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## **CHAMPIONS TOUR PLAYERS PREPARE FOR TEST AT VALENCIA COUNTRY CLUB**

### 54-Hole AT&T Champions Classic Begins on Friday

VALENCIA – In the late winter of 1998, after four days of tournament competition, PGA Tour star John Daly took a final look around Valencia Country Club.

“This is a great golf course,” said Daly, who had finished in a tie for fourth in a Nissan Open that Valencia had agreed to host as Riviera Country Club in Los Angeles was preparing to host the U.S. Senior Open that year. “This is one of the best courses we’ve played on the West Coast. Where has it been?”

The answer, of course, is that for the past 40 years one of the best golf courses ever designed by Robert Trent Jones has been an oasis of beauty in the sprawling Santa Clarita Valley while maturing into the par 72 layout that Golf magazine rates among the top 25 courses in the West.

For the past six seasons, Valencia Country Club has been home to the 54-hole AT&T Champions Classic, scheduled for March 16-18, and the challenges presented by a course that plays to 6,959 yards for the tournament make a win here one of the most prestigious on the Champions Tour.

“It’s definitely one of the more challenging courses we play during the year,” said Des Smyth, the 2005 champion. “The fairways aren’t as wide as the normal run of fairways we see out here. It’s an old, traditional style golf course and of course the greens are pretty tricky. The greens have a lot of undulation in them and they’re small. I think that’s the difference, because if you watch the scoring it’s always a little higher than most other tournaments.

“I won on it, so I like it. But I like challenging golf courses where it’s difficult to get around in par.”

Last year, when Tom Kite posted his second win with a 54-hole total of 12 under par 204, Valencia was the fourth-toughest course on the tour statistically, topped only by three courses that hosted major championships. It also had four of the 50 toughest holes – the 17<sup>th</sup>, a 449-yard par 4 ranked 20<sup>th</sup>; the second, a 400-yard par 4 tied for 24<sup>th</sup>; the sixth, a 421-yard par 4 rated 35<sup>th</sup>; and the seventh, a 185-yard par 3 ranked 36<sup>th</sup>.

The front nine opens with a 540-yard par 5 and closes with a 500-yard par 5. The back nine starts with a 470-yard par 4 and finishes with a 546-yard par 5.

Last year, Kite took control of the tournament in the second round with a tournament-record 8 under par 64 that included an eagle on No. 9 and birdies on 10, 11, 12, 13, 16, 17 and 18.

(more)

## **2-2-2-2 AT&T Champions Classic**

“I think it’s probably the most challenging golf course on the Champions Tour,” said Kite, who finished at 4 under par when he won a playoff against Tom Watson in 2002. “It’s got plenty of length, some very challenging greens, and it always seems like when we play there it’s cool so the ball doesn’t go as far and the course plays long.

“For me, it’s a wonderful golf course and I’ve played very well there over the years. I have some great memories of that course and I always look forward to going back.”

Gil Morgan won in 2004 with a record 14 under par 202 and he’s been the runner-up twice (2003 and last year), so he has some great memories as well.

“I think it’s demanding in the fact it has a lot of length in places,” Morgan said. “Due to the tree-lined features of the course, it really demands shot-making. The greens have always been difficult to putt because you have to put your ball in certain places to really have a good run at birdie. I really like the definitive features of the course; it really gives you an idea of where you need to place your ball.

“It’s really more of an old, traditional style golf course and I like that.”

Tom Purtzer, the 2003 champion, calls it “a real ball-hitters golf course. If you drive it straight you can shoot some pretty good numbers. There are a couple of greens that are pretty severe where you need to place your ball in certain areas. To me, it’s just a good all-around golf course. Eighteen is a great finishing hole because of all the things that can happen there. It’s a tough green to get on in two, but you can.

“They just have a really good mix of holes, some short par 4s and some long par 4s. I just really can’t say anything bad about it.”

And when the AT&T Champions Classic is over, the winner is going to find a place of honor for a trophy that will remind him that when he says he beat the best, he’s not just talking about the players.

Tickets for Wednesday-Sunday are available to purchase onsite at the Main Gate of the course for \$15.

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Contact: Dennis Bickmeier

714-488-0112

[dbickmeier@hotmail.com](mailto:dbickmeier@hotmail.com)

[dennis@attchampionsclassic.com](mailto:dennis@attchampionsclassic.com)