



State Amateur at Merrill Hills

By David Brandenburg, Golf Course Manager, Rolling Meadows Golf Course

Summer brings excitement for all golf courses as each one hosts a variety of local and statewide tournaments. One of Wisconsin's biggest tournaments each season is the Wisconsin State Amateur hosted by the Wisconsin State Golf Association.

The 108th Wisconsin State Amateur will be held at Merrill Hills Country Club in Waukesha July 20 to 23. Set in the picturesque hills of Waukesha the club which opened in 1929 plays 6,728 yards from the back tees.

The golf course offers a visually appealing layout as it routs through some terrific rolling terrain. The fairways are lined with trees to add to the beauty, challenge and privacy of each hole. Many of the greens slope from front to back so they receive shots well, while leaving no easy putts. The raised pads allow for some deep greenside bunker shots to challenge even the best of players.

For its members the club offers a 24 acre practice area with 3 putting greens and 2 chipping areas. The range tee is large and reminiscent of a resort course in size, however it sees a lot of activity as the members work on their games.

Merrill Hills offers a full service clubhouse for dining, a pool with water park features, and tennis courts to round out the members experience.

The club reportedly came to its location due to a dead cow. Golfer and insurance agent Earle Hardy went out to the then Decatur and Margaret Merrill Farmstead to investigate a dead cow and observed the property would make a wonderful golf course. 7 years after that visit the 160 acre farm was purchased by a group of



The range tee and two target greens at Merrill Hills.

golfers from Waukesha looking for a new place to play.

Originally called Waukesha Country Club the layout designed by member C. H. Hardy legally changed its name to the Merrill Hills Country Club in 1936. The first superintendent, Fred Peters had been a mechanical engineer at Alloy Products before operating the club from 1930 to 1944. No superintendent is known from 1945 to 48 and other keepers of the green include Albert Decker 49-60, Frank Maurina 71-75 (WGCSA President while at Tripoli County Club in 1960), Jack Soderberg 76-85, Dan Bauer 86, Mike Kositske 87-91 and current superintendent Randy Van Fleet who started in 1992.

Certified Golf Course Superintendent Randy Van Fleet grew up in Columbus, WI and found

his way into the golf business by way of his summer job at the 9 hole Columbus Country Club. Randy enjoyed playing the game and graduated from the University of Wisconsin Madison in 1982. Before arriving at Merrill Hills Van Fleet was the golf course superintendent at Quincy Country Club in IL.

Randy and his wife Cara and three children make their home in Muskego. His current hobby include his kids as playing golf takes a bit of back seat while he enjoys the many activities his family is involved in.

To enter the 72 hole stroke play event players need have a USGA index of 9.4 or under to qualify at one of 9 qualifying tournaments or be one of the approximately 36 exempt players based on past championships and amateur play.



The 484 yard 13th at Merrill Hills will play as a par 4 for the Amateur players.

This year qualifying sites include District 1 - Drugans Castle Mound GC, Holmen and River Falls GC, River Falls, District 2 - Lake Arrowhead GC Pines, Nekoosa, District 3 - Johnson Park GC, Racine, District 4 - Legend at Bergamont, Oregon, District 5 - Golf Club at Camelot, Lomira, District 6 - Hawthorn Hills GC, Saukville, Western Lakes GC, Pewaukee, Muskego Lakes CC Muskego. Players must qualify in the district of their home course unless providing a good reason why they cannot do so.

180 players make the field with a cut after 36 holes for the low 70 players and ties. 4 days of 18 hole play will challenge the states best players and award the true State Amateur Championship the Sinnissippi Cup. The Sinnissippi cup gets its name because the first amateur in 1901 was played at the Sinnissippi Country Club which is now the Janesville Country Club.

Players not only compete for the Sinnissippi Cup but

any WSGA member golf club with three qualifiers can compete for the Yule Cup. The Yule Cup is given to the winning three man team after the first 36 holes of play. Merrill Hills members won the Yule Cup in 1967 when the course hosted the Amateur for the first time.

Past winners of the State Amateur include US Open Winner Andy North, and PGA Tour players Steve Stricker, JP Hayes and Mark Wilson. Last year at Old Hickory Golf Club in Beaver Dam Ben Bendtson of Racine Country Club finished 7 under par and defeated Danny Zimmerman of Hawks Landing Golf Club in a 2 hole playoff.

Both the Wisconsin State Open and State Amateur are open for spectators at no charge. It is a great way to see some of the best golfers Wisconsin has to offer playing the best golf courses Wisconsin has to offer. I hope to see you there. 🌿