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SPIETH STRUGGLING TO FIND HIS FORM

By Bruce Penton

Where have you gone, Jordan Spieth? The golf world turns its lonely eyes to you.

OK, apologizes to Simon and Garfunkel, but what has happened to Spieth? In 2014-17, the young Texan was the obvious slam-dunk successor to Tiger Woods as the most dominant golfer in the world. Now, he's a guy who can barely make a 36-hole cut. Spieth will tee it up at the Masters this week, because he won the season's first major in 2015 and gets a lifetime invitation to the annual tournament as a result. His track record at Augusta is outstanding (T2, 1, T2, 11th, 3 in the last five years).

After his 2015 Masters title, Spieth cemented his status as the best young player in the game by winning the U.S. Open two months later. He won the Tour Championship that year, won two tournaments in 2016 and three more, including the British Open, in 2017. He stood well above the crowd of young talent seeking to fill the Woods void on Tour — ahead of the likes of Rory McIlroy, Justin Thomas, Jason Day, Justin Rose, Rickie Fowler and Brooks Koepka.

But since then? Deterioration. After winning that Open Championship win in July, 2017, Spieth has gone dry. His putting is erratic, his driving is sloppy. He's thinking too much, say some observers — “paralysis by analysis.”

He went winless in 2018, with thirds at Houston and the Masters his best finishes. He has five missed cuts in his last 17 starts, with only one top-10 finish. His world ranking, once a luminous No. 1, is now a so-so 30th.

He's still a 14-1 Vegas pick to win this year's Masters (behind only Dustin Johnson, McIlroy, and Woods) but his recent play makes him a lousy selection, even though his track record at Augusta National, as noted above, is terrific.

“I feel pretty patient with what's coming because I know I'm working on the right things,” Spieth told golfdigest.com.

Spieth will be playing the Masters under the radar this year, quite a change from the past when he was constantly in the spotlight. Fame can be fleeting, and it can absolutely vanish when the drives are landing in the trees, the irons are off target and the putts aren't falling. At 25, Spieth is certainly young enough to find the solution and right the wobbly ship. It couldn't happen at a better time than the second week of April in 2019 amongst the Georgia Pines.

- Comedy writer **Alex Kaseberg**: “Alex Rodriguez proposed to **Jennifer Lopez**. Unfortunately, the engagement ring tested positive for cubic zirconia.”
- Comedy writer **Jim Barach**: “**Danica Patrick** will join NBC for Indy 500 coverage. Or as she remembers it while she was still competing, the Indy 125.”
- **Dwight Perry** of the Seattle Times: “Baltimore Ravens QB **Lamar Jackson** apologized for posting a picture on Instagram that showed him driving at 105 mph. On the bright side, Vegas oddsmakers now list Jackson at 35-1 to win the Super Bowl and 5-2 to win the Indy 500.”
- **Tim Hunter** of Everett's KRKO Radio, on baseball's Atlantic League using computers to call balls and strikes this season: “Instead of yelling at umpires, managers will be told to call tech support.”
- **Jayson Stark** of The Athletic and MLB Network analyst, on proposed changes to baseball: “Any time you suggest that baseball ought to at least be able to experiment with ideas that could make the game more entertaining, millions of baseball fans react as if you're doodling on the Mona Lisa.”
- **Bob Molinaro** of pilotonline.com (Hampton, Va.): “At tournament basketball games, a message flashed on video boards reads, ‘The NCAA opposes all forms of legal and illegal sports wagering.’ Cue the laugh track.”
- **Scott Ostler** of the San Francisco Chronicle, after University of California fired its basketball coach, **Wyking Jones**, after only two years into a five-year contract: “Cal said it would hire a search firm to find Jones' replacement. The last search firm Cal hired to find a basketball coach searched and found **Wyking Jones**. Maybe Cal should hire a search firm to search for a better search firm.”
- **RJ Currie** of sportsdeke.com: “The Blue Jays chose **Chad Jenkins** 20th in the 2009 draft, passing up on **Mike Trout** who went 26th. That's right, Trout — talk about the one that got away!”
- **RJ Currie** again: “I'll concede Duke star **RJ Barrett** of Canada is an outstanding basketball player. That said, what kind of goof goes by the name RJ?”
- One more from **Currie**: “Bravo, **Bianca Andreescu**: first Canadian to win a WTA Premier event; first wildcard champ at Indian Wells; new top 25 player (24). Put aside I Dream of Genie — it's Bianca to the Future.”
- Comedian **Argus Hamilton**: “If you receive an email with the subject line ‘Two free Lakers tickets,’ do not open it. It contains two free Lakers tickets.”

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