

The formidable five

Defending champion Jordan Spieth believes this year's Masters will be the hardest to win in recent memory, with many top players arriving at Augusta in good form. The Straits Times looks at the top contenders and their prospects ahead of 2016's first Major.



World No. 1 Jason Day, 28 (Aus)
Best Masters performance T2 (2011)
Masters form T28-T20-3-Withdrew-T2
Current form 1-1-T23-T11-Cut-T10-T10-1-T12-1

Why he can win: Back-to-back wins at the World Golf Championships Matchplay and Arnold Palmer Invitational make him the form player. Has the all-round game to win at Augusta, where he has twice come close. Led the field with a 326-yard average off the tee last year.
Why he might not: Preparations were delayed by a day after being hit by flu-like symptoms. He also experienced back pain at the Matchplay.



World No. 2 Jordan Spieth, 22 (US)
Winner (2015)
1-T2
T-13-T9-T18-T17-Cut-T21-1-4-T7-1

Why he can win: The American has shown, in just two appearances, that he has figured out the course - breaking par in seven rounds with a 69.13 scoring average. His worst round is a par 72 and his aggregate is 23 under par.
Why he might not: One of his core strengths, putting, has been letting him down of late. Spieth admits that the rest of his game is affected because he cannot get into a rhythm.



World No. 3 Rory McIlroy, 26 (Nir)
4th (2015)
4-T8-T25-T40-T15-T69-T20
4-T27-T3-Cut-T20-T11-T26-T16-T4-T29

Why he can win: Given his talent and ball-striking, it is widely believed that as long as he putts decently, he will become the sixth man to claim a career Grand Slam. His new cross-handed putting stroke has led to some improvement on the greens, going from being ranked in the 150s in strokes gained putting to No. 94 since the switch at the Cadillac Championship.
Why he might not: He has 10 double-bogeys or worse in his last 10 strokeplay rounds. He is also the only man in the world's top five who has yet to win this year.



World No. 4 Bubba Watson, 37 (US)
Winner (2012, 2014)
T38-1-T50-1-T38-42-T20
T28-2-1-T70-T14-T10-1-T35-T5-T10

Why he can win: The course seems to favour left-handers and reward creative players like Watson. Masters are also largely won by scoring on the par-fives and he knows how to take advantage of that.
Why he might not: The challenge is whether he can stay mentally engaged. He has never been diagnosed with attention deficit disorder but is certain he suffers from it. He also claims his complicated thought processes may be a stumbling block.



World No. 6 Adam Scott, 35 (Aus)
Winner (2013)
T38-T14-1-T8-T2-T18-T51-T25-T27-T27-T33-T79-T23-T9
T28-T12-1-1-T2-T56-T10-70-2-Cut

Why he can win: No Major has more repeat winners than the Masters and Scott, with his improved putting, is ready to be the 18th multiple winner at one of his favourite courses. The Australian is one of only five men to have made nine of the last 10 Masters cuts.
Why he might not: He will be using a short putter at Augusta for the first time since 2010, having been equipped with a broomstick for the last five editions. While his work on the greens has improved, his putting will be tested by the fast and undulating greens.

Five of the toughest shots

Augusta National's famous 18-hole layout consists of some of the best-known holes in the world of golf and an array of tantalising and challenging shots. Here are five of the key shots players must negotiate if they are to win the Masters.

Tee shot at hole 1

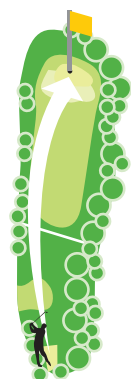
4 445
 Par Yards



A slight dogleg right that plays uphill. A bunker right and trees left must be avoided if the optimum position to hit a tricky second shot onto a severely undulating green is to be secured.

Tee-shot at hole 4

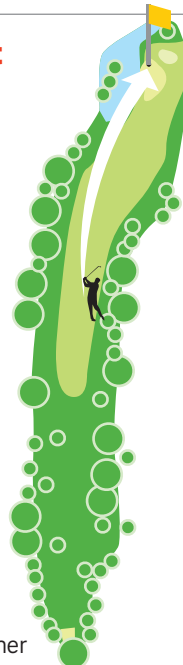
3 240



Longest and toughest of the four par-threes. The length, cavernous protecting bunker in front of the green and the difficulty of gauging the winds around the green from the vantage point of the tee all conspire to make the hole a stern challenge.

Second shot at hole 11

4 505



Regularly rated as the toughest hole, the key is the long approach shot. A pond guards the green left and a bunker centre-right. It is the start of the famed Amen Corner trio of holes and shifting winds at the bottom of the course add to the difficulties of hitting the green in two.

Second shot at hole 13

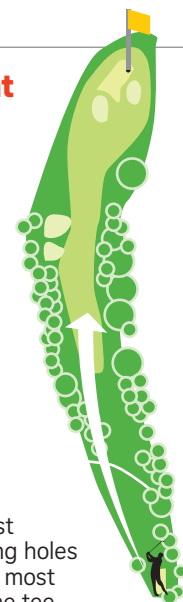
5 510



A classic risk-reward hole, the green is reachable in two on the back of a good drawing drive down a fairway bordered by azaleas. But it turns into a gamble as they try to dissect Rae's Creek in front and deadly bunkers behind, and eagle hopes can turn to bogey despair in a matter of seconds.

Tee-shot at hole 18

4 465



One of the most famous finishing holes and one of the most daunting off the tee - with towering pines on both sides presenting a narrow corridor to hit through to find the fairway. A play-off hole alongside the 10th; the heightened stakes make it an even tougher prospect.