



## **Stratham golf club counting down days to U.S. Junior Amateur**

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STRATHAM – Let the countdown begin.

More than two years of preparation for the first-ever U.S. Golf Association championship to be contested in New Hampshire has arrived at its stretch run -- or, in this case, its final holes.

The 65th U.S. Junior Amateur will be played at the Golf Club of New England on July 16-21. USGA officials were on hand at the club Wednesday to unveil details about the course set-up and competition that will feature 156 of the world's best under-18 players, both from the U.S. and internationally.

“I think just about every professional golfer has played in this event or aspired to play in this event,” said former governor Craig Benson, who is serving as honorary chairman. “You won't just see terrific play, but terrific play from players who will be household names down the road.”

Past U.S. Junior Amateur champions include Tiger Woods, Johnny Miller and David Duval, each of whom could rightly claim to be the best golfer in the world at one time.

Portsmouth will figure heavily in the weeklong event. Host hotel duties will be shared by several in the downtown area, USGA officials said. In addition, a dinner for players and families on the Sunday before the competition will be held at a hangar at Pease Tradeport, where former PGA Tour commissioner – and longtime Maine amateur player – Deane Beman will be the guest speaker.

“The USGA said, ‘A great golf course is great, but you need infrastructure, too,’” said Benson, the club's owner.

USGA officials praised the club's prep work and the local support for the event, which to date has attracted nearly 500 volunteers.

“We could come in tomorrow and run the U.S. Junior Amateur championship,” said Greg Sanfilippo, the USGA's tournament director.

New Hampshire has produced two USGA champions, both with Seacoast ties. Laura Shanahan-Rowe, the teaching pro at Sagamore Golf Center in North Hampton, won the U.S. Women's Mid-Amateur in 2001; former University of New Hampshire golf captain Austin Eaton III won the U.S. Mid-Amateur in 2004.

That number almost increased last summer: Phil Pleat of Nashua lost in the finals of the U.S. Senior Amateur and, at the U.S. Junior Amateur in Bremerton, Wash., Keene 16-year-old Chelso Barrett reached the final before losing to Jordan Spieth, 6-and-5.

That performance earned Barrett one of 10 exemptions into this year's U.S. Junior Amateur field. The other spots will be filled by the top performers at 63 sectional qualifiers, including one at Atkinson CC next Tuesday where the majority of local hopefuls will vie.

“Last year, when I got into mach play, I just thought, ‘The tournament's in New Hampshire (in 2012),’” said Barrett. “If I can get to the semifinals I can end my junior career in New Hampshire.”

Barrett has already made a verbal commitment to Texas Christian University but for many of the players, this is an event that can put them on – or take them off – the college radar screen. More than 100 college coaches are expected to be in attendance that week.

Stroke-play rounds will be held Monday and Tuesday, with six rounds of match play to follow. Admission is free, though nobody is making attendance projections.

Benson said that nearly 500 volunteers have been lined up – compared to 230 a year ago in Washington – and \$600,000 has been arranged in sponsorships, compared to \$200,000 last year. That's allowed the event to take on a charitable partner, the New Hampshire Golf Foundation, which was formed to advance the game of golf in the state with an emphasis on junior programs.

“That's where our future golfers are going to come from,” said Jeremy Sprince, executive director of the N.H. Golf Association. “Maybe this gives some exposure to kids that haven't had it.”

Sanfilippo said the course will be set up at just under 7,200 yards, with greens between 11 and 12 on the Stimpmeter, and no intermediate cut of rough.

In short, a test. Kind of what these last couple years have been like for the people – and club – involved in hosting this event.

“This is the only golf club in New Hampshire that can host an event like this,” said Benson.

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