

Doherty tournament has large, talented field

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By Gary Curreri

Morgan Miller made the most of her debut in the 2022 Ione D. Jones/Doherty Women's Amateur Championship at the Coral Ridge Country Club in Fort Lauderdale.

The 19-year-old University of Colorado sophomore from Cedar Park, Texas, said winning the 90th edition of the tournament last year with a 2-up victory over Jupiter's Ina Kim-Schaad, 39, in the title match "meant a lot." Kim-Schaad was the 2019 U.S. Mid-Amateur champion.

Her performance in Fort Lauderdale as well as showings at state, regional, and other national tournaments helped her land the 2023 Colorado Golf Association's Player of the Year honor.

"It started a positive momentum that led into the next school semester and on from there," Miller said. "Match play tournaments light a fire in me that isn't necessarily there during stroke play events. So, it's good to be back and playing in this prestigious tournament again this year."

The victory was her first in two years, last winning a tournament in her senior year of high school – an STPGA Prestige tour tournament. She also made some changes to her game this summer.

"I had a lot of highlights," added Miller, who set several school records for the Buffaloes, including the lowest scoring average in the fall (70.4), most rounds in the 60s in a school year (broke it during just fall events), and most consecutive rounds in the 60s during a school year.

"Being able to experience the USGA Four-Ball and the USGA Women's Amateur again last year is just a highlight in itself," Miller continued. "I had one of the best seasons at Colorado this fall setting several school records. So overall, I had a great 2023 starting with winning the Jones Doherty."

Miller is looking forward to the tournament this year. Last year she won in blustery conditions in the 70s, a far cry from the 20-degree-below temperatures back in school.

“I made a lot of changes this summer that helped sharpen my game, so it was really about small changes and focus on the little things that added up to great results,” Miller said. “There’s always going to be pressure when you play in a tournament you’ve won in a prior year, but it’s how you handle the pressure that counts.”

With the win, Miller added her name to the stellar names of past winners including Lexi Thompson and three-time champion Alexa Pano. Also on that historic list are World Golf Hall of Famers Patty Berg, Babe Zaharias, JoAnne Carner, Marlene Stewart-Streit, and Carol Semple Thompson as well as current and former LPGA Tour pros Charley Hull, Michelle McGann, Natalie Gulbis, and Vicki Goetze.

“I’ve learned over the past year or so how to really channel in my inner thoughts and how to handle different situations,” Miller. “No matter what tournament you’re playing in, the past year’s winner will always be hunted, and you have to take it as a challenge.”

The Amateur field is loaded headlined by two-time Doherty champ and Oakland Park resident Meghan Stasi, the 2024 Curtis Cup captain and four-time U.S. Women’s Mid-Amateur champion, the most in the championship’s 35-year history.

Also entered are Delray Beach’s Gabriella Albert (2023 South Florida PGA Junior Champion); Boca Raton’s Kayla Bryant (2023 Sun Sentinel Palm Beach Girls Golfer of the Year); West Palm Beach’s Maise Filler (2022 Golfweek All-American Honorable Mention at the University of Florida. She also played in the 2023 Augusta Women’s National Amateur; Scarlett Schremmer (2023 Alabama Girls State Junior Player of the Year); Montana State sophomore Scarlet Weidig the Montana State Match Play Champion, who represented Costa Rica in the 2023 World Amateur Team Championships in France; and Dawn Woodard, a six-time South Carolina Amateur Champion, and three-time USGA Women’s Mid-Am medalist.

Shelly Haywood (Huntington Beach, Calif.) won the 2023 Ione D. Jones/Doherty Senior Women’s Amateur Championship in 20 holes over 2017 U.S. Senior Amateur champion Judith Kyrinis, 60, of Thornhill, Canada.

“It was a big win for me because it got my year started off right with a lot of confidence,” Haywood said. “I really took off after that and just expanded on it from there. I had a really great year.”

The pair combined for nine birdies with Haywood, 56, draining four, none more important than a 15-foot birdie putt on the 18th hole to force the playoff in the 37th annual senior tournament. Kyrinis fell in the 2017 semifinals before winning in 2020.

“Oh my gosh, that was very exciting, and pressure-packed because we both played so well and we just kept trading birdies,” Haywood said. “I’ll never forget that for the rest of my life.

“I made a birdie on the 18th hole to tie the match and then a clutch birdie on the 19th to move on,” Heywood continued. “I then had the sand save out of a bunker (to win). It was just back-and-forth the whole day, and it was really fun, and it was super rewarding to be able to come out on top. Anything can happen in match play, and either one of us could’ve won that match easily.”

Once again, this year’s senior event has 40 players – ages 50 and over. Boynton Beach’s Terril Samuel, who won last year’s Palm Beach County Women’s Amateur golf tournament, is hoping to improve in her previous three runner-up finishes (2017, 2018, 2019) in the Doherty.

Samuel had a stellar 2021 campaign as she won the prestigious R&A Women’s Amateur Championship at Royal Dornoch in Ireland as well as the Florida State Women’s Senior Amateur Championship. She also was the 2017 USGA Senior runner-up. This year’s senior championships will also feature 2011 champ Mary Jane Hiestand of Naples, and Kim Keyer-Scott, who won the 2022 championship.

Sarah LeBrun Ingram, 57, who was the USGA Amateur Championship runner-up in 1993 and went on to capture the USGA Mid-Am championships in 1991, 1993, and 1994, is entered in this year’s championship. LeBrun Ingram was captain of the US Curtis team in 2021 and 2022, in addition to playing on the team. In 1992, 1994, and 1996.

After winning the three Mid-Am titles in the early 1990s, she was sidelined from the game for more than 20 years with rheumatoid arthritis. Lebrun Ingram reached the quarterfinals of the USGA Senior Amateur tournament.

For more information, visit coralridgecc.com/Doherty.