

Champions up to the task as countdown begins for 2020 U.S. Women's Open

[Melanie Hauser](#), Correspondent June 7, 2019



The 2020 U.S. Women's Open will be the first star-studded women's event played in Houston since the LPGA held the Mazda Hall of Fame Championship at Sweetwater Country Club from 1985-86.

Photo: Thomas Nguyen, Freelance

The redo of the Cypress Creek layout was just tested by some top amateurs during April's Champions Cup Invitational and passed with more than flying colors.

The hotels, parking and basic footprint for the biggest event in women's golf are in place — give or take a few tweaks.

The volunteers are signing up — 1,100 strong and counting — and tickets just went on sale.

Players like former TCU standout Angela Stanford are telling folks they can't wait to step to the first tee.

And, yes, Champions Golf Club is ready. But aren't they always?

Champions is officially on the clock. Yes, after three years of planning, Champions president and Jack Burke and vice president Robin Burke and tournament chairman Tom Godbold find themselves a mere 51 weeks away from hosting the crown jewel of women's golf — the 2020 U.S. Women's Open.

"We say we're always ready," said Godbold, a longtime Champions member. "We say it's always opening day. Now we have the baton. Lets' go prove it."

Godbold and Robin Burke just got back from last week's Women's Open at the County Club of Charleston — their third U.S. Women's Open visit in as many years — where they came back with more ideas they can use as they polish up the final plans for the 2020 event that will be held June 4-7.

And come Friday morning at City Hall, they'll be handed that baton he mentioned — the U.S. Women's Open Trophy — by USGA director of championships Matt Sawicki.

The 75th U.S. Women's Open will be the first star-studded women's event played in Houston since the mid-1980s when the LPGA held the Mazda Hall of Fame Championship at Sweetwater Country Club from 1985-86.

And it's just the second time the event has been held in Texas. The only other time was 1991 when Meg Mallon won at another distinguished club — Colonial Country Club in Fort Worth.

"This is a once-in-a-generation, once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for golf fans to see these players," said John Coppins, the USGA's senior manager of the 2020 U.S. Women's Open. "We want to make sure bigger and better than any U.S. Women's Open."



Champions Golf Club vice president Robin Burke said the goal is to "create energy the very second the (players) land in Houston."
Photo: Darren Carroll/USGA, FRL

Coppins and two other USGA staffers have been in Houston since last September working on the operational side of the Open. Like Charleston, Champions has a smaller footprint to work with than a U.S. Open — the 2019 Open will sprawl across the area that surrounds Pebble Beach Golf Links — but smaller doesn't mean less exciting and engaging for fans and sponsors.

"What we learned at Charleston, is we can pull off a successful championship outside the ropes with a really tight, small footprint," he said. "We were surrounded by water on three sides there. Champions, while surrounded by neighborhoods and homes, has a much larger footprint than what we worked with in Charleston.

"We're excited at the options and flexibility Champions offers from an operational standpoint. We've got a lot of ways to get creative and a lot of different directions we can go."

Champions opened in late 1950s and the first 60 years of the all-golf club was marked by the championships it brought. The 1967 Ryder Cup and 1969 U.S. Open. The 1993 U.S. Amateur. Five TOUR Championships. Five Houston Champions Internationals. Two women's Mid-Amateurs and two Southern Amateurs. The winners? Orville Moody took the '69 Open, the U.S. won that Ryder Cup and players like Tiger Woods and David Duval won the TOUR Championship here.

The next 60 years? The Women's Open is quite the way to start.

"We want to create energy the very second the (players) land in Houston," Burke said. "I think that's going to happen because Houstonians love sports."

"We want them to have a great experience on and off the course. I think they'll enjoy the engagement with our members and the fans here in Houston. That's the whole product that you deliver."

The course? That goes without saying. The tree-lined traditional course has stood the test of time and the redo will only make it more challenging for the best in the game. Burke, who was one of the best amateurs in the game and has won eight Women's City Championships, should know.

"It's old style, it's walkable, it's hard, it's difficult," Burke said. "I know we all can't wait to see women tee it up. It'll be a healthy course as far as length. And it will be interesting to see where ball landing; how far they'll be hitting it."

And the operations? With all the events Champions has hosted — the club even jumped in last-minute and pulled off a seven-week change of venue when hurricane damage forced the 2017 Women's Mid-Amateur to be relocated from Naples, Fla. to Houston — they're confident they'll be able to handle anything.

One thing they're still working on is a unique fan experience that would allow spectators to see several holes from one location. In Charleston, the Open had the Palmetto Pavilion, an open-air hospitality area on the 18th tee with a panoramic view.

Godbold said they're looking at several areas where they might be able to offer a similar fan experience at Champions — likely at least partially air conditioned. One area they're considering would include views of 12, 16 and 17.

"We're going to try and find the best places to do that," he said. "It'll be really cool. It'll give spectators the chance to sample all kinds of shots and perspectives."

Coppins, like Burke, said there's a lot of details and work to do, but the operations for 2020 couldn't be on a better track.

The 1,100 volunteers who have already signed up account for more than half of what the event will need and represent 150 more than turned out for the week at the 2018 Women's Open at Shoal Creek in Birmingham.