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*This page: Picturesque winter scenes like this at TPC Jasna Polana haven't been plentiful so far this winter, but we're not complaining because for some that means more golf!  
(Photo: Tim Connolly)*



# The Road to Augusta goes through...



**T**hanks to the Drive, Chip and Putt Championship, the dream to compete at Augusta National Golf Club is just as real for golf's young competitors as it is for professionals. The journey even includes the opportunity to compete at some of the greatest clubs and courses in the United States. For example, those looking to advance to Augusta from the Met Area in 2018 would also have a stop at Winged Foot Golf Club (pictured).

A joint effort between the USGA, Masters Tournament and PGA of America, this free youth golf development initiative welcomes boys and girls ages 7-15 to participate in separate divisions in four age categories. The 2017 Drive, Chip and Putt National Finals may still be several months away, but registration for 2018—the initiative's fifth year—is already open! The road to Augusta from the Met Area once again provides ample opportunities for qualifying, with 12 total MGA Member Clubs serving as host sites. In all, the top 80 performers—40 boys and 40 girls—will earn an invitation to 2018's National Finals at Augusta National Golf Club.

For insight from Met Area competitors preparing for the 2017 Drive, Chip and Putt Championship National Finals, be sure to check out the February/March issue of *The Met Golfer*.

## The Met Golfer EXTRA

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# Met Junior Moments

**T**his July, the Met Junior Championship sponsored by MetLife will celebrate its 100th playing, reuniting with its earliest host Plainfield Country Club. The MGA is proud that junior golf has been one of its highest priorities since its earliest years and continues to be a primary focus today through the MGA Foundation. To honor the rich history of the Met Junior, which has produced a noteworthy list of winners, we're searching the archives to highlight some the championship's greatest moments. Where better to start than the beginning?

The Met Junior Championship was contested at Plainfield Country Club each of its first three years (1912-1914). H.B. Hollins, the MGA's first president, strongly supported young men taking up the game, and Plainfield member Leighton Calkins, who served on Executive Committees of both the MGA and USGA, formalized plans for the championship. The first playing attracted 37 competitors representing 14 Met Area clubs. It was received with high praise, establishing the foundation for what is the nation's oldest junior championship.

Stuart Connelly of Rockland emerged as the victor, recording a score of 74 on Plainfield's 18-hole Tom Bendelow course—the Club's masterful Donald Ross layout opened in 1921. Philip Carter of Nassau, who went on to win the championship's next three titles, finished second with a score of 76. The top two finishers also led the way in a supplemental "driving contest and approaching and putting competition." Carter won the driving contest, totaling 685.5 yards on three drives, while Connelly won the approaching and putting competition.

A gallery watches contestants take part in the driving competition at the first-ever Met Junior Championship in 1912.

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Left: Stuart Connelly, Right: Philip Carter



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# Reality... CHECK!

BY SCOTT KRAMER

**T**hat it was the winning product on a Golf Channel club design reality TV show was big enough news back in November. But when specific lofts of Wilson Staff's high-MOI Triton driver (\$450) were deemed non-conforming as the club came to market last month, it made even louder headlines. Ultimately, the USGA labeled the 9- and 10.5-degree versions conforming to the Rules of Golf. "We expect the 12-degree and left-handed versions to be approved very soon, too," says Michael Vrska, global director of innovation. The driver can be customized via interchangeable sole plates, moveable weights and an adjustable hosel. A wide alignment band on the crown helps ease set up. Golfers may well be enamored by its celebrity. They may also become fans of another blossoming newsmaker, Callaway's new Great Big Bertha Epic driver (\$499), that promises to be one of 2017's longest drivers. It features "Jailbreak" technology: Two slender and parallel titanium bars behind the face connect the crown and sole to govern impact deformation, generating more ball speed and lengthening driving distance. Light and strong, the sleek-looking clubhead is designed with sophisticated aerodynamics to enhance power. Perimeter weighting is adjustable, as well. The reality: Mighty tee shots.





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# Asian Tour Ambition



McCormick and his caddie after finishing the Final Stage of Asian Tour Q-School.

**F**ormer Met Amateur champion Ryan McCormick competed on the Mackenzie Tour in 2015 and made starts in a variety of professional events in 2016. Earlier this month, McCormick cruised through two stages of Asian Tour Qualifying School in Bangkok, Thailand and is now looking forward to an adventurous 2017.

**Extra:** *How did you decide to attempt qualifying for the Asian Tour?*  
**McCormick:** After narrowly missing qualifying for the Final Stage of European Tour Q-School, my good friend Mike Miller and I talked about going over to qualify. I wouldn't have gone over to Thailand if he didn't go as well. It was my first time to Asia and it was comforting knowing I was going with a friend. The Asian Tour is recognized as one of the best worldwide tours. It has a lot of co-sanctioned events with the European Tour, Japan Tour, and PGA TOUR, and opportunities to play your way into big events.

**E:** *You had just six bogeys in eight rounds of play in Thailand, what were keys to your consistent scoring?*

**RM:** My game feels great right now and I knew I would have lots of opportunities for birdies after playing practice rounds at both sites. I stayed patient both weeks and played what I like to call boring golf. I hit it solid and didn't have a three putt in any round.

**E:** *Was there a language barrier with your caddie? If so, in what ways did they help you around the course?*

**RM:** The caddies at both courses spoke a little English—enough to understand basic things. They smiled a lot and I'm not sure they really understood what was going on with the event, but it really kept me relaxed. I had a stretch of three rounds in a row where I couldn't talk to my playing partner or caddie, which was interesting!

**E:** *How did your experience on the Mackenzie Tour introduce you to competing on a professional tour?*

**RM:** The Mackenzie Tour was great for me in learning everything that has to do with being a pro. The most important thing I learned was how to score and shoot low scores consistently. The winning scores out there are consistently better than 20-under. It took a little bit to get used to scoring that low mentally, because growing up playing golf courses in the Met Area, double digits under par in a tournament is very rare.

**E:** *What are you looking forward to most about competing on the Asian Tour?*

**RM:** I'm so excited for the year ahead on the Asian Tour. It will be fun traveling around the world for these events. I feel the best about my game that I've ever felt. I'm looking forward to the opportunities that I'll have to compete out here, but also to play my way into the co-sanctioned events on the schedule.





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The Trump Organization commissioned one of the world's top golf architects, Gil Hanse, to completely restore Doral's four historic courses, including the famed Blue Monster – a massive 300-plus acre, 18-hole golf course and host of the PGA TOUR. Each of the courses was reimaged, expanded and upgraded as part of the transformation to exceed expectations of amateur and professional golfers alike. The driving range is enhanced with LED lighting systems – the first of its kind – new short-game practice area and 40 practice stations. The Jim McLean Golf School, renowned as the number one golf school in America, offers an on-site state-of-the-art teaching facility. The True Spec Golf club fitting center

provides the ultimate custom-fitting experience in golf equipment – an experience that was once exclusive to tour players.

As an added bonus, guests can enjoy a modern locker room and an expansive pro-shop that provides the latest in golf equipment, accessories and apparel for men, ladies and juniors. One of the largest in the country, the pro-shop is regarded as an authority in golf products, as they continuously carry exclusive and limited-edition items. Guests who become club members can enjoy exclusive golf tournaments and events.

For guests looking to lounge, the Royal Palm Pool complex offers an exciting and relaxing oasis, while the new 48,000-square-foot Trump Spa welcomes those who seek rejuvenation and tranquility. The resort's versatile dining options, including signature restaurants BLT Prime Steakhouse and Champions Bar & Grill, can be considered destinations in their own right and are sure to satisfy every palate.

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# The Waiting Game

While more typical during the late or early months of the golf season, this type of frosty scene has turned into a fairly common sight during what (so far) has been a milder winter in the Met Area. The opportunity to play golf through the winter is exciting here in the northeast, though it's important for players to abide by any delays or limitations set by superintendents and golf shop staff.

"Frost is essentially dew that has frozen on the leaf blade of the plant," described Tim Connolly, director of golf course maintenance at TPC Jasna Polana in Princeton, N.J. "Since the plant is essentially 80% water, if it's cold enough it can actually freeze inside the plant. If we were to walk on top of it, it's going to either damage the leaf or kill the plant all the way down to the crown." Damage is not immediately noticeable, but generally shows 48-72 hours later when the plant browns and dies.

Connolly identifies his club's membership as very

knowledgeable, but remains proactive by sharing this type of information in periodic newsletters and by providing up-to-date course information through the @JasnaPolanaAGR Twitter feed.

"We've had a fair amount of play over the last six weeks," said Connolly, who has been at TPC Jasna Polana since 2012. In fact, with the combination of added activity and freeze-thaw cycles, Connolly sent rollers out this month. "This is the first time since I've been here that we've actually sent the rollers out this late in winter. I felt like it was the right thing to do to smooth out the putting surfaces. We also changed cups to give our members a different hole location for the next week or two."

So, if you're lucky enough to have the opportunity to play this winter, be sure you're all clear to be on the course and thank the grounds crew for their continual focus on providing quality playing conditions.



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The resort is renowned for the 18-hole championship Miller course and the Soffer course voted among the top 100 “Best Resort Courses” by Golf Week. Both pristine golf courses have gone through more than \$45 million in renovations changing the landscape of Florida golf. The South Course’s (Soffer) debut was December 2006 and the North (Miller) opened in December 2007. Originally designed by Robert Trent Jones, Sr., both courses offer lush, tropical grounds accentuated with a variety of elevation changes, contoured fairways, sharp changes within holes and strategically placed water features. Varied flora and trees indigenous to Florida’s tropical climate create an oasis-like feel throughout the courses giving nearly each hole a private feel, with more than \$100,000 in landscaping spent on each hole of play. Occasionally, a beautiful statue can be found nestled within the foliage, reminding golfers that beauty surrounds them at every turn.

The resort’s courses are home to hundreds of birds that continue to call Turnberry home. Special nesting areas have been positioned throughout the courses. Even a separate “Flamingo Island” was built within Lake Julius, the largest and deepest body of water at the resort named after Golf Hall of Famer and former Golf Director Julius Boros. The Island ensures resident Flamingoes are able to nest and nurture their young in a natural environment.

The courses vibrant hues accentuated by the Paspalum Sea Dwarf grass that stays green year round is offset by the many lakes, brilliant flowers, white sand bunkers and lush foliage, all creating a golfer’s dream destination.

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# LAYOVER

BY TIM HARTIN

# MIAMI

The international flavor of Miami has made it a key hub for finance and commerce, and as an operations center for many multi-national corporations. For that same reason, Miami is one of the most entertaining cities in the United States and an easy location to enjoy, especially as an escape from the northeast winter and even if the trip is meant for business. Golf, of course, lies at the top of the to-do list.

#### COURSES:

- 1 The Diplomat Golf & Tennis Club** – While 15 small lakes are scattered across The Diplomat's golf course, forced carries are held to a minimum and most greens own an open front to welcome players of all skill levels. Even at just 6,800 yards from the back tees, accuracy will prove more beneficial than length as position off the tee is a key to scoring well. It's likely that every club will be tested, including the flat stick upon the course's smoothly contouring greens.
- 2 Trump National Doral Miami** – Golfers are sure to face a fresh experience on any of the resort's four courses thanks to recent re-designs. While the Blue Monster is heralded for previously testing the world's best golfers, every course is a challenge thanks to ever-present water. The Red Tiger Course faced the most dramatic transformation, highlighted by its small, subtly undulating greens surrounded by a combination of mounds and bunkers.
- 3 Crandon Golf at Key Biscayne** – Miami's best municipal course is just minutes from downtown, yet it offers a secluded experience that typically includes crocodile, heron, egret, and iguana sightings. Mangroves, palms, and bunkering frame many holes—which include a variety of doglegs and character-filled par-threes—and lead to greens that can provide challenging hole locations. A view of Miami across Biscayne Bay awaits on the home hole.

The short par-four second, a slight dogleg with an island green near the clubhouse, is the signature hole at The Diplomat Golf & Tennis Club.



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# Straight to the Topgolf

**T**he vision for Topgolf began in the United Kingdom in 2000 and first came to the United States in 2005. With the company continuing its expansion, golfers—and non-golfers alike—can now experience Topgolf in the Met Area at the new location in Edison, N.J.

While the golf aspect, which features games scored through hitting microchipped golf balls at dartboard-like targets, is certainly the driving attraction for the entertainment venue, its additional features lead to an enjoyable experience for anyone. “Whether they are focused on the food, the music, or the entertainment, Topgolf can be a place for everyone to have a great time,” said Topgolf’s Morgan Wallace, who also reported a fantastic response since the December opening of the New Jersey location—the company’s first in the northeast.

Pool tables, foosball, and Xbox Kinect, plus food made from scratch daily, over 200 HDTVs, and even live entertainment on weekends all equate into the Topgolf experience that is introducing many of its visitors to golf, with 45% of Topgolf guests saying they play traditional golf once or less per year. “We are really proud to focus on growing the game and being an entry point to the sport,” Wallace remarked.

With climate-cooled bays, leagues, lessons, and a modern take on playing the game, Topgolf may be the way to first introduce your golf-skeptic friends to the game.

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