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## Open Season

Lancaster County welcomes the 2015 U.S. Women's Open this summer

BY CINDY KALINOSKI



The Lancaster Country Club is oddly calm for a venue that's gearing up to host the largest annual women's sporting event in the world, one that will be broadcast in 100 countries, and will attract 100,000 spectators in a single week onto a single, highly manicured property.

The reason for this calm is that they're not running the tournament: the United States Golf Association (USGA) is, and this will be their seventieth U.S. Women's Open. So they're on it.

"It's not their first rodeo," jokes Jeff Hostetter, committee chair and past president of Lancaster Country Club (LCC), who is also remarkably calm. "Plus we've been working on this since 2007."

### **So What Is the Open?**

The U. S. Women's Open is one of the "majors," the tournaments that represent the most significant challenges and offer the highest purses on the Ladies Professional Golf Association (LPGA) tour. Both amateurs and pros can play in the Open (thus the name). It's the longest-running championship in women's golf, attracting the world's top female golfers. And in July, it's coming to us.

Golf isn't like most sports, where spectators squint at the big screen to glimpse the players. Golf gets up close and personal. That may be one reason 2,600 volunteers signed up in less than five weeks, with another 350 hopefuls on the wait list, setting a new record. Pretty impressive, considering the volunteers also pay for this privilege. Still, helpers will have a good shot at autographs...and, for a few, maybe even TV time.

### **Our Time to Shine**

But the main reason South Central Pennsylvanians jumped at this opportunity may be because we like to help. That's Chairman Hostetter's take.

"This is about something bigger than golf. We've never had anything like this, that's going to be broadcast all over the world," he notes. "We're a very passionate community that does a nice job of rallying around causes that we consider to be our own. I think this event is our event, and we'll have the opportunity to show the world how unique our community is."

He tosses out numbers like gifts. A record \$1 million in ticket sales by February 10. A purse rumored to be over \$4 million. \$25 to 30 million in economic impact to our local economy. 70 percent local vendors signed. Twenty hours of global TV coverage.

### **Watching the Stars**

You can see why golf champion and Reading native Betsy King, who won the U. S. Women's Open in 1989 and 1990, is watching the run-up this year. "I think the tour is in a really strong place right now," says King. "The young stars are tremendous, very talented." As for her picks, King says, "Michelle Wie is obviously the one to watch, and Stacy Lewis is a great competitor."

Hawaii-born Wie, who won the Open last year, turned pro at age sixteen. Lewis, a Texan, captured the LPGA's "triple crown," the first American to do it in a single year since King in 1993.

King's also tracking Lydia Ko of New Zealand. At age seventeen, Ko just moved up the world rankings into the number one spot. Then there's Korea's Na Yeon Choi, whose earnings approach \$10 million, and Inbee Park, the first Player of the Year from Korea in 2013.

But no matter how good they are, the tournament will be tough. King says the Open "is probably the hardest golf course they play all year. Lancaster has always had a reputation for being one of the top courses in Pennsylvania. You have to play aggressively in a U.S. Open; you want to birdie every hole. I think Lancaster will be a good test."

To put this observation in perspective, Betsy King dominated the golf world for almost a decade, winning six majors and over thirty tournaments. She knows her golf courses.

## **A Site for Greatness**

King prefers classic layouts, with smaller greens and tree-lined fairways, like the Old Course at the LCC, the site of this year's U.S. Women's Open. It's arguably the best work of William Flynn, a master of the golden age of golf course architecture. He laid it out in 1913, developing a friendship with the green chairman at LCC. Returning every year for twenty years, Flynn tweaked the 6,850-yard course into a work of art.

Adding interest to the course, the Conestoga River and Cayuga Creek both flow through it. Scott Irwin, General Manager and Chief Operating Officer of the Club, says: "Anytime you have a river, you develop bluffs and elevation changes that really add to the complexity of the lay of the land and the golf holes. The whole idea of golf is to introduce risk-reward. If you're really good, you can make this difficult shot and be rewarded for it. If there's no risk involved, it takes the enjoyment out of the course for better players. I think that was done extremely well here."

Irwin admits that, even with the USGA running the tournament, "It will be busy, and we'll probably have to double up on staff, but we started this process six years ago." They've been re-grassing greens, re-contouring a fairway, that sort of thing. "But," says Irwin, "we would have done these things for our members anyway. When the Selection Committee originally visited, they said we 'could tee it up tomorrow.'"

There is a pile of stuff to do, but the USGA has engaged thirty committees. Still, transforming the verdant course into what amounts to an international stage is no small feat.

They'll need grandstands that seat 5,500, eighteen TV towers (one on each green), a 1¼-acre compound just for FOX TV, 50,000 square feet of tenting, and miles of fencing and rope. Not to mention security, merchandise, food, transportation, and parking.

The operational director's been on site full-time since January and won't leave until October. It takes six to eight weeks to set up, another four to six weeks to tear down, and then there's grass restoration and an intense scoring analysis.



## Ready...Set...

But until then there's the anticipation of the event, especially if you're lucky enough to have nabbed tickets before they sold out. Legends like Betsy King will be there to watch, and Hostetter and Irwin will likely be a lot less calm. If you're a volunteer, they're holding your t-shirt.

The rest of us can tune in up to five hours a day. We'll become fans, or maybe even take up the sport. One thing's for sure: we'll be proud of our region, watching our neighbors assist the stars as they're televised all over the globe. Lancaster, you're on in three, two...(and one).

## Betsy King, Local & Legendary

To gain insight into the U.S. Women's Open, we were fortunate to sit down with golf legend Betsy King, who offered exclusive comments on the tournament and on the sport itself.

Playing this year on LPGA's Legends Tour, Betsy King grew up in Reading, where she was later inducted into the World Golf Hall of Fame. Her career includes:

- thirty-four career wins on the LPGA Tour, fourteenth on the all-time wins list
- breaking, for the first time, the \$5 million and \$6 million marks in LPGA career earnings
- being a three-time recipient of the LPGA Rolex Player of the Year award
- award-winning humanitarian work

In 2008, King climbed Mt. Kilimanjaro to raise funds for Golf Fore Africa, which she founded to provide water and assist people with HIV/AIDS.

Best quote: "The secret to golf is that there is no secret. A lot of people are looking for that one tip that's going to turn your game around. There isn't one."

Best advice: "Number one: Get lessons. All the times I've played on tour in twenty-eight years, I don't think there's one pro out there who doesn't have a teacher."

Least favorite trend: "Having kids focus on one sport. They're playing organized baseball at five years old. Let the kids play on the playground and learn themselves a little and then get into the competition."

Best course(s) ever: The Dinah Shore course at Mission Hills Country Club in Palm Springs, CA, and Wykagyl in New Rochelle, NY.

Favorite PA food: Pretzels: She always takes guests through the aisles at our stores so they can witness our vast array of pretzel options.

### Got Tickets? Here's the rundown:

July 6-12: practice rounds Monday through Wednesday; tournament starts Thursday and runs through Saturday (half of players are cut before the weekend)

Find tee times, parking info, etc., at [www.2015uswomensopen.com](http://www.2015uswomensopen.com) and [www.uswomensopen.com](http://www.uswomensopen.com).

Cameras and autographs allowed on practice rounds Monday through Wednesday.

**For the first time ever, all four rounds will be broadcast:**

FOX sports 1 cable on Thursday and Friday (2-7 p.m. EST), and Saturday and Sunday on FOX from 2:30-6:30 p.m. EST.

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To view the course with an analysis of each hole, go to:

[www.golfclubatlas.com/courses-by-country/usa/lancaster-country-club/](http://www.golfclubatlas.com/courses-by-country/usa/lancaster-country-club/)

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[www.golfclubatlas.com/courses-by-country/usa/lancaster-country-club/pg-ii/](http://www.golfclubatlas.com/courses-by-country/usa/lancaster-country-club/pg-ii/)

Check the countdown clock at [www.lancastercc.com](http://www.lancastercc.com)

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