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The Honda Classic 2015 pre-tournament notes

Dates: February 23-March 1, 2015
Where: Palm Beach Gardens, Florida
Course: PGA National (Par/Yards: 70/7,140)
Field size: 144
2013 champion: Russell Henley
Purse: \$6,100,000 (\$1,098,000/winner)
FedExCup: 500 points to the winner
Format: 72-hole stroke play
Twitter: @thehondaclassic

Honda longest-running title sponsor on PGA TOUR

Title sponsor of The Honda Classic since 1982, American Honda Motor Co., Inc. is the longest-tenured title sponsor on the PGA TOUR, now in its 34th year. Since its inception, the tournament has contributed more than \$25 million to national and local charities, including the Nicklaus Children's Health Care Foundation. The Foundation's mission is to provide charitable support for activities that advance and enhance the diagnosis, treatment and prevention of childhood diseases and disorders.

A look back at the 2014 Honda Classic

Russell Henley began Sunday's final round trailing 2012 Honda Classic champion Rory McIlroy by two strokes at 12-under 198. Despite a 1-over-par 72 in the final round, Henley worked his way into sudden death with McIlroy, Russell Knox and Ryan Palmer. His birdie-4 on the first extra hole, No. 18, was good for his second career PGA TOUR victory (2013 Sony Open in Hawaii).

More on Russell Henley

- After his victory at PGA National, Henley collected two more top 10s in 2014 (Shell Houston Open/T7, Deutsche Bank Championship/ T2)
- Henley advanced through all four FedExCup Playoffs events to finish 19th in the points standings, up from 44th in 2013
- Through six events this season, Henley has already collected a pair of top-10 finishes (The McGladrey Classic/T4, Hyundai Tournament of Champions/T3)
- An accomplished musician, Henley played guitar with the band O.A.R. last Saturday evening at Riviera Country Club as part of Northern Trust Open week.

TOUR Trends

- Five of the seven winners in 2015 through the Northern Trust Open were inside the top 50 in the Official World Golf Ranking at the time of their victory. With his win at the AT&T Pebble Beach National Pro-Am, Brandt Snedeker, jumped from 63rd to 31st in the Official World Golf Ranking. Last week's winner James Hahn moved from 297th to 86th after his first career PGA TOUR title at the Northern Trust Open.
- The trend of young winners on TOUR has continued early in the 2014-15 season as seven of the 14 winners through the Northern Trust Open were under the age of 30.
- Four rookies sit among the top 50 in the FedExCup standings through the Northern Trust Open: Tony Finau (26); Nick Taylor (30); Justin Thomas (32); Daniel Berger (48)
- Jimmy Walker, after leading the FedExCup standings for 36 of 37 weeks last year, took the lead in the 2014-15 FedExCup standings after winning the Sony Open in Hawaii and has held onto the lead for six consecutive weeks through the Northern Trust Open.

Last chance to qualify for the World Golf Championships-Cadillac Championship

The week of The Honda Classic offers the final opportunity to qualify for the following week's World Golf Championships event, the Cadillac Championship down the road at Trump National Doral. Players not previously eligible can qualify by being inside the top 50 in the Official World Golf Ranking or the top 10 of the FedExCup standings following The Honda Classic.

Field notes

- 29 of the top 50 in the current FedExCup standings
- 27 of the top 50 in the Official World Golf Ranking
- Five of the 14 PGA TOUR winners in 2014-15
- Rory McIlroy (Open Championship and PGA Championship) and Martin Kaymer (U.S. Open) accounted for three of the four major championships in 2014, with Kaymer also winning THE PLAYERS Championship
- Three rookies inside the top 50 in the FedExCup standings (Tony Finau, Justin Thomas, Daniel Berger)

Player Notes

Brooks Koepka

- Captured his first career PGA TOUR win at the 2015 Waste Management Phoenix Open
- Three top-10 finishes in four starts of 2014-15 season (Frys.com Open/T4, Shriners Hospitals for Children Open/T8, Waste Management Phoenix Open/Won and Farmers Insurance Open/T41)
- The West Palm Beach, Fla., native will make his second straight Honda Classic start; he finished T33 in 2014

Rory McIlroy

- The world No. 1 will make his 2014-15 PGA TOUR debut and seventh start at The Honda Classic
- Won the 2012 Honda Classic and held the 54-hole lead in 2014, finishing T2 after losing in a playoff
- Named PGA TOUR Player of the Year in 2014 (the second time in three seasons) after three victories, including The Open Championship and PGA Championship
- Two European Tour starts this season (Abu Dhabi HSBC Golf Championship/2nd and Omega Dubai Desert Classic/Won)

Sergio Garcia

- Will make his fifth start at The Honda Classic; he finished T8 in 2014
- Has eight career PGA TOUR wins; in search of first TOUR title since the 2012 Wyndham Championship.
- Three starts of the 2014-15 PGA TOUR Season (CIMB Classic/T2, World Golf Championships-HSBC Champions/T28, Northern Trust Open/T4)
- He finished one stroke away from joining the playoff at last week's Northern Trust Open

Rickie Fowler

- The Jupiter, Fla., resident will make his sixth straight start at The Honda Classic; best finish was T7 in 2012
- Finished in the top five in each of 2014's major championships, becoming the first player to do so since Tiger Woods in 2005
- Finished ninth in the 2014 FedExCup standings
- In search of second career PGA TOUR win since the 2012 Wells Fargo Championship

Billy Horschel

- 2015 FedExCup will make his fourth appearance at The Honda Classic (2014/MC, 2013/T46, 2011/MC)
- Recorded one of the best closing stretches in TOUR history during the FedExCup Playoffs: Deutsche Bank Championship/T2, BMW Championship/Won and TOUR Championship by Coca-Cola/Won
- Looks for first top-10 finish in his ninth start of the 2014-15 season

Phil Mickelson

- Returns for second consecutive Honda Classic start and fifth overall (1995/MC, 2001/T27, 2002/T11, 2014/MC)
- Will make his fourth start of the 2014-15 PGA TOUR Season (Humana Challenge in partnership with the Clinton Foundation/T24, Waste Management Phoenix Open/MC, Farmers Insurance Open/MC)
- In search of first PGA TOUR top 10 since his runner-up finish at the 2014 PGA Championship
- Since 1993, Mickelson has recorded at least one win each year, except for 1999, 2003, and 2014

Erik Compton

- Coral Gables resident returns to PGA National for the fifth time; best finish was T4 in 2013
- The two-time heart transplant recipient amassed three top 10s in 2014, including T2 at the U.S. Open
- In eight starts this season, his best showing is T10 at the Humana Challenge in partnership with the Clinton Foundation

Tournament notes

- Twelve players have made The Honda Classic their first career TOUR title. Since 2000, five players have achieved the feat; Matt Kuchar (2002), Padraig Harrington (2005), Mark Wilson (2007), Y.E. Yang (2009) and Michael Thompson (2013).
- Since 1980, only four players have won The Honda Classic in their first attempt; Tim Herron (1996), Matt Kuchar (2002), Todd Hamilton (2004) and Padraig Harrington (2005).
- Six of the last seven winners of The Honda Classic have finished the season of their win inside the top 30 in FedExCup standings (Michael Thompson finished No. 66 in 2013).
- Jack Nicklaus (1977-78) is the only player to successfully defend his title at The Honda Classic.
- International players have dominated The Honda Classic in recent years, with wins by Padraig Harrington (2005), Luke Donald (2006), Ernie Els (2008), Y.E. Yang (2009), Camilo Villegas (2010), Rory Sabbatini (2011) and Rory McIlroy (2012). Mark Wilson (2005), Michael Thompson (2013) and Russell Henley (2014) are the only United States natives to win since 2005.
- PGA National continues to rank among the toughest layouts on TOUR. Again in 2014, the par-70 Champion Course ranked as the 13th toughest course on TOUR outside of the majors, with a scoring average of 70.408.

Miscellaneous 2014-15 PGA TOUR notes

- Entering the 2014-15 season, 29 of the top 30 players in the Official World Golf Ranking were PGA TOUR members, including 2014-15 new members Victor Dubuisson and Jamie Donaldson. Thomas Bjorn (30) was the lone non-member inside the top 30.
- The 2014-15 rookie class of 24 players includes 21 players under the age of 30. The list of 24 includes three players playing on medical extensions from previous years but remain in the rookie category.
- Four new members earned PGA TOUR cards through the non-member FedExCup points list but are not considered part of the rookie class: Victor Dubuisson (France); Francesco Molinari (Italy); Jamie Donaldson (Wales); and Brooks Koepka (United States).
- There are 86 active international players representing 24 countries in 2014-15. Australia has the most international members (16).

Notable changes for the 2014-15 PGA TOUR season

- Starting in January 2015, winners of the Arnold Palmer Invitational presented by MasterCard and the Memorial Tournament presented by Nationwide will receive a three-year PGA TOUR exemption and a three-year exemption into THE PLAYERS Championship.
- The 2015 Presidents Cup team eligibility for the U.S. Team will be based on FedExCup points instead of money. Presidents Cup points for the FedExCup Playoffs will be weighted the same as World Golf Championships (550 for first place, 315 for second, etc.).
- The Top 125 Money List from the previous season, established following the conclusion of the 2014 Wyndham Championship, will remain as an exempt category in 2014-15 for standard, open events only.
- The Humana Challenge in partnership with the Clinton Foundation included the Top 10 from the Previous Tournament Category, as will the RBC Heritage.