

ILLINOIS GOLFER THE OPENING 9

Wednesday,
July 7, 2021



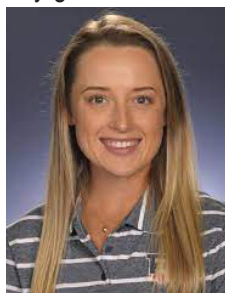
John Deere Classic / J.R. Howell

THE SHOWROOM Every fan sees the annual showcase of John Deere equipment between the driveway and the ninth hole at Deere Run.

Nowlin leads IWO by 1 with 18 left

1 Tristyn Nowlin is 18 holes from going two-for-three as a professional, but the final round of the Illinois Women's Open at Mistwood Golf Club in Romeoville won't be a coronation.

Nowlin, the recently-graduated Kentuckian from the University of Illinois and pro for about a month, scored back-to-back 69s on Tuesday, the total of 6-under-par 138 earning her a one-stroke lead over **Ueakarn "Loukyee" Songprasert** of Bloomington.



Nowlin

Nowlin, as noted yesterday, is coming off a victory in the Michigan Women's Open last week. Songprasert, a native of Thailand and recent graduate of West Texas A&M, is also a freshly-minted pro, seeking the same goal – LPGA membership – as Nowlin. Songprasert had seven

top-nine finishes, including a victory, in her last seven college starts. Tuesday, she opened with even-par 72 and stormed home with a 5-under 67, the best round of the day, in the afternoon, finishing with a birdie on the par-5 18th.

That duo and **Elayna Bowser** of Dearborn, Mich., who scored 71-72–143, are the only players under par, and will be grouped together in the final round at 8:10 a.m. Twenty-two players made the cut, which fell at 12-over 156.

Other notables in the final 18 include host pro and two-time IWO winner **Nicole Jeray** (3-over 147), Illinois Amateur champion **Grace Curran** (4-over 148), and former IWO champ **Jenna Pearson** (9-over 153).

2 Today's John Deere Classic Pro-Am is definitely of the COVID-19 era. Amateurs aren't supposed to mingle with the pro they're playing with – which takes a great deal of the fun out of it, especially given the money they're paying

to step inside the ropes – and all week, kids can't get autographs.

Usually, the CEO of the sponsoring company gets a prime tee time with the defending champion or someone equally notable. Deere & Company chair and CEO **John May** will turn the tables today at noon. He'll caddy for Deere employee **Allison Farrell**, a 14-time tournament volunteer, when she tees it up with defending champion **Dylan Frittelli**.

"I asked employees to tell me what makes the John Deere Classic so important to them, and to our community," May said. "I was impressed by the quality of video submissions and the passion these employees have for the John Deere Classic.

"Many of the submissions were from employees – including Allison –

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who have volunteered at the Classic for years. It was a difficult decision, but with her experience as a Division I golfer, and her love of the game and the Classic, Allison's story stood out."

Farrell, a module leader at Deere's cylinder works in Moline, is an assistant golf coach at Geneseo High School, and is something of a regular at Deere Run. In fact, her fiancé proposed to her on the picturesque fourth hole and they'll be married this September on the bluff above the 18th green.

May thinks he'll go this route again next year. For one thing, he's not a golfer.

"I feel more at home on my farm than I do on the golf course, and thought this would be a great way to get to know some of our employees while giving them the unique opportunity of taking the tee alongside some of the world's best golfers," May said in a news release.

3 Coming to the Deere? Buy your tickets online. Thanks to COVID, all tickets are electronic this year and none will be sold at the gate. Go to www.john-deereclassic.com for the order form.

4 At the Deere? Then you already know everything is credit-or-debit card (or Apple Pay or Google Pay) only. No cash sales at the concession areas or merchandise tent this year.

5 Defending Deere champion Dylan Frittelli held court on Tuesday and tried to explain why his game is sour compared to two years ago, when he captured the Deere for his first and so far only victory on the American tour (to go with a pair on the European circuit).

"I've worked with my coach obviously intensely to try and figure it out," Frittelli said. "We've outlined short irons and putting. Putting is a major one. My putting stats have been terrible this year, to be blunt. But I know my technique and everything related to it is pretty sound. It's more so trying to make putts and be more creative and stop trying to be so analytical and worry about that technique. Trying to be more creative, more productive on making putts and doing drills that challenge me to make putts.

"In general I'm playing pretty well. I don't think, as a lot of guys say, my

results don't reflect how I'm playing. I think mental side I've been a little bit distracted the last few months. I haven't really been too focused. Came out of a relationship recently, so hopefully that's going to get me on a nice straight trajectory to playing the good golf again. Once that kind of clears up and I've worked on those two things, I think I'll be back to top-70, top-60 player that I know I can be."

Frittelli has to step it up to make the PGA Tour playoffs. The top 125 players advance, and he's 130th.

"Yeah, it's three, four tournaments left, I guess I'm only going to play two of them beyond this, but I'm just looking at just popping inside that Top 125, getting in the first playoff event and from there I'll bust it and try to get into the top 75 or 70 for the next event. I'm just looking to do well this week and try to make birdies and try and conjure up some of those feelings I had two years ago."

Frittelli has been the defender since July 2019 thanks to the tournament not being played last year.

"It's quite a long time ago," Frittelli said. "I played the back nine today and had some good memories coming through there, but yeah, two years is quite a long time in a young person's life. If I'm only 31 years old it's almost – what is that, five percent of my life, 10 percent of my life?"

"Front nine, I didn't have too many memories. I remember bogeying the first hole. I think it was the second round. That was the only bogey I had all week, so that was pretty memorable in a negative sense.

"Memories on the back nine, I think it was cool once I got to 16, that was really where everything sort of focused in for me. I realized on 17 green that I was leading by two but I knew by the time 16 came with hearing some chatter in the crowd, so playing that par-3, that was a cool experience today. I actually hit it in the left hazard, it bounced off the green and rolled into the left hazard."

6 If ticket sales are brisk, there will be as many as 15,000 fans at Deere Run each day. That's about what the tournament gets in a good year, though the figures are not announced. (Golf is

odd that way.) Frittelli is overjoyed to see spectators back.

"We didn't realize, I think I'll speak for a lot of guys on Tour, how much we missed them," Frittelli said. "Just that energy that you can thrive off having some fans and cheering you on and even just focusing you in knowing people are there watching you. It was cool in the beginning logistically driving to the golf course, play and leave and you don't have to worry about any traffic or anything, but the aspect on the course, trying to play, trying to perform, it's a whole lot better having people there and a whole lot more fun."

7 It will be lost in the shuffle this week, but the U.S. Senior Open is at Omaha Country Club, so golf fans in Des Moines have a choice. Go east and see the kids, or go west and see the seniors.

8 The 1-Percent Department: Pine Valley Golf Club in Clementon, N.J., recently admitted three women as members, notably **Annika Sorenstam**. You and me, whether boys or girls? The invite was lost in the mail.

9 Finally, The Match, the made-for-television concoction from the wilds of Montana, raised a good deal of money for charity and took up some five hours of air time on TNT, TBS and truTV. Why three networks were needed for four players we know not, but between **Phil Mickelson**, **Bryson DeChambeau**, **Aaron Rodgers** and **Tom Brady** there were enough one-liners and decent shots in the high elevation of Moonlight Basin to keep most people awake for most of the show. At least, the part before the sun set. DeChambeau and Rodgers, a fine clutch putter, won 3 and 2.

This was the fourth version of The Match, which started as a Mickelson vs. Tiger Woods showdown on pay-per-view, of all things, a couple of years ago. The PPV system failed and it could be found on the Internet during the final holes. You would have thought that would have been the end of it, but Turner picked up the concept. The third edition set cable TV records for a golf telecast – sorry, Golf Channel – and Tuesday's might have done nearly as well.