

# Women's PGA: More Than Major

By Tim Cronin



There's a reason the PGA of America selected Olympia Fields Country Club to host the KPMG Women's PGA Championship. It's big enough to host something that's more than a major championship.

The golf – the second women's major of the year – will be in the spotlight beginning June 29, when the first round is played. But before then, several sideshows that are unique to the week will take place.

The biggest is a business conference that could have been held anywhere but is taking place at Olympia Fields at KMPG's behest: a women's leadership summit featuring big names in

economics, politics and sports.

"We ask CEOs in their organization to identify two women who are just steps away from the [corporate] suite," said KMPG U.S. chairman Lynne Doughtie of a gathering which began when the PGA of America took over management of the LPGA Championship from the LPGA in 2014 and convinced KMPG to become the title sponsor. "They become part of this summit, and they are inspired by what's going on around them with golf, but it's also a year-long program. And this year, they are going to have another great lineup of incredible speakers."

Those include former U.S. Secretary of State (and current

Augusta National member) Condoleezza Rice, IBM chairman Ginni Rometty, and Olympics notables Lindsay Vonn and Michelle Kwan.

"It's really cool to have the Olympians there talking to women in business, as well as the players and the things that they have had to overcome," Doughtie said. "There's application for all of us to learn and be inspired by that."

Proceeds from the summit go to fund college scholarships through a Future Leaders initiative. The recipients, high school girls who have passed muster through a rigorous qualifying process, will also be on hand.

The reason for all the extra-curricular activity? The orga-



Former U.S. Secretary of State (and current Augusta National member) Condoleezza Rice



L to R: LPGA commissioner Mike Whan, KMPG U.S. chairman Lynne Doughtie, defending champion Brooke Henderson, Stacey Lewis and PGA of America Paul Levy



nizers believe it's one more way, however subtle, to increase interest in golf.

"It fits very much our mission of growing the game of golf, and also the excitement we see in junior golf," PGA of America president Paul Levy said. "Junior golf in America the last five years has grown over half a million and the largest part of growth in that segment is young girls."

As for the golf, this will be the first women's championship on Olympia's fabled North Course since the 1933 Women's Western Open, which was won by Olympia member June Beebe. An outsider will win this time, plus cash a

\$525,000 check, but who?

Among the contenders, these four stand out:

- Brooke Henderson, the Canadian who knocked off Lydia Ko on the first hole of sudden-death at Sahalee last year, could repeat, though her game is a bit off last year's form.

- Ko, the New Zealander who hasn't won since last July and recently surrendered the No. 1 spot in the women's rankings, has been playing better and is due.

- Lexi Thompson, the American whose miscalculation in the third round of the ANA Inspiration – the year's first major – brought about a four-stroke penalty late in

the final round, and who has won since, will have plenty to prove.

- Ariya Jutanugarn, the Thai who recently supplanted Ko as No. 1 and was one stroke out of last year's playoff, has an extra incentive. She won the 2011 U.S. Girls Junior on Olympia's South Course, so could become the first player since Walter Hagen to win titles on both North and South (a Western Open and a PGA on what were then known as No. 4 and No. 1, respectively).

"We're going to have the best female golfers from all over the world that have taken their whole lives to make it to this level, and really what they want is they

want to play in a forum where the best are going to play each other week-in and week-out," said LPGA Commissioner Mike Whan.

"And they have all got individual stories, whether you grew up in South America, North America, Asia, Europe, to get here is an unbelievable venture. Last year we had 41 different countries playing in Q-School trying to make it to the LPGA. What's happening in women's golf right now is unbelievably exciting because it's borderless. Doesn't matter where you grew up. You can have this dream.

"There's probably already somebody who has shown you can make it here. But if you come

out here and watch the KPMG Women's PGA Championship, you're going to see the best female athletes from all over the world. You're going to see some incredible youth. You're going to see players that can't rent a car yet but can win this tournament. You're going to see players that have actually won this tournament before and are still playing. You're going to see players from countries all over the globe. You'll see flags from all over the world.

"We create an Olympic experience every week."

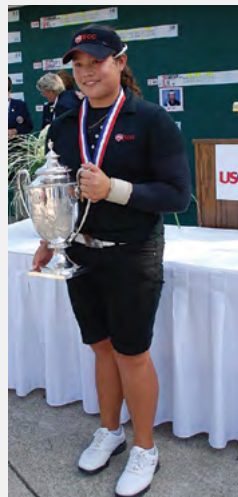
A bevy of U.S. fan favorites, including Cristie Kerr, Michelle Wie, Stacy Lewis, and Paula

Creamer will also be on hand, along with the international contingent that makes the LPGA circuit unique in the game. Only on the women's tour can someone from the Republic of China – a.k.a. Taiwan – like Candie Kung, tee it up in the same group with Shanshan Feng from the mainland People's Republic of China, to say nothing of the Korean wing of the series, including ANA Inspiration winner So Yeon Ryu and multi-major winner Inbee Park.

They'll be playing on – and sometimes against – a course that has challenged the best for over 90 years, and seen everyone from Walter Hagen to Sam Snead to



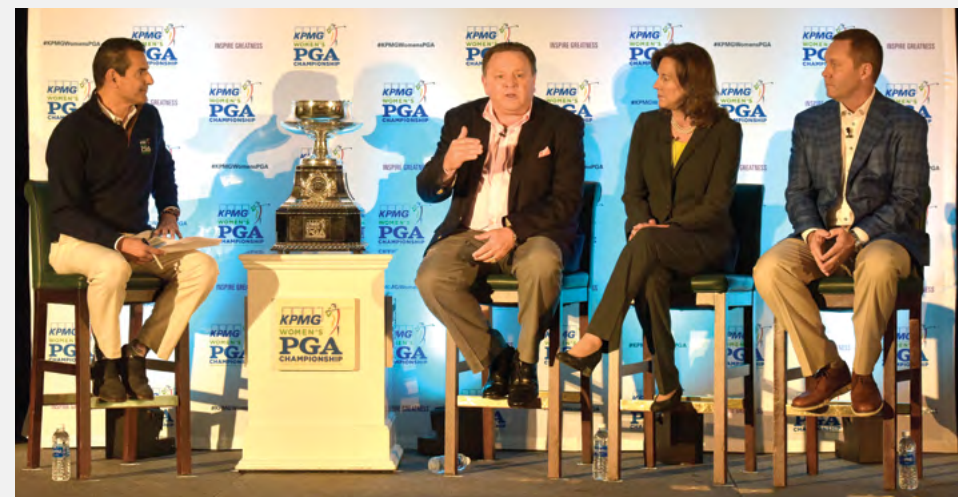
June Beebe (by then, June Beebe Atwood) in front of the Olympia Fields clubhouse in 1935.



With the trophy after winning the 2011 U.S. Girls Junior at Olympia Fields. (Courtesy Olympia Fields Country Club)



Julius Mason quizzes Brooke Henderson and Stacy Lewis



Mason, Paul Levy, Lynne Doughtie and Mike Whan take questions



The original LPGA Championship trophy, still awarded to the champion





Jack Nicklaus to Jim Furyk come out on top.

It's a course that demands precision off the tee, accuracy with approaches, a sterling short game, and perfect touch with the putter. Rare is the flat green, rarer still is a straight putt. The patient player who can roll with the punches and roll the ball as well is the player who will succeed.

The move of the LPGA to partner with the PGA of America for a major championship that would change the name of the event was looked upon with a raised eyebrow by many in golf when the decision was announced.

Three-time winner Patty

Sheehan tweeted almost immediately, "Diminish the LPGA to uplift PGA," and called the re-naming to Women's PGA "a slap in the face."

Others, including LPGA legend and 1990 winner Beth Daniel, also objected, but the change, which included an increase in the purse and a better television deal, seems to have taken the LPGA Championship to a higher plane, no matter what the name.

For one thing, the courses are better. Westchester and Sahalee hosted the first two years of the new deal, Olympia Fields North this year, Kemper Lakes in Hawthorn Woods next year, and Hazeltine Na-

tional near the Twin Cities in 2019. That's a major championship lineup, and worlds apart from playing at the Jack Nicklaus Sports Center, next to an amusement park near Cincinnati, as the LPGA Championship was anchored for most of the 1980s. There seemed to be a roller coaster around every corner.

Now, it's the courses that provide the thrill ride.

"When you're talking about this major, you're talking about 1955 to today," said Whan, the Chicago Heights native whose idea it was and who made it happen in conjunction with PGA of America CEO Pete Bevacqua. "When we first got together and started

talking about this idea, we knew we had to understand, respect and embrace the past while we elevated this to a new level, because you know, when you look on the trophy up there, you're going to see names like Whitworth and Rawls and Lopez and Sorenstam and the names just go on and on. It's a Who's Who of women's golf.

"This is major in terms of what goes on on the golf course. It's major in terms of NBC and Golf Channel coverage. It's major in terms of the size, purse, Rolex Ranking points, and all the things that will change the lives of female athletes that are among the best 156 in the world. But it's ma-

major in terms of women pursuing their career in business. It's major in terms of young women getting the opportunity to go to college.

"And so yes, it's a major championship, but I just always call this the major because it's major in so many other ways, and I think when we first talked about doing this, when we got together with the PGA of America, we were talking about a major championship. When we met [KMPG officials], they turned it into a major event, and I think that's really been pretty special. That's why we're so proud of this thing because our vision wasn't as good as theirs, and when you really are on

to something is when somebody takes your idea and takes it to the next level.

"So I hope that both players that have won this tournament from 1955 to today realize that what we have done is taken it up a notch, I've said this many times, if you meet the founders of the LPGA, at least when they are talking to me, and I'm pretty sure when they are talking to the Stacys and Brookes of the world, they generally ask us to do one thing, and that's leave the game better for the next generation of women."

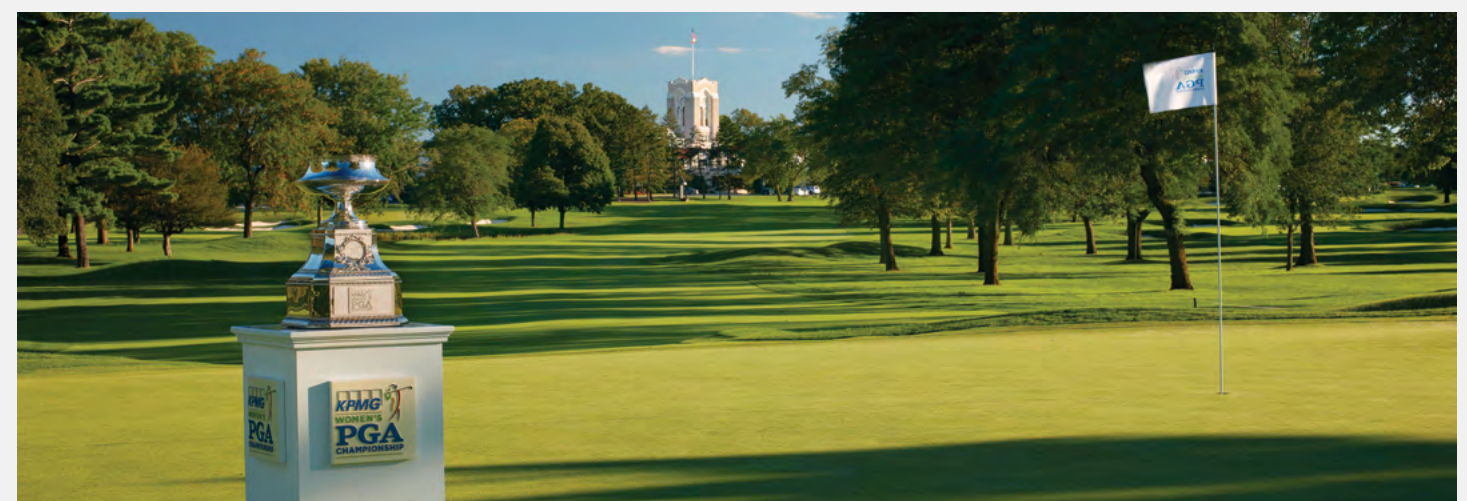
That's something Olympia Fields can handle.



Brooke Henderson during an Olympia Fields practice round



Brooke Henderson hoisting the championship trophy last year



The championship trophy on the 10th green, with the famed clock tower in the background



# Olympia Fields' Four Swing Holes

Text and photos by  
Tim Cronin

**K**MPG Women's PGA Championship viewers with good memories will be familiar with the North Course of Olympia Fields Country Club. The course will use the same configuration as was used in the 2003 U.S. Open and 2015 U.S. Amateur, with the first and 10th holes the same as for the members, and the remainder of the front and back nines flipped to afford more room for spectators, especially on the final holes.

What doesn't change is the degree of difficulty. The course, from a design by Willie Park Jr., opened in 1925 and has hardly been changed, aside from added length.

Said Park when he came up with the design, "I have examined thousands of places adaptable for an ideal golf course, both in Europe and America. I have never seen a more natural setting for a championship course.

I am satisfied now that your No. 4 course is the equal of any golf course I have ever seen and I know of none that is superior, either in beauty or natural terrain."

If anything, the course is more like Park's creation than it was when Jim Furyk was winning the U.S. Open. Since then, and in advance of the U.S. Amateur, consulting architect Mark Mungeum and club officials went back to aerial photos and found several bunkers, including centerline bunkers on the tournament's 14th and 17th holes, that had been turfed over in a modernization effort prior to the 1961 PGA. When a backhoe dug into the turf, the original sand was still there.

There's both opportunity for heroics and trouble on every hole. Here are four that could, by virtue of their design and place in the batting order, make a difference in who wins or loses.

## No. 1 • Par 5 • 525 yards

The opening hole on North can be hard or impossibly hard, depending on the tee selected. Go all the way back, and feel free to buy a Metra ticket, so close is the back tee to the tunnel under the railroad. Just stay out of the donut bunker on the right, a Willie Park Jr. trademark.

A solid uphill second leaves a pitch to a green with enough movement to demand attention. Par is a great score on a great opening hole.

## No. 5 • Par 4 • 420 yards

A fabled hole, with good reason. The 5th (usually the member 14th) has caused many heartbreaks over the years. It's just a hard hole, starting with the tee shot from the elevated tee to the fairway in the valley some 30 feet below. Miss left, and trees are the problem. Miss right, and Butterfield Creek might bring a headache.

From the fairway, the goal is just to clear the creek and barranca for some. The favored can go for the canted green, which is well beyond the creek at the top of the rise, but with a false front from which balls have been known to roll 30 yards away.



No. 1 starts with a donut bunker, a Willie Park signature, on the right side of the fairway, and goes on (and on) from there. (Tim Cronin)



No. 5, seen here after the barranca is cleared, offers a placement tee shot and a very difficult second to an elevated green with nowhere to bail out. (Tim Cronin)



**No. 12 • Par 4 • 409 yards**

An All-American hole that has seen many great moments, most recently Bryson DeChambeau's closing out Derek Bard on the 30th hole of the championship match to win the 2015 U.S. Amateur.

The tee shot must find the lower fairway, preferably on the left side. Then the challenge is to hit the tilted green about 20 feet above you and stay below the hole.

June Beebe did so in 1933 en route to the Women's Western Open crown; Jerry Barber missed the green, but pitched in to save par in the final round of the 1961 PGA.



No. 12 is usually the third hole, and offers a dramatic tee shot over the cliff to a fairway misaligned with the upper fairway, and a second shot to a cliffs' edge green. (Tim Cronin)

**No. 18 • Par 5 • 472 yards**

The severity of the tilt in the ninth green is generally felt more than seen. From the fairway, the green at the end of the front nine looks welcoming, almost benign compared to the deep bunkers surrounding it. But it's a fooler. Staying below the hole, and as close to the fall line as possible, is a must, so severe is the slope.

It was on this green in 1961 that Barber ran down his 60-footer to tie Don January and force a playoff in the PGA Championship, which he won



The finishing hole, the ninth for member play, features a severely tilted green at the end of a trip down a fairway festooned by bunkers. (Tim Cronin)



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