



# The Time is NOW

It's an important time for Illinois native Todd Hamilton, who is seeing some of the perks for his 2004 British Open win nearing an end

By Art Stricklin

At the end of his British Open odyssey in 2004, Todd Hamilton had possession of the Claret Jug, one of golf's most revered prizes.

PHOTOS BY THE ASSOCIATED PRESS



**T**he long and winding road Illinois native Todd Hamilton has taken in his professional golf career would be enough to make many people queasy from motion sickness: from the small-town, nine-hole course in Biggsville to the plains of the University of Oklahoma, to the exotic

lands of the Japanese Tour, to becoming a 38-year-old PGA Tour rookie, to a British Open title at Royal Troon, to five mostly inglorious years wandering in golf's wilderness.

Hamilton sometimes shakes his head in disbelief over the journey, but the Dallas-area resident says with conviction that as the 2009 season heads into its second half, he feels his career is again headed in the correct direction.

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“I know I’ve done it, played well, but it just takes some guys longer than others to feel comfortable and feel like they belong.”

With the five-year exemption (for a PGA Tour playing card) he received for winning the British Open about to run out, Hamilton is again playing some inspired golf. The perks awarded for winning a major championship are about to reach their expiration date, which means if Hamilton wants to play in the 2010 majors, he’ll have to earn his place in them.

“I played pro golf for a long time, and once you get the taste, get the juices going, it’s like baseball players in a long slump,” Hamilton said. “You get a couple of homers, then break out with a long string of base hits, and it’s the same thing in golf.”

Without a top-15 finish in all of 2008 or a top-30 in 2007, Hamilton already has two top-15 finishes in the first half of 2009, including his best Masters finish, a tie for 15th, that earned him a return invitation for 2010. He earned more money in the first four months of 2009 than he did in all but three of his past PGA Tour seasons.

“Golf is such a mental game,” he said, “that if you’re not mentally into it, it’s tough. I needed to see something good happen, not just for nine holes or 18 holes, but for 36 holes or longer.”

After capturing the British Open Championship title in 2004 in Scotland as a long shot—in three previous British Open starts he had two missed cuts and a tie for 44th—Hamilton acknowledged he was taken aback by the increased responsibilities he faced and the new expectations as well.

“I know I’ve done it, played well, but it just takes some guys longer than others to feel comfortable and feel like they belong and I guess I’m one of those guys,” he said. “I just know I’m not on the list of best players not to win a major.”

“Most people think you should win a couple times before a major, but sometimes it’s the other way around. Tiger had to win his first major sometime, you know.”

Going into the final round of that British Open at Royal Troon, Hamilton held a one-stroke lead over Ernie Els and was two better than Phil Mickelson and Retief Goosen. Often using

#### THE TODD HAMILTON FILE

**AGE:** 43

**BORN:** Galesburg, Ill.

**RESIDES:** Westlake, Texas

**COLLEGE:** University of Oklahoma (three-time All-American)

**TURNUED PROFESSIONAL:** 1987

**PGA TOUR VICTORIES:** 2 (Honda Classic and British Open, both in 2004)

**CAREER PGA TOUR EARNINGS (through 2008):** \$4,483,753

**INTERNATIONAL VICTORIES:** 14, including the Singapore Masters (1992) and two Japan GA Match Play Championships



Todd Hamilton at the 2009 Masters

his utility wood to get himself out of trouble, he stayed steady as others fell back.

After a bogey on the 72nd hole to fall into a playoff with Els, Hamilton put together four straight pars in the four-hole playoff to earn a one-stroke victory.

“It was a great thrill, that’s something I will always remember,” he said.

After his playoff victory, Hamilton returned to Texas and was honored by his home club in Dallas with a lavish party and celebration.

As an extended thank you to many of his North Texas friends, Hamilton often would tote the famed Claret Jug in the back seat of his car when he was going to the golf course so his friends and club members could get a look at it up close and have their picture taken with it.

He said he’s not far personality-wise from his small town Illinois roots, where he knew just about everybody growing up and many felt they had a part of his golfing success.

“Sure, my parents still live up there and will call when I do

well,” he said. “I get a text message from my sister, who is still up there. My best friend from high school lives in the Champaign area. He has my number and will call after a good week.”

While he has lived in North Texas since leaving the University of Oklahoma in 1987, he said other than another major championship, nothing would mean more than a PGA



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marcus.toral@hubinternational.com

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