

MICHIGAN AMATEUR GOLF

Belvedere gears up for return of Michigan Amateur

BY ANDY SNEDDON
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They say you can always go home again. In the case of the Michigan Amateur golf tournament, home is Belvedere Golf Club.

"We're proud to be here — great tradition," said David Devendorf, vice president of the Golf Association of Michigan, at the tournament media day recently. "It's extraordinary. We're going to be so proud to have this course for all the participants. It (Belvedere) really paints a beautiful picture of the rich heritage of the club."

The 92nd annual tournament, which annually crowns the state's top amateur male player, returns to Belvedere after a 15-year absence. It was played at the Belvedere every June from 1963-88, and 2003 marks the 39th time the course will host the event.

"This has been a labor of love," said Steve Braun, who is in his seventh year as the head pro at Belvedere. "I've had a fun trying to make sure that we do this right."

The tournament begins with 156 players — determined by sectional qualifying and exemptions — on June 17. After two rounds of medal play, the field is cut to the low 64 players, who

then square off in a grueling test of elimination match play until the two-man final on Saturday, June 21.

"We really started talking about it, four, five, six years ago," club president Peter Flanigan said. "We are delighted to be considered to have the tournament."

The Belvedere was built in 1925 by William Watson, who also had a hand in designing such famed American golf names as Interlochen in Minneapolis, The Olympic Club in San Francisco, and Olympia Fields outside Chicago, site of this year's U.S. Open.

But before the GAM would award the state amateur to the Belvedere, the club went through a spiffing-up stage, spearheaded by greens superintendent Rick Grunch, along with Braun and general manager Tom Conlan.

"There are really three people who run the Belvedere Golf Club," Flanigan said. "Tom Conlan, Rick Grunch and Steve Braun. If you knew what our budget was ... I mean, these guys just perform miracles."

The work they put in, plus their attention to bringing the course up to championship caliber and

covering all the bases, was enough to convince Devendorf, the GAM vice president.

"Two years ago they went to Flint Golf Club" site of the 2001 tournament, he said. "And last year, they were at the Country Club of Jackson.

"They have been extremely dedicated here ensuring that they do it just right for the return to Belvedere. My hat's off to the folks at the club who have prepared this place."

The old-style course, which plays to a par 70, 6,715 yards, is expected to be absolutely shining when the tournament tees off in less than four weeks.

And while the Belvedere certainly will show its teeth, the course features something extra, according to GAM officials who attended Wednesday's event.

"This is special for a lot of us," tournament director Roger Ostrander said. "It's the way you feel when you're out there. It's different than being at The Bear ... You feel like there's a lot of history (at the Belvedere). It's quiet, it's a very nice place to be.

"It's just the greatest place to be. I guess that's why we're here for the 39th time."