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Sports

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Sunday, July 4, 2010

COMING THIS WEEK

We visit with Greensboro's John Isner, who carved his name into the lexicon of pro tennis last month with an epic 11-hour match at Wimbledon. Now, everybody knows his name. What he'd really like is to win a Grand Slam title.



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OUR CROWN JEWEL

While public golf courses across the country struggle, Greensboro's Bryan Park is the best of the best



PHOTOS BY JOSEPH RODRIGUEZ/News & Record

Ringed by Lake Townsend, golfers enjoy a scenic view while playing the No. 13 hole on the Champions Course at Bryan Park. The course will play host to the 2010 U.S. Amateur Public Links Championship later this month.

COMMENTARY

The toughest course that you'll ever love

BROWNS SUMMIT — What if the USGA showed up at your course one day and set it up for a U.S. Open?

You know what I'm talking about. Gnarly rough, narrow fairways, slanted landing areas, hard and fast approaches and runoffs sliding away from lightning-fast greens. Pretty much impossible conditions.



ED HARDIN

Well guess what? The USGA has indeed come to your golf course and done just that. Welcome to Bryan Park. Welcome to a golfing nightmare. The scenic Champions Course at Bryan Park is ready for a national championship and not just any national championship. Starting July 12, they'll play the U.S. Amateur Public Links Championship here, the tournament that determines the best public

See Hardin, Page C6

BRYAN PARK: Joseph Bryan's vision still resonates



When the Champions Course at Bryan Park opened in 1990, Golf Digest magazine named it the #2 Best New Public Course in America.

WANT TO GO?

What: U.S. Amateur Public Links Championship
Where: Bryan Park Champions Course, Browns Summit
When: July 12-17
Admission: free
Information: usga.org

By Ed Hardin, Staff Writer

GREENSBORO

The parking lots are still filled on the weekends, and the fairways are still filled with golfers and those Arnold Palmer once described as "those who just play golf."

There's a difference, he suggested. And he's probably right. But here in Greensboro, they're one and the same. It's by design. The old distinction of public vs. private has been blurred here, thanks in part to Sam Snead and the old GGO,

and thanks in part to the advent of a women's professional tour, which was first envisioned right here in Greensboro.

The primary reason, though, is Bryan Park. While public courses close across the nation and private clubs struggle to stay afloat, the original intent of Joseph M. Bryan to bring a country club of the people to Greensboro still resonates.

Next week, a national championship will be played on the Champions Course at Bryan Park, a unique golf tournament that seems to

See Bryan Park, Page C6

"You have to find a way to have fun every day. Obviously you want to do well, but you can't do well if you're not having fun." — Chase Austin, *Greenshoppers* third baseman

Feels like home: Elon's Austin stars for Hoppers

Third baseman Chase Austin's bat has heated up along with the weather.

By Jeff Mills
Staff Writer

GREENSBORO — Chase Austin got his first up-close look at NewBridge Bank Park long before he ever wore a Greensboro *Greenshoppers* uniform. And he got graded on it. Austin, the former Elon University star who starts at third base for the Hoppers, toured the ballpark as part of a sports management class dur-

ing his college days. "We took a field trip over here for my Managing Sports Franchises class," Austin said. "They brought us here before a game and gave us a tour of everything, then we got to stay and watch the game. It's different being a part of the atmosphere in the stands than being out on the field. I couldn't believe how loud the crowd was. "That was just two years ago, and it's a little weird that I'm getting a chance to play here now."

HOPPERS HOMESTAND

What: Lakeswood at Greensboro, today
Where: NewBridge Bank Park, 408 Belvedere St.
Tickets: \$6-\$9, at the park, by calling 268-2055 or at www.greenshoppers.com
Radio: WPEF-950

Weird, but good. Because this summer, plenty of friends and family have come to see the 22-year-old from Charlotte

See Austin, Page C5



Austin hit .280 in June, and coaches say his defense is improving.

KEEP AN EYE ON

Lakeswood won the Northern division in the first half, finishing 10 games ahead of Greensboro in the standings. The BlueClaws have the best overall record in the South Atlantic League this season. ... 18 Jonathan Singleton started the weekend hitting .350, which would lead the league if he had enough at-bats to qualify. He had 10 home runs and 44 RBIs in his first 44 games. ... (Sebastian Valle ranked second on the team with 9 RBIs, and Baseball America ranks him as the seventh-best prospect in the Phillies farm system. ... RHP Jarrod Cosart (7-3, 3.79 ERA, 16 BB, 77 Ks in 71 IP) is ranked as the Phillies' eighth-best prospect. He's eighth in the league in strikeouts. ... LHP Matt Wray (4-2, 3.25, 79 Ks) is fifth in the league in strikeouts.

—JEFF MILLS, staff writer

FROM C1



PHOTOS BY JOSEPH BOURGAREZ/News & Record

Bryan Park is leased from the city by the Joseph M. Bryan Foundation and the course operations are then run by Pinnacle Golf Properties. It's a unique partnership and also a hedge against economic and industry downturns.

Hardin

Continued from Page C1

base and became swim among turtles and geese in an idyllic setting among 550 acres of undeveloped land.

"We'd forget all that because right now your golf course might as well be a nest of snakes. A walk around Bryan Park now is no fun. Jones' beautiful golf course now has flags.

When it was opened in 1990, the course immediately got a lot of attention. Golf Digest named it the #2 Best New Public Course in America, and the accolades poured in over the next few years.

Golf World said it was one of the few public courses in America worthy of hosting a U.S. Open, and Golf Magazine called it one of the top 10 public courses in the country.

Jones said he built it with the idea of one day hosting major championships, and in fact he designed it thinking the Wyndham Championship would be played here eventually. When asked a few years ago to compare it to other courses he'd worked on, Jones mentioned the Champions Course and its sister layout, the Players Course, in venerable tones.

"The two courses at Bryan Park are like Bethpage Black and Bethpage Red," he said. "The Champions Course is a true test of golf, and the Players is a fair test of golf."

Bethpage was the site of the 2002 and 2009 U.S. Opens.

Playing the Champions Course now evokes those same brutal memories of deep rough around ridiculously narrow fairways and fast undulating greens surrounded by mown embankments that will bring you to your knees.

Go out and play it now, before it closes Wednesday evening. You owe it to yourself. You'll talk about it forever.

The course is hard enough as it is. There's really nothing quite like playing No. 13 into the breeze here. Add to the normal 47 yards of wind a six-foot wide intermediate rough and then an expanse of primary behind that before you even get to the shared benign greens that are rolling about 11 on a USGA Stimpmeter this week.

The fairways could be gauged on a Stimpmeter now, too. They've been mown to Open specifications of 1/8 inch, and the approaches are even shorter than that. Yes, there are approaches now that allow you to run the ball up onto the greens, but they also fanned the ball right back off the greens if you don't hit them perfectly.

Head pro Chris LeClerc said the course will get harder this week as the practice rounds near.

"Wednesday evening would be a great time to play it," he said. "They'll roll the greens, and they'll get faster and faster. And then it all goes well, we'll open back up on Sunday the 18th. There have been some requests to leave the rind and toes in the same positions for that day."

If you can do it, you should really try to play it this week and then again the Sunday after the event. The course has never been in better shape, and it's unlikely we'll see it quite like this again.

At least until the USGA returns.

Contact Ed Hardin at 373-7069 or ed.hardin@news-record.com

BRYAN PARK: A priceless piece of real estate

Continued from Page C1

fit Greensboro's golfing image perfectly.

The USGA's 2010 U.S. Amateur Public Links Championship will begin July 12 with 156 golfers from around the country competing in a tournament first held in 1922, a tournament reserved for players not affiliated with a private club.

"We think Greensboro and Bryan Park is the perfect place for our championship," said Bill McCarthy, the USGA tournament director.

There are many reasons for that, and the course Bryan dreamed of a generation ago is one of the reasons. But Greensboro's place in golf, especially in a trying time for the industry, is another reason.

According to the National Golf Foundation, participation in the game continues a gradual slide. Nothing dramatic, but figures from 2009 show a 0.6 percent decline nationally in rounds played.

A better barometer, at least in North Carolina, is the number of courses closing in the last generation. A look around the state reveals an alarming trend. The public courses are disappearing.

"We're probably about the only public course left in Raleigh," said Ronnie Casper, the pro at Raleigh Golf Association, the old course known as 'RGA' since 1929. "And we're holding our own."

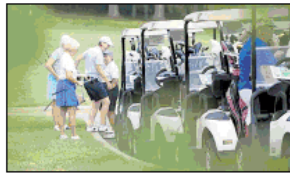
In Charlotte, the number of public courses has been declining steadily for some time now.

"We're losing them to development," said Mike Musialowski, the general manager at The Divina in Charlotte. "I don't think you'll hear about too many new courses being built. We're losing the low-end courses. It's survival of the fittest."

The private courses are struggling, too, but the concept of the old municipal course is going away both here in North Carolina and nationally. Cities that once subsidized public courses are



Most public golf courses are flanked by housing developments. But Bryan Park is just that: a park. The view will never be obscured by houses.



Bryan Park offers a country club setting without country club prices.

beginning to pull out.

"The old man doesn't stand a chance," said Casper.

Memphis announced recently that it would close its municipal courses three days a week as part of budget cuts, and the mayor of Tulsa told the city's golf superintendents to close 27 of the city's 72 golf holes, leaving it up to them to figure out what that meant.

In Greensboro, the recent budget contained about \$300,000 set aside for the maintenance of courses at Gillespie Park and Bur-Mil Park and for infrastructure at Bryan Park.

"We're still committed to assuring that the people have quality courses to play in Greensboro," said Greg Jackson, the director of Greens-

boro Parks and Recreation.

"It's something we're very interested in."

Greensboro's unique partnership with Bryan Park is a kind of insurance policy against the national trend. According to the NGA, there were 90 more course closings than openings in 2009.

Bryan Park isn't going to close.

"It goes back to Mr. Bryan's dream of this being a quality place where everybody belonged to a country club without having to pay dues," said Jim Melvin, the president of the Bryan Foundation.

"This is a public place, including the Entertainment Center here where there are weddings and conventions and meetings and bar-

mitzvas and graduations and proms every day."

He said Bryan Park will become more valuable to Greensboro in the coming years.

"Most golf courses are built with residential subdivisions in mind," Melvin said. "You're a part of nature here. There will never be a house built out here. There will never be another road or anything like that. A long time from now, it will be priceless."

The national championship coming to Greensboro next week is a fitting tournament for a city and a golf course just waiting to show that public courses still have a place in golf.

Contact Ed Hardin at 373-7069 or ed.hardin@news-record.com

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