

Black Hall to host Connecticut Amateur as part of its 50th anniversary



The 113th Connecticut Amateur Championship is coming to Black Hall Club. The five-day tournament tees off on Monday and concludes Friday with the crowning of the champion. The Connecticut State Golf Association approached Black Hall (fifth hole pictured) about serving as host during its 50th anniversary year. The Robert Trent Jones-designed course was established in 1965. (Photo courtesy of Andrew Campbell, Black Hall Club)

By Gavin Keefe

Old Lyme — During its history, Black Hall Club has hosted nearly every major state golf tournament.

Next week, Black Hall can check another prestigious event off its wish list.

The 113th Connecticut Amateur Championship is coming to Black Hall, a gem of a private course. The five-day tournament tees off on Monday and concludes Friday with the crowning of the champion.

The Connecticut State Golf Association approached Black Hall about serving as host during its 50th anniversary year. The Robert Trent Jones-designed course was established in 1965.

Black Hall officials enthusiastically accepted the invitation.

"We've hosted just about every tournament there is to host here, except the Amateur," said Black Hall professional Andrew Campbell while sitting outside the clubhouse on a sun-splashed Wednesday afternoon. "I'm really looking forward to it. It's going to be a really, really memorable week."

Leading up to the tournament, Black Hall will hold an anniversary celebration on Saturday that includes a golf event and party.

A significant percentage of the 300 members plan on attending. Golfers will play the old course setup, teeing off on the 12th hole, the original site of the first hole.

One foursome will feature all four head professionals who've worked at Black Hall. Campbell, who's been in charge for the last 14 years, will play with Tim Gavronski, Don Gliha and Larry Demers. A 1974 Fitch High School graduate, Demers is now the head professional at Country Club of New Bedford in North Dartmouth, Mass.

"Our committee has been working on this for two years," Campbell said. "We didn't know what the turnout was going to be. It's exceeding our wildest dreams in terms of participation, which we're all thrilled about."

Members are embracing hosting the Connecticut Amateur, signing up in force to fill the numerous volunteer positions.

"We have great support," Campbell said. "We have about 100 volunteer positions and we filled almost all of them already. That's pretty neat."

Black Hall will be represented in the 122-player field. Bill Hermanson, Phil Perry and Scott Farrell, all longtime members, will compete.

No one knows the course better than Hermanson, a member since 1978. He's won a Black Hall record 23 men's club championships. Black Hall is the permanent host of the CSGA Two-Man Team Championship, which was started in Hermanson's honor.

Hermanson combined with Dave Szewczul of Tunxis Plantation Country Club to claim the Two-Man Team Championship last month. He then knocked off Szewczul to win the Connecticut Senior Match Play Championship last week at the Golf Club at Oxford Greens.

He's one of several former champions in the state amateur field, winning his only title in 1991.

"He's back on his game," Campbell said. "I hope he can come out here and play well."

Perry, a seven-time club champion, has had a good track record at the state amateur, qualifying for match play each of the last five years. A member since 2006, Farrell's veteran experience should come in handy.

Familiarity with the course and its 6,664-yard layout should help the trio.

"In golf, home-field advantage is humongous," Campbell said.

Given the grueling grind of the tournament format, having father time on your side also is an advantage.

Last year, 20-year-old Zach Zaback, a member of the UConn golf team, outlasted the field on the way to winning the 2014 championship at Lake of Isles in North Stonington. Zaback, who's from Farmington and plays out of TPC River Highlands, is back to defend his title.

Golfers with the low 32 scores after two rounds of stroke play will advance. Two rounds of match play each day will be capped off by a 36-hole final on Friday.

"Just getting to match play is a huge accomplishment," Campbell said. "To win this event is very difficult."

Campbell reports that Black Hall is in great shape, thanks to the hard work of superintendent Phil Neaton and his staff. Experience is certainly on their side.

Not too many golf courses in the state can match Black Hall's resume.

Just last year, Black Hall was the site of qualifiers for the U.S. Amateur Championship and PGA Tour's Travelers Championship. The Connecticut Open made a stop here in 2003 while the Connecticut Mid-Amateur has been in Old Lyme seven times.

"If you look at what are the major events in Connecticut golf," Campbell said, "(the Connecticut Amateur) was the only one missing. ... It's cool that we now have them all."