

49th John Deere Classic Preview

ILLINOIS GOLFER

SPECIAL DIGITAL EDITION

JULY 11, 2019



Matthew Wolff leads Deere field

Rookies Morikawa, Hovland, Suh on hand this week in Silvis

The Buzz

Metamora buys WeaverRidge

The plan was afoot a couple of years ago. It made complete sense to **Jim Ring**, founder and proprietor of Metamora Fields, the luxe course in Metamora, the small town on the bluff northeast of Peoria.

Only one public course in metro Peoria compared to it, that being WeaverRidge, the equally luxe course on the west edge of Peoria. The Weaver family, having built the course and never seeing it take off financially, wanted out.

Ring, whose prairie-style layout had had more success, wanted in.

The deal was there to be made. Finally, in June, it was made. Metamora Fields, which is to say Ring, bought WeaverRidge from **Jerry** and **Matt Weaver**.

Changes were effected immediately: lower prices to match those at Metamora Fields, with a \$60 top on weekends and a weekday senior rate of \$47 all day long. A season pass, pricey at \$3,000, that covers both facilities from golf course to range. (Those who prefer just one course can get in for \$2,000.)

The WeaverRidge parking lot was quickly repaved. Clubhouse repair was being effected. Needed course maintenance is being taken care of, part of a two-year plan that could include tweaking the design – D.A. Weibring’s name has been mentioned as a tweaker. And there’s a new name on the place: WeaverRidge Golf Course of Peoria.

“We had the name Metamora in our course and

thought it would be a good idea to add Peoria to WeaverRidge,” **Matt Rogers**, general manager of both courses, told the *Peoria Journal-Star*.

This is a bold move by Ring, given the flat nature of golf business at the moment – even Metamora Fields has seen a year-to-year dropoff in rounds. But he and Rogers believe ownership of two courses will make sense for a statewide marketing plan to be successful. Peoria is about three hours from downtown Chicago and a bit closer to St. Louis. Both courses are worth the drive.

“We want to give golfers from Chicago and other areas an opportunity to come and play two great and very different courses,” Rogers told the *Journal-Star*. “We’re hoping in time, with the two together, we can market outside our local market and get enough out-of-town people to make up the difference.”

On a visit last year, Ring told ILLINOIS GOLFER he thought he was close to finalizing a deal to build a medium-sized hotel on a corner of the Metamora Fields property two years ago, but the deal fell through, some \$1.5 million short of financing.

Now it may be revived with a different partner. If that happens, Ring will have in an urban area what **Mike Keiser** has achieved in the hinterlands, combining two or more courses and on-site lodging to make a golf jaunt not just a day trip but a destination for mid-week or weekend getaways.

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THE 49TH JOHN DEERE CLASSIC

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THE COVER Matthew Wolff, 20, surprise winner last week in Minneapolis, signed autographs and took selfies with his legion of new fans Wednesday at TPC Deere Run. / Tim Cronin / Illinois Golfer



The Grill Room by Tim Cronin

The little tournament that could

It was the Quad Cities Open at first, not even on the regular PGA Tour in 1971, and then barely on it for a number of years thereafter.

It was almost killed off by debts, so close to the end at one point the news conference had been called and the release prepared. An eleventh-hour phone call guaranteeing a new partnership saved it.

Ed McMahon, who did not play golf, was the front man for the tourney for a number of years, and while he didn't coax boss Johnny Carson, whose monologue-ending golf swing was likely seen by more people than anyone in history, to Oakwood Country Club, he did drag Jerry Lewis and a host of Hollywood stars to the tournament for Wednesday's pro-am. After which, in many years, the rest was conducted in near-secret. You don't get someone bellowing "Hey, lady!" every day in Bettendorf. When you do, people turn out.

Burger maker Hardee's signed on for a spell, and while that brought financial stability to one of the PGA Tour's smallest tournaments – right there with the B.C. Open for the longest time – those who remember the fruit flies surrounding the burgers sitting in the sun in the open-air press tent will tell you fine dining it sometimes was not.

But the QCO hung on, pressed forward, gained a measure of respect, and finally landed a big-time sponsor in Deere & Company, the best-known company in the Quad Cities.

April 2, 1997 was the day the QCO was adopted by Deere – the John Deere Classic title

arrived in 1999, 20 years ago now – and since then, the tournament has been on an ever-spward spiral.

The PGA Tour touts itself as a charity-first operation, and in many ways that's true thanks to the groups which do the dirty work to put on each week's tournament. It is certainly true in the cast of the Deere, where the charity component is stunningly effective.

Birdies for Charity is a wide and welcome umbrella under which more than 500 local groups conduct fund-raisers based on – you guessed it – the number of birdies scored during the pro-am and the four tournament days proper. From a small start, the Birdies program has become one of the major economic engines for charity in the area, with over \$13.4 million raised last year and more than \$107 million across the years, most of those in the Deere era. (Deere, the company, covers all the administrative costs, and its charity wing also kicks money into the pot, so the return for each charity is more than 100 percent of the money pledged.)

Attendance isn't massive – maybe 15,000 on a big day – but the impact is, thanks to the all-in attitude of so many donors, to say nothing of the many volunteers who work long hours marshaling or what have you at TPC Deere Run. Stan Leach



Ed McMahon

raised his hand to help at the first QCO in 1971 and continues to do so as the 49th edition starts. (He continued to volunteer during the dozen years he was mayor of Moline.)

Some years ago, we chanced to compare the John Deere Classic to the Green Bay Packers, which was music to tournament director Clair Peterson's ears. He's a Packers fan from way back. The analogy is simple. An NFL franchise in a small town – Green Bay has about 306,000 people in its metropolitan area – and a PGA Tour franchise in a small group of cities totaling 383,000 folks (and which had an NBA franchise, the Tri-Cities Blackhawks, today's Atlanta Hawks, at the dawn of pro basketball). Bears fans will hate to hear it, but both areas punch above their weight.

The QCO-Hardees-Miller Lite-Deere – that covers most of the sponsors – became known as the incubator of PGA Tour careers. Payne Stewart's first victory was here, as was Jordan Spieth's and Bryson DeChambeau's more recently.

Their careers took off. Not everyone's do. Michael Kim, last year's winner, hasn't made a cut in 2019. His last check came at the Tournament of Champions on the first weekend of the year, where there is no cut. He's a great guy and you hope he turns it around, but only two of his last 28 rounds are in the 60s.

Maybe this is the week he lights up the scoreboard again. After all, the tournament slogan is "Magic Happens Here." Can it happen twice?

ILLINOIS GOLFER COVER STORY

49TH JOHN DEERE CLASSIC PREVIEW

Young guns take center stage

It was from this bunker adjacent to the 18th green that Jordan Spieth holed a shot for birdie in the final round to join a playoff that he would win in 2013. Don't bet this year's winner will be in this spot on Sunday.

PHOTOGRAPH BY TIM CRONIN



Rookie standout Wolff leads surge of PGA Tour newcomers in prelude to next week's British Open

BY TIM CRONIN
REPORTING FROM SILVIS

Sports franchises down on their luck and without veteran leadership often turn to rookies for an injection of excitement.

The youth movement is as old as the participants are young.

Golf is different. With occasional exceptions over the years – Gene Sarazen in 1922, Jack Nicklaus in 1962, Tiger Woods in 1996 – it's the veterans who have figured out how to play. The kids have to watch, learn and wait their turn.

Not any more. Maybe it started with Jordan Spieth when he holed out to force a tie at the end of regulation in the 2013 John Deere Classic, an overtime session he won on the fifth extra hole. No teenager had won on the American circuit since 1931, when Ralph Guldahl did so at Riviera, before it was even called the PGA Tour.

Since Spieth's feat at age 19, the kids have poked their nose inside the tent, and taken up residence, with increasing ease. Part of that is due to the professionalism, so to speak, of college golf. Spieth was a polished player when he arrived from a short stint at Texas, chasing a not-so-impossible dream.

Still, Spieth, for all his post-Deere success – a Masters and U.S. Open, and a second Deere title besides – he was a bit of a one-off.

Look at this week's John Deere Classic roster, and it's the closest thing to a college tournament



Tim Cronin / Illinois Golfer

THE SHOWROOM Some of Deere's more specialized products are on display near the ninth green.

with money on the line that you'll see. If this field was any younger, it would have to be carded.

Start with Matthew Wolff, who won last week's 3M Open in his third start as a professional and, as he's but 20, the youngest winner in Tour since Spieth, couldn't celebrate with anything stronger than a ginger ale.

Having finished in a tie for 50th in Phoenix and capturing the NCAA Championship in June, he left Oklahoma State early, and the move was clearly the right one. He's an instant millionaire, has a spot on the Tour through 2021-22 and will

play in next year's Masters. That beats Chemistry 302 every day of the week.

Then consider Viktor Hovland, Wolff's Oklahoma State teammate. The Norwegian remained in college for four years, but the graduate studies of last year's U.S. Amateur champion include low amateur honors at the Masters and the U.S. Open – in the latter case breaking Jack Nicklaus' 59-year-old amateur scoring mark of 282 by two strokes.

How good is Hovland? He finished in a tie for 13th at the 3M.



Next up, we present Collin Morikawa, like Wolff a native Californian. He won the Pacific 12 title in the spring and last week played in the final group at the 3M with Wolff.

Two rookies in the final twosome?

Told you things were changing. And fast. If those three weren't on hand, then four-time All-America standout Justin Suh, raised in San Jose and pedigreed at Southern California, would be drawing headlines on his own. Instead, he's just one of the rookie pack.

All four were handed valuable sponsor's exemptions by John Deere Classic tournament director Clair Peterson a month or so ago, with the expectation that one or two might hit the Tour running. All four have done so, and Wolff, by virtue of winning in Minneapolis, and Morikawa, by finishing in the top 10, didn't even need them.

They're all on hand, and the Tour has taken advantage of the excitement by grouping Hovland and Morikawa with Doc Redman, another stand-out who captured the U.S. Amateur at Riviera in 2017, together for the first two rounds. (Wolff, as a tournament winner, was paired with Charles Howell III and Kevin Tway, two other Tour winners, and was slated to commence his birdie binge at 7:40 a.m. Thursday, 50 minutes before Morikawa, Redman and Hovland.)

That most of the big names are skipping the Deere because of next week's British Open and the following week's WGC cash grab in Memphis – the renamed and relocated old World Series of Golf from Firestone – means the newcomers would have a better chance to stand out.

But crazily, if you believe golfodds.com, Hovland is the favorite to win this week, at 18/1 thanks to two straight 13th-place finishes and a

John Deere Classic
**SCENE OF THE
 SUBLIME** The map of TPC Deere Run, with severe elevation changes on the front nine and birdie opportunities throughout.





tie for 12th in the U.S. Open at Pebble Beach, his amateur finale. Morikawa and Joaquin Niemann are 20/1 along with Sungjae Im. Wolff is a mere 25/1 along with Zach Johnson, Brian Harman and Howell, among others.

Crazy? Hovland thought so.

“I don’t know what my thoughts on that are,” he said Wednesday. “Stay off the weed?”

Wolff has taken things a bit more in stride. Winners do that.

“It’s not extremely important,” Wolff said Wednesday. “Obviously Vegas isn’t always right. But it’s really cool to see that.

“Knowing that our games translate really well to the pros and so many people have belief in us to play well – that gives me a lot of confidence. Coming off last week, I feel I have a lot of confidence but knowing that other people see that as well and have belief in you gives you more confidence.

“I’m really happy to see Viktor and Collin playing well and hope that we can make those odds go down a little bit.”

Wolff was 13 when Spieth won the 2013 Deere. It might as well have been 30 years ago.

“When I was 13, I don’t think I was thinking (I can do that),” Wolff said. “I’m a freshman in high school. To me it was just cool

to see that. Seeing a young guy win out there was really awesome.

“You see a lot more of that now, but I think he’s really the one to start that, and now you see all those young guys winning week in and week out.

“By no means is it easy. I’m not saying these young guys are going to keep on winning. But seeing him do it, what I did last week, I feel it just gives that kind of boost and motivation to the younger generation.

“I’m talking about the younger generation like I’m not in it.”

Wolff first received notice because of the odd hitch in his swing, an exaggerated hip twist forward and back just before he takes the club away – plus his swing across the plane coming down to the ball – though at impact he’s as standard as all the greats.

In generations past, old-timers would sidle up to a new kid with a sound swing and tell him, “Kid, your swing won’t last on the Tour,” thus prompting changes that would screw the newcomer up for months, if not longer. In the age of coaching and entourages, that doesn’t happen.

“Why would I change what brought me all the success and what got me here,” said Matthew Wolff, 20 going on 35.



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– *Golf Digest*

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– *Golf Inc.*

Best Courses You Can Play
– *Golfweek*

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Addison, 630-595-0071

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Golf Inc. Renovation of the Year
Golfweek Best Courses You Can Play

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**Forest Preserve District
of DuPage County**





49th John Deere Classic

Groupings and Starting Times • TPC Deere Run, Silvis • July 11-12, 2019

Thu 1st Tee - Fri 10th Tee

6:50 a.m. - Noon, Nick Taylor, Abbotsford, B.C.; Shawn Stefani, Houston, Tex.; Alex Prugh, Spokane, Wash.
 7 a.m. - 12:10 p.m., Ollie Schniederjans, Alpharetta, Ga.; Brandon Harkins, Scottsdale, Ariz.; Denny McCarthy, Rockville, Md.
 7:10 a.m. - 12:20 p.m., Robert Garrigus, Banks, Ore.; Anirban Lahiri, Bangalore, India; Richy Werenski, West Palm Beach, Fla.
 7:20 a.m. - 12:30 p.m., Troy Merritt, Meridian, Idaho; Andrew Landry, Austin, Tex.; Kyle Stanley, Gig Harbor, Wash.
 7:30 a.m. - 12:40 p.m., Ted Potter, Jr., Ocala, Fla.; Ryan Armour, Silver Lake, Ohio; Ryan Moore, Las Vegas, Nev.
 7:40 a.m. - 12:50 p.m., Adam Long, St. Louis, Mo.; Chris Stroud, Houston, Tex.; Nick Watney, Dixon, Calif.
 7:50 a.m. - 1 p.m., Matt Every, Jacksonville Beach, Fla.; Kelly Kraft, Dallas, Tex.; Sungjae Im, Jeju-Si, Jeju-do, South Korea
 8 a.m. - 1:10 p.m., Billy Hurley III, Annapolis, Md.; Hunter Mahan, Dallas, Tex.; Dicky Pride, Tuscaloosa, Ala.
 8:10 a.m. - 1:20 p.m., John Senden, Brisbane, Australia; Thomas "Boo" Weekley, East Milton, Fla.; Cameron Tringale, Laguna Niguel, Calif.
 8:20 a.m. - 1:30 p.m., Jim Herman, Palm City, Fla.; Scott Brown, Aiken, S.Car.; Carlos Ortiz, Guadalajara, Mexico
 8:30 a.m. - 1:40 p.m., Dylan Frittelli, Johannesburg, South Africa; Kramer Hickok, Dallas, Tex.; Dylan Meyer, Evansville, Ind.
 8:40 a.m. - 1:50 p.m., Ben Silverman, Concord, Ont.; Julián Etulain, Coronel Suarez, Buenos Aires, Argentina; Austen Truslow, New Smyrna Beach, Fla.
 8:50 a.m. - 2 p.m., José de Jesús Rodríguez, Irapuato, Gto., Mexico; Kyle Jones, Grapevine, TX; Steve Allan, Melbourne, Australia

Thu 10th Tee - Fri 1st Tee

6:50 a.m. - Noon, Ben Crane, Portland, Ore.; Parker McLachlin, Kohanaiki, Haw.; Tom Hoge, Fargo, N.D.
 7 a.m. - 12:10 p.m., Martin Laird, Glasgow, Scotland; Sam Saunders, Atlantic Beach, Fla.; Sam Ryder, Atlantic Beach, Fla.
 7:10 a.m. - 12:20 p.m., Arjun Atwal, Calcutta, India; Tyrone Van Aswegen, McKinney, Tex.; Kyoung-Hoon Lee, South Korea
 7:20 a.m. - 12:30 p.m., Austin Cook, Jonesboro, Ark.; Jason Dufner, Auburn, Ala.; Stewart Cink, Duluth, Ga.

7:30 a.m. - 12:40 p.m., Cameron Champ, Sacramento, Calif.; Daniel Berger, Jupiter, Fla.; Joel Dahmen, Clarkston, Wash.
 7:40 a.m. - 12:50 p.m., Matthew Wolff, Agoura Hills, Calif.; Charles Howell III, Windermere, Fla.; Kevin Tway, Edmond, Okla.
 7:50 a.m. - 1 p.m., Lucas Glover, Greenville, S.Car.; Joaquin Niemann, Chile; Seamus Power, Waterford, Ireland
 8 a.m. - 1:10 p.m., D.J. Trahan, Kiawah Island, S.Car.; Chad Campbell, Andrews, Tex.; Bronson Burgoon, The Woodlands, Tex.
 8:10 a.m. - 1:20 p.m., Scott Stallings, Oak Ridge, Tenn.; Ricky Barnes, Phoenix, Ariz.; Roberto Castro, Atlanta, Ga.
 8:20 a.m. - 1:30 p.m., Peter Uihlein, Jupiter, Fla.; Beau Hossler, Mission Viejo, Calif.; Adam Schenk, Vincennes, Ind.
 8:30 a.m. - 1:40 p.m., Collin Morikawa, La Cañada, Calif.; Doc Redman, Raleigh, N.Car.; Viktor Hovland, Oslo, Norway
 8:40 a.m. - 1:50 p.m., Stephan Jaeger, Chattanooga, Tenn.; Nicholas Lindheim, Satellite Beach, Fla.; John Catlin, Gold River, Calif.
 8:50 a.m. - 2 p.m., Martin Piller, Dallas, Tex.; Curtis Luck, Perth, Australia; Sepp Straka, Athens, Ga.

Thu 1st Tee - Fri 10th Tee

Noon - 6:50 a.m., Matt Jones, Sydney, Australia; Daniel Chopra, Falun, Sweden; Harold Varner III, Gastonia, N.Car.
 12:10 p.m. - 7:00 a.m., Vaughn Taylor, Augusta, Ga.; Bill Haas, Greenville, S.Car.; Sebastián Muñoz, Bogota, Colombia
 12:20 p.m. - 7:10 a.m. Dominic Bozzelli, Pittsford, N.Y.; Talor Gooch, Midwest City, Okla.; Wyndham Clark, Las Vegas, Nev.
 12:30 p.m. - 7:20 a.m., Martin Trainer, Palo Alto, Calif.; Brice Garnett, Gallatin, Mo.; Mackenzie Hughes, Dundas, Ont.
 12:40 p.m. - 7:30 a.m., Nate Lashley, Scottsdale, Ariz.; Ryan Palmer, Colleyville, Tex.; Jhonattan Vegas, Maturin, Venezuela
 12:50 p.m. - 7:40 a.m.; Michael Kim, Dallas, Tex.; Brian Harman, St. Simons Island, Ga.; Zach Johnson, Cedar Rapids, Iowa
 1 p.m. - 7:50 a.m., Fabián Gómez, Chaco, Argentina; Brendon Todd, Athens, Ga.; Roger Sloan, Merritt, Canada
 1:10 p.m. - 8 a.m., Peter Malnati, Knoxville, Tenn.; Brian Davis, Windermere, Fla.; Zack Suerch, Birmingham, Ala.
 1:20 p.m. - 8:10 a.m., Andres Romero, Tucuman, Argentina; Ryan Blaum, Jacksonville Beach, Fla.; Tyler Duncan, Columbus, Ind.

1:30 p.m. - 8:20 a.m., Brian Stuar, Jackson, Mich.; Danny Lee Rotorua, New Zealand; Kris Blanks, Jupiter, Fla.
 1:40 p.m. - 8:30 a.m., Tom Lovelady, Birmingham, Ala.; Brady Schnell, Omaha, Neb.; Ho Sung Choi, South Korea
 1:50 p.m. - 8:40 a.m., Chase Wright, Muncie, Ind.; Cameron Davis, Sydney, Australia; Justin Suh, San Jose, Calif.
 2 p.m. - 8:50 a.m., Roberto Diaz, San Antonio, Tex.; Chris Thompson, Lawrence, Kan.; John Chin, Temecula, Calif.

Thu 10th Tee - Fri 1st Tee

Noon - 6:50 a.m., George McNeill, Fort Myers, Fla.; Jonathan Byrd, Sea Island, Ga.; David Hearn, Brantford, Ont.
 12:10 p.m. - 7 a.m., Tim Herron, Wayzata, Minn.; Josh Teater, Lexington, Ky.; Hank Lebioda, Orlando, Fla.
 12:20 p.m. - 7:10 a.m., Alex Cejka, Germany; Chad Collins, Cloverdale, Ind.; J.T. Poston, St. Simons Island, Ga.
 12:30 p.m. - 7:20 a.m., Satoshi Kodaira, Tokyo, Japan; Cody Gribble, Dallas, Tex.; Smylie Kaufman, Birmingham, Ala.
 12:40 p.m. - 7:30 a.m., Pat Perez, Scottsdale, Ariz.; Russell Henley, Kiawah Island, S.Car.; Luke Donald, High Wycombe, England
 12:50 p.m. - 7:40 a.m., Michael Thompson, Sea Island, Ga.; Whee Kim, Dallas, Tex.; Scott Langley, Scottsdale, Ariz.
 1 p.m. - 7:50 a.m., J.J. Henry, Fort Worth, Tex.; David Lingmerth, Tranas, Sweden; Bud Cauley, Jacksonville Beach, Fla.
 1:10 p.m. - 8 a.m., Robert Streb, Shawnee, Kan.; Trey Mullinax, Birmingham, Ala.; Sam Burns, Shreveport, La.
 1:20 p.m. - 8:10 a.m., Sangmoon Bae, Seoul, South Korea; Chris Couch, Winter Garden, Fla.; Derek Fathauer, Jupiter, Fla.
 1:30 p.m. - 8:20 a.m., Johnson Wagner, Charlotte, N.Car.; Freddie Jacobson, Gothenburg, Sweden; Wes Roach, Knoxville, Tenn.
 1:40 p.m. - 8:30 a.m., Jim Knous, Littleton, Colo.; Anders Albertson, Atlanta, Ga.; Ryan Vermeer, Omaha, Neb.
 1:50 p.m. - 8:40 a.m., Will Claxton, Auburn, Ala.; Joey Garber, Petoskey, Mich.; Darin Fisher, Moravia, Iowa
 2 p.m. - 8:50 a.m., Adam Svensson, Surrey, British Columbia; Seth Reeves, Suwanee, Ga.; Austin Connolly, Irving, Tex.

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Radio Fri Golf 3-6 p.m. Sun Golf Noon-2, CBS 2-5 p.m.
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