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## Tee time in Prattville: Navistar LPGA Classic is back

By Marty Roney  
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PRATTVILLE -- The Navistar LPGA Classic will tee off this week in Prattville, and officials believe this year's event will be the best yet.

The tournament brings 145 of the best women golfers in the world to test their skills against the Senator Course at Capitol Hill. This year, the LPGA added one more player to the field to pursue a purse totaling \$1.3 million.

The top five players in the Rolex Women's World Golf Rankings will make the stop, including the defending champion Lorena Ochoa, along with rookie sensation Jiyai Shin, Suzanne Petterson, Yani Tseng and Cristie Kerr, said Jonathan Romeo, tournament director. Phenom Michelle Wie also will be making her first appearance at Navistar, which is returning to Prattville for its third year.

It's the high-caliber players that will bring in fans, said Mark Hunter, a Montgomery duffer who's been able to take in two days of play for each year the classic has taken place. He plans to continue that streak during the upcoming weekend.

"How many chances are you going to get to see Michelle Wie play in Prattville?" he asked. "There seems to be a bigger buzz around the tournament this year than there has been before. Just look at the talent that's going to be on that course. And you can't argue with the ticket prices."

Tickets are \$10 each, regardless of the day.

Several things coalesced to bring such a strong field to town, Romeo said.

"The third time really is the charm," he said. "The Navistar Classic has become established on the tour. This is the last domestic stop of the season, so the ladies are chasing those checks. We've had strong fields each year, but this is the strongest field we have seen since the tournament began in Prattville.

"There's going to be some great golf played."

The big party kicks off Monday, with tournament days Thursday through Sunday. Even the recent heavy rains of the past few weeks haven't dampened the spirits of those involved in pulling the tournament off.

"The course is in great shape," said Mike Beverly, superintendent of golf at Capitol Hill, a Robert Trent Jones Golf Trail site. "We've been able to grow the rough. This last week we were able to steal a few days for maintenance. The heavy rains didn't come like the forecast predicted. We had gotten behind on our mowing, and setting up some of the sky boxes and public bleachers.

"But the break in the weather came at just the right time. We were able to catch up. People are going to see a beautiful course."

Forecasts call for a dry week for the tournament, with fall-like temperatures and lower humidity levels. The cooperation of the weather isn't the only high note as the buildup to the tournament continues. Ticket sales are on par to be better than 2008.

Last year, the galleries for the week were estimated at 50,000. The event created a \$7 million economic impact for the region, Romeo said. The University of South Alabama generated a study on the impact, he added.

"We expect to see our largest gallery yet," Romeo said. "The weather looks like it's going to be perfect, and we lucked up with the Alabama and Auburn both having away games next weekend. So the galleries should be huge."

Mayor Jim Byard Jr. said the city is ready to play welcoming host.

"We've had a few last-minute things arise that needed to be taken care of," he said. "But this isn't our first tournament. Our public works and public safety employees know what to expect and know what they need to do. I'm looking forward to another great tournament."

And looking forward to an extension of the tournament being announced some time next week.

Negotiations to bring the tournament back to Prattville next year look good, Romeo said.

"We are moving in that direction," he said. "We haven't gotten anything signed, but the LPGA and Navistar are very pleased with the way things have gone. They are very impressed with the level of support that has been shown locally.

"And the players love Prattville. They are treated like rock stars in Prattville."

## Additional Facts

WANT TO GO?

Dates: Oct. 1-4

Purse: \$1,300,000

Format: 72 holes

Ticket/Pro Am/ Volunteer Info: 205-966-9332

TV: 7:30 to 9:30 p.m. each day on the Golf Channel

Course: The Senator at Capitol Hill, Robert Trent Jones Trail Golf Trail in Prattville

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