



Merit Club Hosts UL International Crown

Chicagoland Welcomes Golf's Global Team Championship

By Todd Mrowice

Chicago is no stranger to professional golf tournaments. Many of our local courses have played host to PGA and LPGA events in addition to major championships. On the global scale, Chicago welcomed the Ryder Cup in 2012 at Medinah as well as the Solheim Cup in 2009 at Rich Harvest Farms. Oh, and let us not forget the failed bid for the 2016 Summer Olympics. With golf being re-introduced to the games, there was the potential for another local track to make history by being the first to host Olympic golf in over a century.

Not to worry though, Chicago landed another golf event of global proportion with the UL International Crown. The event will be held July 19 to 24 at Merit Club in Libertyville, and our fair city will once again be the center of the golf world. If you don't know that much about the event, it's probably because the inaugural International Crown took place just two years ago, so the event is still very much in its infancy. With the quality and competitiveness of women's golf growing every year, the International Crown is an event that



should be on every golf enthusiast's radar. Here we'll provide you with a guide to get up to speed and ready to watch some of the best golfers on the planet.

The Basics

The UL International Crown tees up in even-numbered years, whereas the Solheim Cup is held in odd-numbered years, much like the Ryder Cup and Presidents Cup on the men's side. Also similar in comparison is that the International Crown features golfers from every edge of the Earth, unlike the Solheim Cup, which is only the United States versus Europe.

The International Crown is a four-day event. Eight countries participate, each with four

representatives carrying their flag. Participating countries are determined by the combined Rolex World Ranking where a country needs to have a minimum of four players to be eligible. The total field of 32 golfers will be determined on June 13th. Each country is then seeded and divided into two brackets.

Thursday through Saturday the event has a four-ball format. Points are awarded per match (two for a win, one for a tie, zero for a loss). At the conclusion of Saturday's matches only five of the participating countries move on to Sunday, where the drama really unfolds in singles matches.

A cumulative score spanning the entire four days of competition determines the winning country. This year the winning team will take home \$100,000 per player

History

Not much of it. That's not to say though that 2014 wasn't a great kickoff for the UL International Crown. Spain's quartet of Carlota Ciganda, Belen Mozo, Azahara Munoz, and Beatriz Recari dominated the weekend by going 2-0 in four-ball matches and 4-0 in singles. Spain tallied 12 of its 15 points on Saturday and Sunday earning the title of inaugural champions.

Anna Nordqvist and Team Sweden finished second with a total of 11 points. The Inbee Park led Republic of Korea would ultimately tie for third with Japan. The United States finished in sixth place after posting no points on Thursday and having an uphill battle the rest of the way.

The 2014 host course was Caves Valley Golf

Club in Baltimore, MD. The International Crown will be held off of U.S. soil for the first time in 2018 when the event takes place in South Korea.

The Players

The main thing for casual golf fans to realize is that international golf competitions (men or women) should not be confused with an all-star game. For these players it is a tremendous honor to represent their country to the rest of the golfing world. Often times you'll hear major champions talk about how nervous they were on the first tee or standing over a five-foot putt. So along with the honor comes a great amount of pressure and nerves, even for the best of the best.

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Learn How to Practice

INSTRUCTION

FINDING PAR



John Esposito

Is your golf game where it needs to be? How much time do you spend practicing in order to shoot better scores? If you're like most golfers, the answer is most likely, not enough.

Wouldn't the game be more enjoyable if you were shooting ten strokes better? Of course it would.

As a PGA Professional who has dedicated over 30 years to helping others with their games, I see the practice habits of my students and thousands of golfers on the driving range. I can say with confidence that most people do not have the foggiest notion of how to properly practice.

Tell me if this sounds familiar: you have a 1:00 PM tee time and you get to the course about 20 minutes early-. You check in, then head down to the range, grab the driver, and hit a few balls in an attempt to get ready for your round. You then head to the putting green to roll a few putts, and it is off to the first tee. Sadly, this is the extent of most golfers practice sessions.

If you only have time for one practice session a week, then make it worthwhile. I would like to share some insight into what would constitute a valuable practice session. First, go to your practice facility with nothing on your agenda other than golf. That means no rushing because you have to be somewhere in 45 minutes. Secondly, bring with you a couple of alignment sticks. These sticks can help you with ball position and alignment. You can purchase the sticks at your local hardware store for just a few dollars each. Thirdly, after you have properly warmed up, focus on an area of your game that has been causing you trouble on the course.

When you start your practice session, begin with chipping and pitching. These shots will allow you to regain the feel for distance control. As the session progresses, that "softness" and rhythm will transfer into your long game. As you move on to longer clubs, move your alignment sticks to start a fresh line of divots (photo 1). Remember to place your next shot on the back of your divot and work back from there. Practicing like this allows you to check that your divot path is square to the target and it helps you with alignment. Key point: your feet, knees, and hips are parallel left of your target at address (photo 2).

John Esposito is the Director of Instruction at Bowes Creek Country Club.



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While the final teams are not determined until mid-June, you can expect top players teeing-up such as Inbee Park, Sei Young Kim (Republic of Korea), Lexi Thompson and Stacy Lewis (U.S), and Minjee Lee (Australia) rounding out the top-32.

Oddly enough, world No. 1 Lydia Ko will not be competing. The 18-year old phenom finds herself without any additional golfers from New Zealand that will land in the qualifying rankings.

What to Watch for in 2016

The Republic of Korea stands as the favorite heading into the 2016 International Crown. Led by Park and Kim, rankings should also land In Gee Chu and Ha-Na Jang on the team. If Korea starts off strong, then they may be the immovable object heading into the weekend.

The United States is surely looking to capitalize on having home field advantage. With Thompson and Lewis leading the charge it could also be Gerina Piller and Cristie Kerr wearing red, white, and blue in July. All four were ranked in the top-20 in the world heading into June.

The Course

If you've never played Merit Club, get in line. The private club located in Gurnee was ranked No. 17 in Illinois by *Golf Digest* for 2015/2016. The course is no stranger to professional events, as it hosted the U.S. Women's Open in 2000 (won by Karrie Webb). Merit Club was founded in 1992 by Bert Getz Sr., and the course architect was Bob Lohmann (Canyata, Jefferson City CC, Midlothian CC).

The layout for the UL International Crown will be 6,613 yards, par 72. Water comes into play on eight holes and the course is heralded for having a very natural state, unaffected by the busy surrounding suburbs.

Tickets and Information

You can purchase tickets for the UL International Crown on the event website, www.ulcrown.com, in addition to finding out more "know before you go" specifics.

You can score practice round tickets (Tuesday or Wednesday) for a mere \$20/day. Competition days (Thursday-Sunday) run \$30/day. You can also purchase passes for the entire week in addition to International Pavilion tickets to get some VIP treatment.

The UL International Crown is only weeks away, and Chicago is ready to have all golfing eyes focused here. A challenge we're getting pretty darn good at.

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