



**O**n a late September day back in 1924, Walter Hagen defeated Jim Barnes in match play to win the PGA Championship and notch his sixth of what would become 11 major titles. On the 4<sup>th</sup> of July, 1960, Mickey Wright won her second of four career LPGA Championships on that very same Donald Ross-designed course. Fast forward 55 years to May 21 – 24<sup>th</sup>, 2015 when French Lick Springs Resort & Casino will host the 2015 Seniors PGA Championship presented by KitchenAid. It seems only fitting that one of the major title holders in the field—which includes Corey Pavin, Nick Faldo, Curtis Strange, Nick Price, and Bernhard Langer—will hoist the Alfred S. Bourne Trophy at tournament’s end to maintain this historic resort’s championship legacy.

While tournament golf has been a tradition at this deluxe resort property virtually since the Ross Course was opened in 1917, every other aspect of the resort has been renovated, updated, or improved since the days that Hagen, Wright,

# Indiana’s French Lick Resort

## A Championship Course to Dye For

By Neal Kotlarek

Gene Sarazen, and Patty Berg roamed the grounds. Indeed, the 2015 Seniors PGA will not be played on the aforementioned Ross Course but on the dramatic, award-winning Pete Dye Course which opened on the grounds in 2009. Colin Montgomerie, 31-time winner on the European Tour and defending Seniors PGA Championship champion, visited the course in late April and walked away impressed. “This is a terrific, terrific venue,” he said. “I’ve played a lot of Pete Dye courses, but this is right up there. It’s right up there with the best of them. This golf course is a championship golf course in every way you can imagine.”

Built through and around the hill-tops of the Hoosier National Forest, the course stretches to a robust 8,100 yards, but will be pared down to a “modest” 7,147 yards for the tournament. Mammoth bunkers, undulating greens, and elevated fairways create drama and challenge from No. 1 to No. 18. Dave Harner, PGA Director of Operations at

French Lick Resort, is looking forward to observing how the field attacks the layout. “When you see the course on TV or here in person, it’s hard to imagine that this particular piece of land is in Indiana,” he says. “Most people associate Indiana with flat terrain and lots of cornfields. This course is high on a ridge line and plays along ridges where you can see for 20 or 30 miles. It’s very hilly. If you hit it off the fairway, you’re going to have a very awkward shot back.”

The Pete Dye Course will play differently during the tournament than it does when resort guests play it. The two nines have been juxtaposed with No. 1 playing as No. 10 and vice-versa. The switch was made to accommodate the hospitality villages arranged across the property. As it turns out, the change in routing will add to the championship’s drama as the 18<sup>th</sup> hole transitions from a sprawling, birdie opportunity par 5 to a grueling dogleg left 431-yard par 4 featuring an elevated fairway that falls off

dramatically with thick rough and Dye’s in-your-face bunkers lurking all the way along the hole’s right side.

Brendan Sweeney, director of media operations for the resort, says he can’t wait for the tournament to start. “Look at the roster of former PGA Tour and European Tour stars who are looking to add another major championship to their tournament legacy,” he states. “Add up all the Masters champions, U.S. Open champions, British Open champions, and PGA Championship champions in the field and you can’t help but get excited. The only question is which golf great you’ll want to follow. It wouldn’t surprise me if the final pairing on Sunday will put two-time Masters champion (1985 and 1993) Bernhard Langer together with last year’s Seniors PGA Championship winner Colin Montgomerie. Then again, how can you go wrong following six-time majors champion Sir Nick Faldo or two-time U.S. Open champion Curtis Strange? Depending upon the pairing



sheet, those two could play together and recreate their 1987 U.S. Open playoff when Curtis shot 71 and Nick shot 75.”

Whoever wins the 2015 Seniors PGA Championship will have to share top billing with the magnificent French Lick Springs Resort property. While golfers visit to take on one of the four courses managed by the hotel, many guests come to experience the other entertainment options available, including spas, elegant restaurants, a casino, two spas and horseback riding. The resort actually consists of two separate complexes—the fully restored French Lick Springs Hotel established in 1845, and the “Eighth Wonder of the World,” the West Baden Springs Hotel with 243 luxury guest rooms and an atrium that spans 200 feet. The hotel is considered a national historic landmark and was listed as the No. 1 hotel in Indiana by *U.S. News & World Report* in 2013 and 2014.

Built in 1855 to capitalize on the abundance of mineral springs in the area, West Baden Springs Hotel was fashioned after one of Europe’s great mineral spas, Baden Baden. When the original hotel was destroyed by a fire in 1901, owner Lee W. Sinclair became determined to build the hotel of his dreams. He unveiled a

design complete with a 200-foot atrium and a fireplace that burned 14-foot logs. The hotel had its ups and downs over the decades and was closed in 1989 for safety reasons. In 1994, the property was sold to Minnesota Investment Partners for \$500,000. The Cook Group, a global medical device manufacturing company headquartered in Bloomington, Indiana, proceeded to inject tens of millions of dollars into the hotel with a goal of restoring its grandeur. In total, the group spent some \$450 million to preserve, restore and expand both the West Baden Springs hotel and its sister property, French Lick Springs Hotel. Beyond the resurrection of two dated but historic properties, the French Lick community benefited with 1,600 jobs.

One of the cornerstones of the restoration project was investment in the classic Donald Ross Course and the construction of the Pete Dye Course. While located only a few miles apart, the two layouts are distinctly different in terrain and character. The Ross Course was given a \$5 million makeover with input from the Donald Ross Society to ensure that the master architect’s original design intentions were honored. The end result is a majestic 7,030-yard course

featuring 80 sand bunkers with flat bottoms and deep, gnarly faces. While those hazards come into play on most every hole, the course is very accessible to players of all handicap levels. *Golfweek* magazine ranked it as the No. 2 golf course in Indiana in 2011–2014.

And the No. 1 best golf course in Indiana, you ask? None other than the Pete Dye Course which hosts the Seniors PGA Championship in May. Ranked as the best new course in America by virtually every golf publication when it opened in 2009, the par-72 tract is today ranked among the top 100 publicly accessible courses in America. “The Pete Dye Course, even day-to-day, is in championship conditions,” says Harner. “It’s as good as anything people can play anywhere in the country.”

The other two courses operated by French Lick Resort are the Valley Links—a Tom Bendelow design that now plays to nine holes with a special configuration designed for kids and beginners—and Sultan’s Run, located 25 minutes from the resort and which stretches over 224 acres of rolling hills, woods and water.

For more information on French Lick Resort, visit the property’s website: [www.frenchlick.com](http://www.frenchlick.com).

