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Stonewall Orchard in August right place, time for Illinois PGA

August 29, 2005

LOCAL GOLF

The Illinois PGA Championship had been the traditional opening tournament for the local golf season the last nine years. This week, it becomes the closer.

Not only does the tournament have a new date, it also has a new site. The 83rd edition of the event starts today at Stonewall Orchard, an **Arthur Hills**-designed public course in Grayslake. It had been held in May at private Royal Melbourne in Long Grove the last two years and was played at nearby Kemper Lakes for 24 years before that.

"We feel fortunate to be able to conduct our premier member championship on a course the quality of Stonewall Orchard," IPGA executive director **Mike Miller** said. "In recent years, we've conducted several of our 18-hole tournaments there, and it received great reviews from our members and competitors."

Illinois coach **Mike Small**, who won the tournament three times in the last four years, believes the date and course switches are a good thing.

"I'm told Stonewall Orchard is a fun, fair test, and scores won't be as low," Small said. "Plus, in late August, the weather conditions should be better."

"May was way too early," agreed **Dino Lucchesi**, the Twin Orchard assistant who is one of five other former champions in the 150-player field. "This tournament should be in August."

Small won last year's title by six strokes, finishing at 7-under-par 209 at Royal Melbourne. This season he became the first IPGA member to win the PGA Club Professional Championship. He also won the Illinois Open and survived the 36-hole cut at both the Cialis Western Open and the PGA Championship.

Thanks to the addition of a new title sponsor, Nadler Golf Car, the tournament will offer a record \$75,000 purse. The top three finishers earn berths in next year's Western Open, and the top 12 qualify for next year's Club Pro Championship.

WORK UNDER WAY: A major renovation project has begun at Sportsman's, a Northbrook Park District facility. Architect **Rick Jacobson** will work on nine holes at a time at the 27-hole facility. The first nine was closed last week, and the third nine, which isn't being renovated, will be integrated with the other nine to form a "hybrid course" so that 18 holes will be available throughout the project. Fees have been reduced from \$45 to \$36. The renovation is to be completed in June 2007.

Meanwhile, the nine-hole Anets course, purchased by the park district in 2000, is getting new greens, bunkers and tees, a full irrigation system and a practice green, and a new clubhouse is in the planning stages. It will reopen next year.

COURSE SPOTLIGHT

WINNETKA

**1300 Oak St. (off Hibbard north of Willow Road), Winnetka
(847) 501-2050**

Facts: Winnetka's 18-hole course measures 6,472 yards from the back tees with a par of 71, rating of 70.1 and slope of 120. From the front, it's 5,740 yards with a rating of 73.1 and slope of 128. The park district-owned facility also has a nine-hole par-3 course, a lighted driving range and facilities for tennis, platform tennis and other recreational sports.

Fees: Weekdays, \$40 for 18 holes, \$28 for twilight. Weekends, \$46 for 18 holes, \$34 for twilight. Reduced rates are available for residents. Carts are \$30 for 18 holes, \$16 for nine. Fees for the par-3 course are \$10 for adults and \$9 for juniors and seniors.

What's to like: The course is more challenging than the yardage suggests. The greens are well-maintained. Nos. 4 and 8 are dandy par-4s, and No. 13 is an interesting long par-3 with the lily-pad flowering in the pond fronting the green presenting an unusual look.

Room for improvement: The club is due for a new irrigation system. The fairways, especially on the front nine, have conditioning problems. Road construction makes entering the club difficult.

Bottom line: Built in 1917, this facility is fairly priced and has served Winnetka well. The fairways are close together, making it a good walking course.

PRO'S TIP

BY MIKE SMALL

When playing in wet conditions, considering using a sand wedge more often around the greens.

Conventional wisdom about chipping calls for using a less lofted club to get the ball rolling as soon as possible. However, with wet and damp conditions in the fairways and roughs, normal chipping clubs may dig, resulting in chunked shots.

If you decide to chip with your sand wedge, set up with an open clubface and a lightly open stance, with your weight evenly distributed. Swing the club along your stance line, not out at the target. The extra bounce that a sand wedge provides will loft the ball higher and give you fine results from those wet and sloppy lies.

Mike Small, the head coach at the University of Illinois, will bid for his fourth Illinois PGA title in five years starting today at Stonewall Orchard in Grayslake.

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