

Bad Ragaz PGA Seniors Open Press Communiqué 3/2008

The seniors US-Open revenge is set to take place in Bad Ragaz

The entry list for this year's Bad Ragaz PGA Seniors Open again reads like a «who's who» of the PGA European Seniors Tour: with a month to go to the tournament, 26 of last year's top-30 players have already promised to attend. Among those competing for the 39,000 Euro winner's cheque are the Bad Ragaz victors of the last five years, the course record holder and four members of the Swiss PGA. Mind you, the world-class field at the 12th Bad Ragaz PGA Seniors Open is headed by a whole host of former Ryder Cup players, notably last year's runner up Costantino Rocca (Italy), and 1963 British Open Champion, Sir Bob Charles (New Zealand). Now 72 years of age, he still enthusiastically gives it all he's got on the regular tour: at the start of the season, he made the cut at the New Zealand Open! We look forward to seeing what sort of a show he will put up in Bad Ragaz from 8 - 10 August 2008.

The Bad Ragaz PGA Seniors Open has been a must for the noted players on the PGA European Seniors Tour when planning their season – once hooked they keep coming back. Provided they have earned a starting place for this event. That's because the 72 starting places for this, the only Swiss event on the Seniors Tour, are much sought after – even though neither appearance money nor a giant prize money fund awaits. Instead the seniors appreciate the unique hospitality in Bad Ragaz. Nevertheless, the amount on the winner's cheque has been boosted to 39,000 Euro. The total prize money for the tournament has been increased by 50,000 Euro to 260,000 Euro.

Revenge for the US Open – and for last year

This year's Bad Ragaz PGA Seniors Open will not only be about the prize money; a great deal of honour will also be at stake. Since 26 of the top 30 in last year's order of merit have promised to attend, it may be assumed that some of the competitors will also be seeking revenge in Bad Ragaz for the US Seniors Open taking place in the preceding week. After all Costantino Rocca, the Italian idol of the public and Ryder Cup hero from 1997, is not the only one returning from the USA at the start of the week and heading directly for Bad Ragaz. Although the charming north Italian is playing down his Ragaz prospects – «you never know, after the long journey and with jet lag, anything can happen ...» –, nevertheless, he has his heart set on winning his first Ragaz title. On his first appearance at the St. Gallen Oberland resort last year, he finished up in second place – it could hardly have been closer. And after all, Switzerland has been a happy hunting ground for him; in 1997 he won the European Open on the regular tour in Crans.

Joining Rocca at the start are last year's winner Carl Mason (England) and Horacio Carbonetti (Argentina – winner 2003 and 2004) who shared second place with Rocca, as well as David J. Russell (England). And the winners from 2006 – Juan Quiros (Spain) – and 2005 – Terry Gale (Australia) – have already entered.

In view of the high-calibre starting line-up, we can probably look forward to some new records being set. High standards have already been set however: in 2006, Juan Quiros lowered the course record to 61 strokes (9 under par) during the second round, while last year Carl Mason established a tournament record with 194 strokes (16 under par) – so there's not a lot of scope left. Nevertheless, anything is possible ...

A battle of giants and generations

This year we can prepare ourselves not only for an exciting race for the title, but also in all probability for a battle of the generations: the 50-year-olds against the 70-year-olds. That's because alongside the above-mentioned players who dominated last year's tournament, at the moment we have to take particular account of another regular competitor: Sir Robert «Bob» Charles. Now 72 years of age, the New Zealander says: «I start every round with the aim of completing it with a lower score than my age». On 13 August 2006 in the final round of the 10th Bad Ragaz PGA Seniors Open he did just that with an impressive 65 strokes (and 70 years of age). At the start of the current season, at the age of 71, he achieved the feat no less than twice in the same tournament – the New Zealand Open. This made him the oldest player of all time to make the cut on the (regular) PGA European Tour. This means that we can look forward to seeing how the ascetic left-hander holds his own in the contest with similarly-aged players (or at least ones barely a generation younger) – and how often he manages to go round in less than his age in Bad Ragaz .

Four Swiss PGA members at the start

The only Senior Tour event in Switzerland (and the country's second-largest PGA tournament after the European Open in Crans) would be incomplete without representatives of the Swiss PGA. Especially of course the Swiss by choice, Maurice Bembridge. The English resident of St. Gallen, who represented his first homeland in the Ryder Cup on four occasions, has now been the ambassador for the host, the Grand Resort Bad Ragaz, on the European Senior Tour for three years. With a full tour card, mark you. On his home tournament, the placid Bembridge is always a great crowd puller – his flight is always followed by large bunch of spectators. And this is not a recent phenomenon, but dates back to the first holding of the tournament – the 63-year-old Bembridge is among the very few players who have participated in every Bad Ragaz PGA Seniors Open since 1997.

The Bad Ragaz PGA Seniors Open is also a home event for the head pro at Lucerne Golf Club, Helmuth Schumacher from Wangs. Like Bembridge, he has been an ever-present since the first tournament. And although he now only plays occasionally on the tour, the Swiss is popular both with his fellow pros and the spectators alike. Another reason why Chairman of the Organising Committee Ralph Polligkeit was pleased to award him a wild card once again this year.

Polligkeit passed on the organiser's second wild card to the Swiss PGA. A decision as to which of their members will be given the other starting opportunity in Bad Ragaz this year will be taken ten days before the tournament.

One player with no need of a wild card is Tony Price, reigning Swiss PGA senior champion both in stroke play and matchplay. The Englishman who works at Golf d'Alsace possesses a restricted tour card for the PGA European Seniors Tour and will find a place in the 72 strong starting field on the merit of his position in the rankings.

Attractive supporting programme

In addition to top-class golf, spectators will again be offered a number of attractive side events this year. In line with tradition, the Shoot-Out will take place late Saturday afternoon: on 9 August, an international field of competitors will compete in front of the grandstand under the motto «Golf & Casino». Throughout the three days of the tournament, a public tent will be open alongside fairway 12 – with a view of the 12th green – where visitors can take a break, fortify themselves and talk shop. The 12th Bad Ragaz PGA Seniors Open thus once again promises to be a fascinating golf rendezvous. A visit (free of charge!) will be well worthwhile.

This year, the public tent will feature evening entertainment

On Friday evening, a lively atmosphere will be provided by Fabienne Louves together with Marc Sway, who are no doubt well known to the younger generation. With “Simply the Best” Fabienne Louves sang her way into viewers’ hearts when she took part in MusicStar 2007 and was celebrated as the new MusicStar. The concert will take place in the evening of Friday, 8 August. Doors open at 19.30, the concert begins at 20.00 and costs CHF 35.00. Minimum age for admission is 16 years – ID checks will be made.

The entertainment continues on a humorous note in the public tent on Saturday evening, 9 August. The well-known duo Lapsus: outspoken, sharp-witted, merciless and hilarious; they can be depended on to get the audience laughing. Nothing is sacrosanct for Peter Winkler and Christian Höhener alias Theo Hitzig and Bruno Gschwind. Doors open at 19.00, the event begins at 20.00 and costs CHF 48.00 including welcome drink.

Tickets for either event can be purchased in advance at Sargans and Chur stations from today. They can also be ordered directly in the Grand Resort Bad Ragaz by calling 081 303 30 30. SBB will allow a 20% discount on rail tickets in conjunction with the PGA public tent event tickets.

For further information and pictures:

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