skills and we will have plenty of time to talk about it."

But is Garcia himself ready to wait? With his confidence brimming after the last two weeks, he is looking to make a splash in Carnoustie.

"I've always thought about it," he said yesterday. 'When I was young, you go to the putting green and you think, 'Fifteen-footer to win the Open.' But I don't know, it's just when you're young, you start imagining things. Let us see if I can have a chance this week.

"It will be great. I am going to do my best to win here, but I don't know. If not, I have a lot of years."

ADAM BUTLER / Associated Press

Sweden's Johan Rystrom peers down the 15th fairway while standing in a bunker during a practice round for the British Open.

ELISE AMENDOLA / Associated Press

Sergio Garcia is being hyped as a potential rival to the biggest name in the game — Tiger Woods. Woods says he recognizes Garcia's talent.

The British Open

■ At Carnoustie Golf Club, Carnoustie, Scotland.
Television: Today-Tomorrow, 9 a.m. to 2 p.m., ESPN. Saturday, 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., Channel 6. Sunday, 9 a.m. to 1:30 p.m., Channel 6.

The pairings

Tee times for the first two rounds of the 128th Open championship at Carnoustie today and tomorrow. All times EDT. a-denotes amateurs.

2:15 a.m., 6:45 a.m.: Peter O'Malley, Australia; Mark McNulty, Zimbabwe; Gabriel Hjertstedt, Sweden.
2:25 a.m., 6:55 a.m.: Rodney Pampling, Australia; Bernhard Langer, Germany; Steve Pate, United States.
2:35 a.m., 7:15 a.m.: Jeff Maggert, United States; Paul Eales, England; Billy Mayfair, United States.
2:45 a.m., 7:25 a.m.: Naomichi Ozaki, Japan; Jesper Parnevik, Sweden; Steve Stricker, United States.
2:55 a.m., 7:35 a.m.: Carlos Franco, Paraguay; Darren Clarke, Northern Ireland; Mark Calcavecchia, United States.
3:05 a.m., 7:45 a.m.: Scott Dunlap, United States; Jarmo Sandelin, Sweden; Kazuhiko Hosokawa, Japan.
3:15 a.m., 7:55 a.m.: Duffy Waldorf, United States; Andrew Coltart, Scotland; Stuart Appleby, Australia.
3:25 a.m., 8:05 a.m.: Tsuyoshi Yoneyama, Japan; Dennis Paulson, United States; David Carter, England.
3:35 a.m., 8:15 a.m.: Retief Goosen, South Africa; Tom Lehman, United States; David Park, Wales.
3:45 a.m., 8:25 a.m.: Steve Elkington, Australia; Sam Torrance, Scotland; Tiger Woods, United States.
3:55 a.m., 8:35 a.m.: Jim Furyk, United States; Padraig Harrington, Ireland; Jeff Sluman, United States.
4:05 a.m., 8:45 a.m.: Billy Andrade, United States; Miguel Angel Jimenez, Spain; Brandt Jobe, United States.
4:15 a.m., 8:55 a.m.: Shigeki Maruyama, Japan; Peter Baker, England; Glen Day, United States.
4:25 a.m., 9:05 a.m.: Vijay Singh, Fiji; Rocco Mediate, United States; Sergio Garcia, Spain.
4:45 a.m., 9:15 a.m.: Stephen Leaney, Australia; Fred Funk, United States; Sandy Lyle, Scotland.
4:55 a.m., 9:25 a.m.: Duffy Waldorf, United States; Eduardo Herrera, Colombia; Robert Karlsson, Sweden.
5:05 a.m., 9:45 a.m.: Nick Price, Zimbabwe; Payne Stewart, United States; Sven Struver, Germany.
5:15 a.m., 9:55 a.m.: Ernie Els, South Africa; Seve Ballesteros, Spain; Mark O'Meara, United States.
5:25 a.m., 10:05 a.m.: Tony Jacklin, Britain; a-Graeme Storm, England; Rich Beem, United States.
5:35 a.m., 10:15 a.m.: Thomas Levet, France; Paul McGinley, Ireland; Per-Ulrik Johansson, Sweden.
5:45 a.m., 10:25 a.m.: Kathsuyoshi Tomori, Japan; Justin Rose, England; Michael Weir, Canada.
5:55 a.m., 10:35 a.m.: Jean Hugo, South Africa; Tom Gillis, United States; Richard Green, Australia.
6:05 a.m., 10:45 a.m.: Michael Long, New Zealand; Stephen Gallacher, Scotland; Geoff Ogilvy, Australia.
6:15 a.m., 10:55 a.m.: Johan Rystrom, Sweden; Gilberto Morales, Venezuela; Marc Farry, France.
6:25 a.m., 11:05 a.m.: Phil Mitchell, Wales; Jeremy Robinson, England; Fabrice Tarnaud, France.
6:35 a.m., 11:15 a.m.: Pierre Fulke, Sweden; Allan MacDonald, Scotland; Martyn Thompson, England.
6:45 a.m., 11:25 a.m.: Santiago Luna, Spain; Per Nyman, Sweden; Gary Orr, Scotland.
6:45 a.m., 2:25 p.m.: Frank Nobilo, New Zealand; David Duval, United States; Thomas Bjorn, Denmark.
7:15 a.m., 2:35 a.m.: Choi Kyoung-ju, South Korea; Mark James, England; Scott Gump, United States.
7:25 a.m., 2:45 a.m.: David Frost, South Africa; Colin Montgomerie, Scotland; Brian Watts, United States.
7:35 a.m., 2:55 a.m.: Jong-duck Kim, South Korea; David Howell, England; Andrew Magee, United States.
7:45 a.m., 3:05 a.m.: Bradley Hughes, Australia; Hal Sutton, United States; Patrik Sjoland, Sweden.
7:55 a.m., 3:15 a.m.: Justin Leonard, United States; Mark Brooks, United States; Dean Robertson, Scotland.
8:05 a.m., 3:25 a.m.: Craig Spence, Australia; Raymond Russell, Scotland; Scott Verplank, United States.
8:15 a.m., 3:35 a.m.: Greg Norman, Australia; Lee Westwood, England; Lee Janzen, United States.
8:25 a.m., 3:45 a.m.: Nick Faldo, England; Jim Furyk, United States; David Love 3d, United States.
8:35 a.m., 3:55 a.m.: Philip Price, Wales; Hidemichi Tanaka, Japan; Stewart Cink, United States.
8:45 a.m., 4:05 a.m.: Tim Herron, United States; Costantino Rocca, Italy; Shingo Katayama, Japan.
8:55 a.m., 4:15 a.m.: Jarrod Moseley, Australia; Des Smyth, Ireland; Bob Tway, United States.
9:05 a.m., 4:25 a.m.: Ian Woosnam, Wales; Craig Parry, Australia; Tiger Woods, United States.
9:15 a.m., 4:45 a.m.: Angel Cabrera, Argentina; Bob Estes, United States; Bill Glasson, United States.
9:25 a.m., 4:55 a.m.: John Huston, United States; Miguel Angel Martin, Spain; Stephen Allen, Australia.
9:35 a.m., 5:05 a.m.: Greg Turner, New Zealand; Jose Maria Olazabal, Spain; Phil Mickelson, United States.
9:55 a.m., 5:15 a.m.: a-Paddy Gribben, Northern Ireland; Gary Player, South Africa; Corey Pavin, United States.
10:05 a.m., 5:25 a.m.: Jean Van de Velde, France; Mathias Gronberg, Sweden; Bob Charles, New Zealand.
10:15 a.m., 5:35 a.m.: Len Mattiace, United States; Pedro Linhart, Spain; Michael Campbell, New Zealand.
10:25 a.m., 5:45 a.m.: a-Luke Donald, England; Paul Lawrie, Scotland; Peter Lonard, Australia.
10:35 a.m., 5:55 a.m.: Craig Owen, England; Mark Allen, Scotland; Tom McCarthy, England.
10:45 a.m., 6:05 a.m.: Derrick Cooper, England; Craig Hanna, United States; Christopher Hanell, Sweden.
10:55 a.m., 6:15 a.m.: Jon Bevan, England; Andrew Sherborne, England; Ross McFarlane, England.
11:05 a.m., 6:25 a.m.: Lee Thompson, England; a-Zane Scotland, Northern Ireland; Warren Bennett, England.
11:15 a.m., 6:25 a.m.: Anders Hansen, Denmark; Prayad Marksaeng, Thailand; Andrew Raitt, England.

■ **For late scores,** call The Inquirer at 215-854-2500.

British Open Notes

Scotland's great golf hope needs a thicker skin, some contend

By Joe Logan
INQUIRER STAFF WRITER

CARNOUSTIE, Scotland — The headline of the day in yesterday's tabloids here had to be this one in the Scottish Sun: "If Monty had Langer's brain he'd have 6 majors by now."

The gist of the story, as you can imagine, was that Colin Montgomery, Scotland's great hope in the British Open and most every other major golf tournament, is, basically, a head case.

"He has everything needed to win a major in a playing sense," said the story, quoting Bob Torrance, a Scottish golf guru and the father of Ryder Cup star Sam Torrance. "But he lets people get to him far too often.

"A player of his class shouldn't allow himself to be affected by what anyone says. Monty has to learn to handle outside influences and pressures and shut them out of his mind."

Torrance went on to say that Montgomerie, who had no comment, could learn a thing or two from Bernhard Langer, the two-time Masters champion from Germany.

■

If you're looking for favorites in the Open, look no further than Tiger Woods.

Going into today's first round, the British bookmakers have Woods, who is looking for his second major title, as the best bet in the field at 5-1 odds. David Duval, who has no major titles to his credit, is rated as the next most likely winner, at 10-1. Montgomerie, who is also winless in the majors, is third, at 12-1.

If the oddsmakers know their business, the rest of the top 10 should include Sergio Garcia (18-1), Ernie Els (20-1), PGA champion Vijay Singh (20-1), Lee Westwood (20-1), Davis Love 3d (25-1), Jesper Parnevik (25-1), and Darren Clark (33-1).

■

Carnoustie is such a tiny village that the hotels can barely accommodate the players, let alone fans in town for the tournament. But don't blame Woods.

Just as he did at Pinehurst for the U.S. Open, Woods has rained money on a local family by renting its house for the week. The buzz has Woods having coughed up almost $60,000 for a posh pad in nearby St. Andrews.

With local roads narrow and crowded, Woods will take no chances on getting hung up in traffic en route to the tournament each day. He will arrive by helicopter each morning.

When the local papers fretted that fog and mist — a frequent and fierce problem here — might cause problems for Woods 'copter, his people assured them not to worry. The 'copter has state-of-the-art navigational controls, they say. Plus, Woods has a hovercraft available if things get too bad.

It wouldn't be a British Open without the possibility — no, probability — of wind and rain. After nice days Tuesday and yesterday, the forecast for today and tomorrow was for clear, shirt-sleeve weather in the morning, with the weather growing increasingly overcast, windy, rainy and chilly as the days wear on.

■

It was at last year's British Open that Justin Rose, a 17-year-old English amateur, burst onto the scene, finishing tied for fourth. He immediately turned pro.

Since then, Rose, now 18, has missed 22 of 23 cuts on the European Tour, won only $4,700, and given every indication that he will lose his tour card. Once the darling of England, he is now viewed with a certain amount of pity. But he is undeterred.

"It doesn't bother me what people say," Rose said this week. "I know how I feel, and I know where I am going. I'll prove people wrong. I'll make people eat them eat their words."

■

Oft-injured Bill Glasson pulled out of the tournament yesterday, citing recurring problems with his elbow. He said he plans to take the next five weeks off.

Osberg wins Phila. Open over his home course

By Joe Juliano
INQUIRER STAFF WRITER

It took golf's equivalent of a full-court press to get Rick Osberg ready to compete in the Philadelphia Open at the club where he is employed as head professional.

"When the head pro is swinging bad, you pull out all the stops," Osberg said yesterday. "So I had three of my assistants on the range three days ago giving me lessons for about an hour and a half."

So much for swinging bad. Osberg played solid golf all day on his home course at Waynesborough Country Club, breaking par in each round, and coasted to a 4-stroke victory in the annual championship conducted by the Golf Association of Philadelphia.

Osberg, a three-time Philadelphia Section PGA Player of the Year, fired a 3-under-par 68 in the morning and followed with a one-birdie, 17-par round of 70 in the afternoon for a 4-under 138 total. It was his first Philadelphia Open title.

Osberg said he had been having trouble with long-iron play for the past couple of years. That problem severely hurt him last month at the PGA Club Professional Championship in Wisconsin, where he failed to make the cut.

Because Waynesborough, at 6,900 yards, puts a premium on long-iron play, Osberg figured he would work on that aspect of his game entering the Philadelphia Open, calling on his assistants for help.

"Something clicked," he said. "Then [on Tuesday], I was directing our junior golf clinic and I put myself on video along with the kids. I played nine holes that evening and I found a little magic."

The problem had to do with balance. Osberg said he had too much weight on his toes, and needed to distribute that weight better.

The fix worked. Osberg carded five birdies in the morning to take a 2-stroke lead over Pete Oakley of Kings Creek. Then, in the afternoon, he hit 15 greens, making one birdie — a 25-foot snake at No. 13, his fourth hole of the round.

"I've known Rick for about six or seven years and he's always hit it very well," said Jim Sullivan Jr., one of Osberg's playing partners yesterday and an occasional student of his. "A lot of times he's hitting it well but not putting it well. Today, he was so good with the putter. He was strong."

Osberg was challenged by Oakley for a time. Oakley, coming off a good finish in last weekend's U.S. Senior Open in Iowa, was tied with Osberg at 4-under par through 10 holes in the afternoon, but then the roof caved in.

Oakley four-putted from 30 feet for double bogey on his 11th hole. Waynesborough's No. 2. He played the next three holes in 4-over and wound up with a 77 that dropped him into a tie for sixth at 147.

"I don't know what happened," Oakley said. "The wheels came off. Or maybe I remembered I'm 50. That four-putt really fried my brain."

Overbrook Golf Club head pro Stu Ingraham shot an afternoon 68, tying for best round of the day and took second place at 142. Sullivan, the Philadelphia Amateur champion, shot a 72 for a 143 total that won him low amateur honors.

Philadelphia Open

The results

Rick Osberg, Waynesborough	68-70—138
Stu Ingraham, Overbrook	74-68—142
a-Jim Sullivan Jr., Huntingdon Valley	71-72—143
Jim Booros, Gravecroft	72-72—144
Jason Gantz, Blue Heron Pines	74-70—144
Aaron Comp, Blue Heron Pines	73-73—146
Bill Sauter, Sunnybrook	73-73—146
Pete Oakley, Kings Creek	70-77—147
David Linkchorst, Blackwood	75-73—148
a-Andrew Achenbach, La Lu	74-74—148
Rob Shuey, Felicita	77-71—148
a-Tom Bossella, Fieldstone	79-76—155
a-Andy Thompson, Overbrook	74-75—149
a-Michael Gregor, Huntingdon Valley	76-73—149
Terry Hatch, Fountain Springs	73-77—150
Jim Muehling, Merion	73-77—150
Graham Deridder, Lancaster	79-72—151
Chris Anderson, Fieldstone	75-76—151
a-Sam McFall, Waynesborough	76-75—151
Rick Fleisher, Berkleigh	76-76—152
Jay Freedman, Meadowlands	78-74—152
a-Aaron Friedman, Meadowlands	79-73—152
Terry Hertzog, Gulph Mills	77-75—152
Bob Trautcher, Old Masters	72-80—152
a-Michael Fash, Tavistock	76-77—153
Rich Steinmetz, Spring-Ford	76-77—153
a-Bill McGuinness, Tavistock	77-76—153
Jeff Hoover, Lancaster	76-77—153
Brian Kelly, Cedarbrook	77-77—154
Joe Guillebeau, Wilmington	77-77—154
John Fetar, Woodcock Springs	77-77—154
Mike Moses, Concord	80-74—154
a-amateur	

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