

ILLINOIS GOLFER

THE OPENING 9

Tuesday,
July 6, 2021



Mistwood Golf Club

BEAUTY SPOT Mistwood Golf Club glistens in the early-morning sun.

IWO leads off a big week

It's tournament week in Illinois.

1 This week, there's a cross-state doubleheader beginning at Mistwood Golf Club in Romeoville and climaxing at TPC Deere Run in Silvis.

The Mistwood frolic is the 26th **Phil Kosin** Illinois Women's Open, taken off last year's calendar because of COVID-19, but back this year with the rising vaccination rate. There are 36 holes scheduled for today, and survivors play the final 18 on Wednesday.

As always, the field is a mixture of pros and amateurs from Illinois and beyond. Kosin, who started the IWO in 1995 and largely financed it himself until his family and Mistwood began to co-administer it following his death, saw the tournament as a regional test more than just a championship of Lincoln-land players. That's allowed it to become a beacon for up-and-coming talent.

This year will be no exception. Among the competitors in the field of 56 will be **Tristyn Nowlin**, the Kentucky

native who was runner-up in the 2019 Women's Western Amateur held at Mistwood. Nowlin, a recent graduate of Illinois, turned pro a couple of weeks ago and last week captured the Michigan Women's Open and \$6,500 in her second start as a pro. She'll tee off Tuesday at 7:10 a.m. with **Grace Curran** of Frankfort, the recent winner of the Illinois Women's Amateur, and fellow amateur and Lincoln-Way Central High graduate **Brienne Bolden** of New Lenox.

There are only 12 pros in the field, an indication of how thin the female professional ranks are in some respects. Many female teaching pros don't see it worthwhile to play because they can make good money giving lessons in comparison to taking two days off with no guarantee of a paycheck, much less victory. And many recently-graduated players such as Nowlin immediately attempt to jump on the Symetra Tour, the stepping-stone loop for the LPGA.

The notable all-pro group starts its

The Week Ahead

Illinois

PGA Tour

John Deere Classic, TPC Deere Run, CBS / Golf

Women

Illinois Women's Open, Mistwood

CDGA

U.S. Amateur Qualifying, Tue., Stonebridge; Wed., Weibring at ISU

U.S. Women's Amateur Qualifying, Wed., Oak Grove

Illinois PGA

Illinois Open Qualifying, Tue., Flossmoor; Thu., Ironwood

National

LPGA

Marathon Classic, Golf

Korn Ferry

TPC Colorado Championship

Champions

U.S. Senior Open, Golf / Peacock

International

European Tour

Scottish Open, Golf

Tour Guide

How Illinois bred and connected players fared last week:

Detroit Rocket / PGA Tour

Doug Ghim T-32 \$ 41,875

Maine Open / KFT

Patrick Flavin T-66 \$ 2,388

Luke Guthrie MC -0-

Vince India MC -0-

Jordan Hahn MC -0-

Dick's Sporting / Champions

Gary Hallberg 73 \$ 1,435

The Quote

"It feels so awesome. I'm definitely taking one day, one step at a time but I do have big goals."

— Tristyn Nowlin after winning the Michigan Women's Open

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Tuesday, July 6, 2021 – Vol. 1, No. 4 – Issue 4

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first round on the 6,249-yard par-72 test at 8 a.m., with **Emily McGiles**, **Jenna Pearson** and **Nicole Jeray** the spotlighted trio. Pearson won the IWO in 2011, while Jeray, who grew up in Berwyn and is now a teaching pro at Mistwood, captured it twice, in 1999 and 2003, and was runner-up on two other occasions.

"I haven't played a tournament in almost two years, so I am so looking forward to competing again," Jeray told WSCR Radio's *The Scorecard* on Saturday. "Home course advantage, maybe? I sure have not have time to play, we are so busy at Mistwood."

2This week also features the John Deere Classic. The 50th edition of the tournament proper commences Thursday, four rounds round and about Deere Run, the fun **D.A. Weibring**-designed layout on property that was in the Deere family for generations, and just a couple of miles from the Deere & Company World Headquarters.

To say Deere's invested in the biggest sports showcase in the Quad Cities doesn't begin to cover it. This is Deere's 22nd tournament with their name on it, and 24th year of involvement overall. The first year, which was expected to be the last at Oakwood Country Club a few miles away, they sponsored without their name on it, preferring to debut at Deere Run. When the course took another year to mature, they hung the Deere shingle out for the actual finale at Oakwood. Last year, as with the IWO, the tournament was canceled, the company and the separate charity golf operation that runs it realizing losses would run into the millions without ticket sales helping fund the purse.

The lynchpin of the Deere is Birdies for Charity, which raised over \$12.2 million in 2020 even without a tournament, testament to the community's investment in both the tournament and their fellow man. This year, with Birdies back and the tournament back, the birdies, beginning with those registered by pros in Wednesday's pro-am, will again determine the charity take.

3The real action in the QC began Monday with the four-spot qualifier for the open places in the field. It's the

last vestige of the old Monday rabbit qualifying from the era when only the top 60 players from the previous year were guaranteed spots in a given week's field. Oakwood Country Club in Coal Valley, Ill., the previous site of the Deere, played host to the hopefuls with the Iowa PGA running the 18-hole scrap, and 24-year-old **Luke Gannon** of Mahomet led the way with a sparkling 8-under 63. He went eagle-birdie-par-birdie on his last six holes to distance himself from his nearest competitors by two strokes.

Gannon is a 2019 Southern Illinois grad and has shown reasonably well on the All Pro Tour mini-tour, cashing regularly. This year, he's five-for-five making checks totaling \$11,263.75.

This will be his first appearance in the Deere (which is also true of the other three qualifiers) and on the PGA Tour. He's missed the cut in three appearances on the Korn Ferry Tour.

The other three qualifiers, all at 6-under 65: **Alex Smalley** of Greensboro, N.C., **Eric Cole** (son of 1970s-'80s tourists **Bobby Cole** and **Laura Baugh Cole**) of Delray Beach, Fla., and **Rodrigo Lee** of Doral, Fla. Among those missing: PGA Tour veterans **Chase Koepka** (66) and **Robert Garrigus** (67).

Gannon's backstory is different than the usual Tour hopeful. He's the son of the minister of Chapel Hill Church in Wichita, Kan., did custodial work at the church as a kid, and still does occasionally when he gets back home. He recently married sweetheart **Ellyn** and settled in Mahomet, in central Illinois near Champaign, some three hours from Carbondale.

4The Deere qualifier is usually at Pinnacle Country Club in Milan, but a chemical malfunction a few weeks ago singled five greens on the back nine. They were playable but didn't look great so the club wasn't comfortable with hosting and Oakwood stepped in. An assistant greenkeeper was said to have made the mistake. What **Carl Spackler** is doing now, we don't know, but it probably involves a pond. Or a pool. Probably a pond.

5Congrats to Illinois Junior winner **Kevin O'Regan** of Northbrook, who

beat Winnetka's **Charlie Creamean** in a sudden-death playoff after the two tied at even-par 213 at Makray Memorial in Barrington. **Grant Roscich** of Glen Ellyn and **Eli Myers** of Northbrook tied for third, a stroke in arrears. O'Regan, who'll attend Notre Dame beginning in the fall, was two strokes behind Creamean on the 18th tee, but birdied the pesky par-5 while the Georgetown-bound Creamean followed him with a bogey at the last

6**Steve Stricker** won the U.S. Senior Open on Notre Dame's Warren Course two years ago, and already has a senior major (the Senior Players) in his pocket this year, but he'll not be at this year's iteration, which is this week. Instead, he'll be at Deere Run, where he won three times in succession.

Stricker, the Ryder Cup captain, is playing partly to eye potential captain's picks, partly because he can zip over to the British Open on the Deere-invented charter jet if he so desires – that's undecided at the moment – and partly because it's the 50th anniversary. Loyalty is a Stricker specialty, and this shows it.

7For those punters out there, the William Hill sports book has **Daniel Berger** a 9-1 pick to win at Deere Run.

8One more on the Deere – and there will be a complete preview on Wednesday – **Whitey's**, the esteemed ice cream chain in the Quad Cities, has come up with a confection featuring the Deere colors, green and yellow. It is said to be the *ne plus ultra* in ice cream cones for 2021. Motor oil not included.

9Finally, today brings us the latest iteration of The Match, this time featuring **Phil Mickelson** and **Tom Brady** playing **Bryson DeChambeau** and **Aaron Rodgers** for silly money and some measure of pride – or at least vanity – at The Reserve at Moonlight Basin, a golf course in the wilds of Montana.

TNT will televise beginning at 4 p.m. CT, and all you need to know about the coverage is the presence of swing guru **Charles Barkley** on the broadcast, adding his wisdom regarding the royal and ancient game. We can't imagine what Sir Charles can do with a telestrator.