

DCCVB View: Looking forward to 2017 NCAA Golf Championships

Published: Tuesday, July 12, 2016 5:30 a.m. CDT

This spring and early summer has been filled with several weeks of exciting NCAA athletics postseason action. In late May, the NCAA Golf Championships featured incredible shot making and several clutch performances in both the women's and men's tournaments that helped propel the University of Washington and University of Oregon to respective women's and men's NCAA titles.

Most recently, upstart Coastal Carolina – a 40-year-old public university with an enrollment of just over 10,000 – won 17 games in 13 days, including a decisive third game of a three-game series against the University of Arizona to claim the NCAA Baseball Championship. The storybook ending to the Chanticleers' first-ever national championship is an indication that few sporting events better showcase the passion, intensity and exuberance of its participants and fans than do the NCAA championships.

Next May, DeKalb County and the entire northern Illinois region will have the chance to experience the excitement and pageantry of a national championship tournament up close and in person when Northern Illinois University and nearby Rich Harvest Farms host the 2017 NCAA Golf Championships.

For two weeks – May 19-24 for the women and May 26-31 for the men – the best NCAA Division I collegiate golfers in the country will convene in Sugar Grove for one of the most prestigious and important collegiate athletic events ever held in Illinois.

Many people in DeKalb County and throughout the region are familiar with Rich Harvest Farms. Designed, built and owned by NIU alumnus Jerry Rich, the facility serves as the home to the NIU men's and women's golf programs and is ranked by Golf Digest magazine as one of America's 100 Greatest Golf Courses. Rich Harvest Farms has become one of the world's premier golf venues having previously hosted the hugely successful Solheim Cup in 2009 and, most recently, the Palmer Cup and Western Amateur in 2015.

The NCAA Golf Championships most certainly is one of the most exciting and significant athletic events in the history of NIU. Not that the university is unaccustomed to hosting major sporting events.

The Huskie football program has played three football games at historic Soldier Field, and in November NIU will take on MAC rival Toledo in the first-ever football game to be played in the home of the Chicago White Sox, U.S. Cellular Field. Closer to home, NIU's Huskie Stadium has twice been the site for the IHSA Football State Championships and will continue to host the event in 2017, 2019 and 2021.

While NIU has a history of success in hosting major athletics events, the NCAA Golf Championships will be the first time the university will host a national championship in any sport since becoming a major college athletic program in 1969. In fact, the only other time that an NCAA Golf Championship has been played in the region or the state was back in 1999 at Conway Farms in Mundelein.

The 2017 championships at Rich Harvest Farms will be televised live on the Golf Channel, focusing a national spotlight on NIU and our region. The attention generated by hosting this high-profile event provides a unique opportunity for NIU and the local community to showcase the wonderful attributes the area has to offer.

Huskie fans, alumni and area residents can get involved in the NCAA Golf Championships in a variety of ways. Tickets for both the women's and men's national championships will go on sale later this month. Ticket pricing will be very affordable with daily general admission and several tournament ticket packages available.

Volunteers also will play a big role in the success of the event, as they have done locally with the IHSA Football State Championships. The size and scope of the NCAA Championships provides numerous volunteer opportunities to help manage the tournaments and assist competitors, teams, coaches and fans from across the nation who will be visiting the area.

Stay tuned to the newly designed niuhuskies.com website for additional information on NCAA Golf Championships tickets and volunteer registration.

These are exciting times for NIU and the northern Illinois region. With the help of the "Huskie Nation" and the local community, the 2017 NCAA Golf Championships will no doubt be a memorable and impactful experience.

- Brad Hoey and Ryan Sedevie are members of the DeKalb County Convention and Visitors Bureau Board of Directors.