



The 13th hole at
Bloomington Country Club

SEVENTH HEAVEN

When this year's Illinois State Amateur Championship visits Bloomington Country Club, a familiar venue, no facility will have served as the tournament's host site more often

By Len Ziehm

Even before it gets under way, the 79th Illinois State Amateur Championship is one for the record books.

In mid-August, Bloomington Country Club, a private facility with 410 golf members, will host the State Amateur for the seventh time. No club has held that distinction more often and only one other, the University of Illinois course in Savoy, has been the host



of the tournament as often; it was the site seven straight times from 1955 to 1961.

While the tournament has moved around the state over the years, including six down-state visits since 2000, it's now getting embroiled in a Chicago area run of sorts. With the exception of this year's visit to Bloomington, it will be the tournament's only venture outside of the Chicago area in a four-year span that began with



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AT A GLANCE

WHAT	THE 79TH ILLINOIS STATE AMATEUR
WHEN	Aug. 11-13
WHERE	Bloomington Country Club 605 Towanda Ave., Bloomington
FIELD	132 players
ELIGIBILITY	Open to amateurs who are Illinois residents with a Handicap Index not exceeding 10.4.
QUALIFYING SITES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Franklin County Country Club, West Frankfort • Crestwicke Country Club, Bloomington • Sanctuary Golf Course, New Lenox • Winnetka Golf Club, Winnetka • Ironhorse Golf Club, Tuscola • Plum Tree National Golf Club, Harvard • Seven Bridges Golf Club, Woodridge • PrairieView Golf Club, Byron • Nettle Creek Country Club, Morris • Pekin Country Club, Pekin
FORMAT	72 holes stroke play (18 holes each on Aug. 11 and 12, and 36 holes on Aug. 13). If there is a tie for the lead after 72 holes, a three-hole playoff will follow. If, after this playoff, there is a tie for the lead, play will continue on a hole-by-hole basis.
CUT	After 36 holes, to the low 30 and ties plus anyone within 10 strokes of the lead.
FUTURE SITES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2010, Beverly CC, Chicago • 2011, Glen Oak CC, Glen Ellyn • 2012, Kokopelli GC, Marion • 2013, Aldeen GC, Rockford

community and the club have welcomed this tournament with open arms.”

Miller, the son of Illinois Golf Hall of Famer and long-time Evanston Golf Club professional Hal Miller, played in the Illinois State Amateur when it was held at Pine Meadow in 1987. He was an Evanston assistant starting in 1994, and he arrived at Bloomington shortly after the course underwent a complete renovation in the fall of 2002. Superintendent Danny Rieger has been at the club for 34 years.

In addition to its six previous Illinois State Amateurs, Bloomington was the site of the 1980 Illinois Open, won by eventual PGA Tour journeyman David Ogrin when he was still an amateur. The Illinois Women’s Amateur also has been contested at Bloomington several times and the club has been the host club for the Illinois PGA’s first stroke play

last year’s event at Cantigny Golf in Wheaton. The 2010 Illinois State Amateur will be at Chicago’s Beverly Country Club and the 2011 version is scheduled for Glen Oak Country Club in Glen Ellyn. The event heads to southern Illinois once again in 2012 when it visits Kokopelli Golf Club in Marion.

But none will have quite the flavor of this year’s State Amateur Championship, which will produce a bit of tournament history in itself.

Bloomington’s first time in the spotlight was in 1946, when Earl Wilde beat out the legendary Jim Frisina, Sr., for the title. Frisina had won the title in 1942 and would later win in 1947, ’54, ’56 and

’58. His record five titles also was supplemented by another runner-up finish in 1941. All of Frisina’s finishes came when the tourney was conducted in match play. The State Amateur Championship changed to 72 holes of stroke play in 1963, which makes Bloomington one of the few clubs to have hosted the tournament in both formats.

Match play was used when Haynes Hawks won the 1953 title and stroke play determined the winner when Mick Soli won in 1975, Roy Biancalana in 1983, Jay Davis in 1991 and Erik Ciotti in 1997.

“People will want to come and watch,” said Jim Miller, Bloomington’s head professional the past five seasons. “It’s a spectator-friendly facility with the greens and tees close together, and the

event in each of the last three seasons.

It’s understandable that Bloomington would be rich in golf history because it’s one of the oldest courses in the state.

Though its designer has been lost in time, the club has roots dating back to 1896, when it had nine holes at a nearby location. [“The Architects of Golf,” one of the game’s foremost reference works for golf course design, lists William B. Langford as having completed Bloomington’s design in 1917, but the first nine holes at the present site were opened in 1903.] That nine is now the back side, the front having been created in 1930. A Larry Denton-directed renovation included all greens, the switch from bluegrass to bentgrass fairways, additional bunkers and new tee boxes.

ILLINOIS

State Amateur

For the State Amateur, the course will play at 6,530 yards and a par 70. The ninth hole, usually a short par 5, will play instead as a 455-yard par 4.

Prior to the renovation, long-time member Brad Barker held the course

record of 64. Bloomington resident Todd Mitchell, a two-time Illinois Amateur champion who plays out of Crestwicke Country Club, unofficially matched Barker's course record after the renovation in a non-competitive round. Mark

PLAYERS TO WATCH



ZACH BARLOW

Percy

The defending champion will be a senior at Illinois in the fall. He helped the Illini to seven tournament titles last season and won two individual events: the Fighting Illini Olympia Fields Invitational and the Marshall Invitational.

Barlow says:

"Coming back to defend the title will be a great challenge. The Illinois State Am is always a great tournament and to be the defending champion with a chance to repeat is something I am looking forward to this summer. It will be great to play against the best in the state and see if I can hang onto the trophy another year."



JOHN EHRGOTT

Peoria

Ehr Gott was the CDGA player of the year in 2007. A pharmaceutical salesman, Ehr Gott tied for second in the Illinois State Amateur in 2007 and finished sixth last year. He started well this season, winning the Illinois State Mid-Amateur and finished second to Dallas Cowboys quarterback Tony Romo in the Will County Amateur.

Ehr Gott says:

"My game plan going into the Illinois State Am is to hit as many fairways and greens as I can each round. I think my overall ballstriking is as good as anyone. It comes down to being able to make putts for four rounds in a row. If I can make my eight to fifteen foot-putts, I think I have a good shot at the title."



TODD MITCHELL

Bloomington

Mitchell was the last player to win back-to-back Illinois State Amateur titles (2002 and '03). Last year, after winning the Illinois State Mid-Amateur by nine shots, he bypassed the Illinois State Amateur in order to compete in the U.S. Mid-Amateur, where he advanced all the way to the title match before losing. He has been the CDGA and Heartland player of the year twice in the last three years, including last year.

Mitchell on Bloomington C.C.:

"It's shorter and tighter than Cantigny (last year's Illinois State Amateur site), and just a couple miles away (from his home). If you play it on an everyday basis it's not that difficult, but I'm sure they'll grow the rough and it'll play much different for the tournament."



BRAD BARKER

Bloomington

No player knows Bloomington Country Club better than Barker, who owns a nearby auto dealership and has played there for the better part of five decades. Now 57, he plays the course about three times a week. Barker received the club's host site exemption into this year's field after strong showings in the last two Illinois State Senior Amateur tournaments.

Barker on Bloomington C.C.:

"It won't be long, but it will be tight and the greens will be small and fast. A score of par (for 72 holes) has usually stood up well. It's a course you've got to plod your way around. You hit a lot of irons and 3-woods off the tees. It's more a strategy golf course. It's not easy to shoot way under par."



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Zach Barlow is the defending champion.

Miller, professional at Sportsman's, won this year's Illinois PGA Stroke Play title at Bloomington with a 67.

Miller believes the key hole could come at the par-5 sixth. While the other two par 5s are reachable in two, No. 6 is a 565-yard dogleg left with out of bounds on both sides on the second shot. "This is one par 5 where they'll be happy to make par," Miller said.

He also believes the 15th will be critical. It's a 450-yard, uphill par-4 with a narrow, undulating green, and the following hole—a 220-yard par-3 that usually plays into the wind—could be taxing as well.

One thing this Illinois State Amateur won't be lacking is local heroes. The exempt players include Mitchell, Barker and Kyle English.

English's family owns Crestwicke. Barker, who is one of the top senior players in the state, received the host club's exemption, and it's certain no one will know the course better than he does. Barker, who grew up on the course and is the current club champion, played college golf at Illinois State University on a team that featured successful touring pro D.A. Weibring.

Those challengers still will have to overcome Percy's Zach Barlow, the University of Illinois star who will try to become the first repeat champion since Mitchell won in 2002 and 2003. 🏌️

Len Ziehm covers golf and other sports for the Chicago Sun-Times.