



On-site PGA TOUR media contacts:

Laura Neal – Vice President, Communications -- (386) 405-7127 - LauraNeal@pgatourhq.com

Chris Reimer - Director, Communications -- (904) 806-6614 – creimer@pgatourhq.com

Mark Stevens – PGA TOUR Media Official -- (904) 861-5112 – markstevens@pgatourhq.com

2014 Northern Trust Open pre-tournament notes

Dates: February 12-16, 2014

Where: The Riviera Country Club, Pacific Palisades, Calif.

Par/Yards: 35-36--71/7,349 yards

Field: 144 players

2013 champion: John Merrick, 273 (-11), defeated Charlie Beljan on the second hole of a sudden-death playoff

Purse: \$6.7 million; \$1,206,000 to the winner

FedExCup: 500 points to the winner

Format: Four-day, 72-hole stroke-play competition; 144 players, cut to low 70 and ties after 36 holes

Facebook: <http://www.facebook.com/NorthernTrustOpen>

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How the 2013 Northern Trust Open was won by John Merrick

John Merrick authored a storybook ending to the 2013 Northern Trust Open, becoming the first Los Angeles County native to win the event in its 87-year history. Merrick came from three shots back entering the final round and relied on knowledge of The Riviera Country Club that he gained in college as a member of the UCLA men's golf team to defeat Charlie Beljan in a two-hole playoff, capturing his first PGA TOUR win just 30 miles north of where he grew up - in Long Beach, Calif. - and where he still lives. Merrick (68-66-70-69) and Beljan (67-71-68-67) tied with pars on No. 18, the first hole of sudden death. The pair moved to No. 10, where Beljan missed a 6-footer to give Merrick the victory.

John Merrick at the 2013 Northern Trust Open

- Ranked T10 in Total Putts for the week with 110.
- Posted his first top 10 in six starts at the Northern Trust Open. His previous best finish was T54 in 2010.
- Won the 18th playoff in tournament history.
- Became the ninth player to record his first PGA TOUR victory at the Northern Trust Open (joined Len Mattiace, 2002; Kirk Triplett, 2000; Chip Beck, 1998; TC Chen, 1987; Phil Rodgers, 1962; Fred Wampler, 1954; Johnny Bulla, 1941; and Victor Ghezzi, 1935).

A look at the field

- FedExCup leader Jimmy Walker enters the Northern Trust Open on the heels of his third PGA TOUR victory in just his eighth start of the 2013-14 PGA TOUR Season. The only other players to win three times in their first eight starts of a season since 1995 are David Duval (1999), Tiger Woods (eight times) and Phil Mickelson (2005).
- 14 of the 30 players who made it to the 2013 TOUR Championship by Coca-Cola will play in the Northern Trust Open: Matt Kuchar (6); Jordan Spieth (7); Graham DeLaet (8); Justin Rose (10); Webb Simpson (11); Dustin Johnson (13); Jim Furyk (14); Keegan Bradley (18); Jason Dufner (19); Hunter Mahan (20); Bill Haas (24); Kevin Streelman (25); Brendon de Jonge (26); Charl Schwartzel (27).
- From the current FedExCup standings, the field includes 23 of the top 30 players, including seven of the top 10: Jimmy Walker (No. 1), Harris English (2), Dustin Johnson (4), Webb Simpson (5), Ryan Moore (7), Kevin Stadler (8), Kevin Stadler (8) and Brian Stuard (No. 10).
- Three former FedExCup champions are in the field: Vijay Singh (2009); Jim Furyk (2010); and Bill Haas (2011), who won the Northern Trust Open in 2012.
- From the Official World Golf Ranking, 16 of the top 30 are in the field and 26 of the top 50.
- Several players are making their 2013-14 PGA TOUR season debut at the Northern Trust Open: Charl Schwartzel (No. 18 in the Official World Golf Ranking) and Joost Luiten (No. 43).
- Reigning U.S. Open champion Justin Rose, whose last PGA TOUR start was the World Golf Championships-HSBC Champions, will be teeing it up at the Northern Trust Open as the highest-ranked player in the Official World Golf Ranking at No. 5. He delayed the start of his 2014 campaign due to tendinitis in his right shoulder.

- Joost Luiten is one of three international players in the top 50 of the Official World Golf Ranking to receive a sponsor's exemption, joining France's Victor Dubuisson (No. 21) and Italy's Francesco Molinari (No. 44).
- Through the AT&T Pebble Beach National Pro-Am, seven of the 10 different PGA TOUR winners from the 2013-14 season are in the field: Jimmy Walker (Frys.com Open/Sony Open in Hawaii/AT&T Pebble Beach National Pro-Am); Webb Simpson (Shriners Hospitals for Children Open); Ryan Moore (CIMB Classic); Dustin Johnson (World Golf Championships-HSBC Champions); Harris English (OHL Classic at Mayakoba); Scott Stallings (Farmers Insurance Open); and Kevin Stadler (Waste Management Phoenix Open).
- Past Champions of the Northern Trust Open in the field include Robert Allenby-2001; Fred Couples-1990, 1992; Ernie Els-1999; Bill Haas-2012; Charles Howell III-2007; Aaron Baddeley-2011; John Merrick-2013; and Mike Weir 2003-04.
- Fred Couples will make his 32nd start at the event, via a sponsor's exemption, extending his record for the most starts in tournament history (Gene Littler is second with 30). Couples will look to add to an already impressive resume at the Northern Trust Open. In addition to his two victories, Couples has collected 12 other top 10s, including runner-up finishes in 1993, 1994 and 1996. He held the 36-hole lead in 2011 at 8-under and was in contention in the final round after three-consecutive birdies to open the round, but fell off the pace after a double bogey at No. 7 and eventually finished T7. Earlier this year, Couples was named honorary chairman of the LA Legends Club, a philanthropic group of professionals and community leaders who are passionate about Los Angeles and the Northern Trust Open. The Legends Club works closely with Northern Trust and the PGA TOUR to raise funds for Los Angeles-area nonprofit organizations.
- Jordan Spieth, 2013 PGA TOUR Rookie of the Year, will make his first Northern Trust Open start as a professional. He received a sponsor's exemption in 2012 as an amateur and missed the cut.
- Kevin Stadler, who won his first PGA TOUR event at the Waste Management Phoenix Open, is hoping to follow in his father's footsteps at the Northern Trust Open. Craig Stadler won the event in 1996 and finished runner-up the following year (he totaled 11 top 10s in 28 starts). Kevin has seen some success at The Riviera Country Club, finishing T10 in 2010 and T12 in 2011. As a USC grad, Stadler will find tremendous support on Friday, which is USC Day in the Palisades Club. Thursday is Pepperdine University Day; and Sunday is UCLA Day. Here are alums in the field this year:

Michael	Putnam	Pepperdine University
Kevin	Chappell	UCLA
John	Merrick	UCLA
Kevin	Stadler	University of Southern California

- Max Homa, 2013 NCAA Men's Golf Individual Champion and All-American, received a sponsor's exemption and will make his fifth-career PGA TOUR start as a professional. The Valencia, Calif., native finished T6 at the Web.com Tour Qualifying Tournament in December, making him fully exempt for the 2014 Web.com Tour season. Homa finished T9 in his professional debut at the Frys.com Open in September 2013 and posted a T30 finish the following week at the Shriners Hospitals for Children Open. This is Homa's fourth sponsor's exemption of the season. Homa was a tri-captain of his golf team at the University of California-Berkeley and the first player in school history to win the individual title at the NCAA Men's Golf Championships. Homa also won the Pac-12 individual title in 2013 during his senior year and received first and second-team All-American honors during his four years. Shortly after graduating, Homa was a member of the victorious 2013 U.S. Walker Cup Team.
- Harold Varner III, who was the first player in East Carolina University history to be named Conference USA Golfer of the Year in 2012, will make his second-career start on the PGA TOUR as the 2014 Northern Trust Open Exemption recipient. Varner has full status on Web.com Tour this season after finishing T32 at the final stage of the Web.com Tour Qualifying Tournament. In 2007, he won the Nature Valley First Tee Open as a junior with Champions Tour pro and teammate Morris Hatalsky. Varner, 23, was chosen from a pool of applicants to receive the exemption, created and sponsored by Northern Trust (Nasdaq: NTRS). The annual exemption provides an opportunity for a top golfer who represents the advancement of diversity in golf and wouldn't otherwise be eligible to compete in the event. Varner is the sixth recipient of the Northern Trust Open Exemption, following Vincent Johnson (2009), Joshua Wooding (2010), Joseph Bramlett (2011), Andy Walker (2012) and Jeremiah Wooding (2013).

Miscellaneous tournament notes

- While the field for the following week's World Golf Championships-Accenture Match Play Championship will be finalized at the conclusion of the AT&T Pebble Beach National Pro-Am (top 64 in the Official World Golf Ranking), players can improve their position in the bracket through the Northern Trust Open.

Seeding for the Accenture Match Play Championship will be based off of the updated OWGR following the conclusion of the Northern Trust Open, meaning that while players can't play their win *in*, they can play their way *up*.

- There have been seven back-to-back winners in the 87-year history of the Northern Trust Open:
 - MacDonald Smith (1928-1929, 1932, 1934)
 - Ben Hogan (1942, 1947-48)
 - Paul Harney (1964-65)
 - Arnold Palmer (1963, 1966-67)
 - Corey Pavin (1994-95)
 - Mike Weir (2003-04)
 - Phil Mickelson (2008-09)
- There have been nine first-time winners at the Northern Trust Open:
 - Victor Ghezzi, 1935
 - Johnny Bulla, 1941
 - Fred Wampler, 1954
 - Phil Rodgers, 1962
 - TC Chen, 1987
 - Chip Beck, 1988
 - Kirk Triplett, 2000
 - Len Mattiace, 2002
 - John Merrick, 2013

2013-14 PGA TOUR Storylines - Structural changes to the PGA TOUR

- The Northern Trust Open marks the 13th official event of the PGA TOUR's new wraparound 2013-14 season schedule. In the fall of 2013, four tournaments that formerly made up the Fall Series along with two events being played as official events for the first time were contested, beginning with the Frys.com Open in October and concluding with the OHL Classic at Mayakoba in November. For the first time, these six events awarded full FedExCup points.
- With the addition of six fall events, year eight of the FedExCup consists of 45 events in 43 weeks, including the four FedExCup Playoff events. Only two weeks will have multiple events (World Golf Championships-Cadillac Championship/Puerto Rico Open presented by seepuertorico.com and World Golf Championships-Bridgestone Invitational/Reno-Tahoe Open). The FedExCup Playoffs once again feature four events and concludes in September 2014 with the TOUR Championship by Coca-Cola and the crowning of the FedExCup champion.
- Last fall, for the first time, 50 players earned their PGA TOUR cards for the 2013-14 season through the Web.com Tour Regular Season money list and the inaugural Web.com Tour Finals.