

FRONT PORCH PERSPECTIVE: Women at Augusta National

By Stephen Somerville

Before this column returns to the local themes of people, politics and public affairs, I would like to opine about an upcoming event. The women are (finally) coming to Augusta National.

No, I don't mean the news about women becoming members at the ultra-exclusive golf club as that already occurred a few years ago. I mean that the ladies will be playing this historic venue on an annual basis beginning this April. The tournament is called the Augusta National Women's Amateur and will be played one week ahead of the Masters, where the men play the first golf major of the year and vie for the vaunted Green Jacket.

The Masters is my favourite golf event of the year.

This is due to the fact that the ground in Aurora is usually covered in snow, while on television the course is beautiful, the weather hot and the azalea bushes are blooming.

This tournament usually develops great storylines and, in most cases, the winner is determined during the famous last nine holes, featuring "amen corner" holes 11 through 13, plus that great par 5, the 15th hole.

I also enjoy watching this because it reminds me of the good times as a child when I would watch this tournament with my mom and dad and two brothers. Today, I settle in with my wife Julie and son Ryan to watch the action.

It also reminds me that (hopefully), spring really is just around the corner in our neck of the woods.

I was sure that the tournament organizers would do an LPGA event there as it would have been fun to watch Canadian Brooke Henderson trying to win, but as I think about this some more I am happy that it is a women's amateur event.

The television viewers most likely won't know much about any of the 75 entrants. These golfers will enter center stage for perhaps a life changing event.

I know that Canada will be represented by Brigitte Thibault. According to the tournament website:

Fresno State University sophomore Brigitte Thibault, 20, concluded the fall portion of the current season with a runner-up finish at the Las Vegas Collegiate Showdown, the best showing of her college career.

Her summer highlights included advancing to the round of 16 at the North South Women's Amateur Championship and the quarterfinals of the Women's Western National Amateur. She had three top-10 finishes in 10 tournaments as a freshman.

A native of Rosemere in Quebec, Canada, Thibault is a pre-business major.

I wish her well!

The ladies tournament will consist of three rounds. The first two rounds will be played on the nearby Champions Retreat course while the third and final round will be played on the famed Augusta, Georgia layout.

Hopefully, in the near future, all three tournament rounds will be played at Augusta National.

While the length of the holes will be shorter than the set up for the men's event, it will also be great to see the women hitting the shots into the same holes (and hopefully) the same pin positions that we have been accustomed to seeing on television over the years.

I am confident that the last round will produce some compelling drama.

The one question that my son and I have been discussing ever since we heard the announcement of this tournament was what would the winner receive?

Would the tournament winner slip on a green jacket?

My son and I initially both felt that that the green jacket should be reserved for the winner of the Master's, but members of the Augusta National Country Club do receive and wear the same green blazer as the winning player, so why not give the woman's winner one?

On the other hand, as this is a new tournament, why not give the woman's winner something that is entirely distinctive and that over time will hopefully take on similar iconic status as the green jacket?

The woman fortunate enough to win this tournament will nonetheless be happy with the exemptions that she earns.

According to the tournament website: "Provided she remain an amateur, the 2019 Augusta National Women's Amateur Champion will receive an invitation to the next five Augusta National Women's Amateurs, the 2019 U.S. Women's Open, the 2019 Women's British Open, and any USGA, R&A and PGA of America amateur championships for which she is eligible for one year."

This should be fun to watch.

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