



**EMBARGO**

**Wednesday 4<sup>th</sup> June 2008**

## **AIB LADIES IRISH OPEN ATTRACTS WORLD'S LEADING PLAYERS TO IRELAND THIS SUMMER**

The most important women's event in Irish golf takes place this July with the rebirth of the AIB Irish Ladies Open, supported by Fáilte Ireland and Killeen Castle, to the sporting calendar. Three of the World's Top 16 players will be competing against the elite of European and Irish golf. They will test their skills over the renowned Bernhard Langer-designed Portmarnock Hotel and Golf Links from 11<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> July in a bid to become the AIB Irish Ladies Open Champion for 2008.

Players confirmed to media today were World No. 3 Norwegian **Suzann Pettersen**, American major-winning sensation **Morgan Pressel** ranked No. 14 in the world, the Swedish Solheim Cup star and World No. 16 **Maria Hjorth** and the highly anticipated rookie from England **Henrietta Zuel**, who made her professional debut only last April in Spain at 18 years of age. **Rebecca Coakley** and **Martina Gillen** will lead the Irish challenge and will be joined by other Team Ireland members **Hazel Kavanagh**, **Marian Riordan** and **Claire Coughlin**, all of whom received invitations.

The new look AIB Ladies Irish Open marks the beginning of an exciting time in Ladies golf in Ireland and the start of building momentum on the road to Ireland hosting The Solheim Cup in 2011 at Killeen Castle, which is a Jack Nicklaus Signature designed golf course and home to the Dave Pelz scoring game school, the only one outside the US. At this year's event a number of support sponsors have come on board





Speaking at the announcement of the field's star players, **Tournament Promoter Roddy Carr** said, "We are going back to the basics of what has always worked in Ireland...bring the best players in the world and make tickets available and affordable to the golfing fans. We are very excited to have these high profile players coming and believe a top class field of International, European and Irish players will attract the golf fans from all over Ireland to come and see the event. This event is the launching platform for The 2011 Solheim Cup at Killeen Castle"

**Billy Andrews, General Manager AIB** said, "We are delighted to be title sponsors of this year's AIB Ladies Irish Open in Portmarnock Hotel and Golf Links. It is our intention to make this event an integral part of the Irish golfing calendar. The AIB Ladies Irish Open is an important part of the bank's sponsorship portfolio as we build our association with women's golf, to compliment our exclusive global partnership with The Solheim Cup 2009 in Chicago and 2011 in Ireland."

**Martin Cullen TD, Minister for Arts Sport & Tourism** said, "Fáilte Ireland is delighted to be supporting the AIB Ladies Irish Open through the International Sports Tourism Initiative. Ladies golf offers good potential for growth for overseas visitor numbers to Ireland. Events like the AIB Ladies Irish Open and the globally recognised Solheim Cup in 2011 will greatly enable us to raise awareness of Ireland as a premier destination for ladies golfing holidays. Ladies golf is showing good growth in participation levels in Northern Europe, especially in Scandinavia and Germany."





**Moira Cassidy, Golf Director Portmarnock Hotel & Golf Links** said: “This event is the only major women’s professional golf tournament in the world played on a natural ‘links’ golf course in 2008, We believe Portmarnock Hotel & Golf Links will showcase some of the finest Links facilities available in the country and are looking forward to welcoming some of the best women golfers in the world to Ireland”

**Bernard and Penny White, Pink Ribbon Golf Ireland:** “Having recently launched Pink Ribbon Golf in Ireland, we are particularly delighted to have signed a five-year ‘Official Clothing’ contract for the AIB Ladies Irish Open to be designated as one of the “official licensee” of The 2011 Solheim Cup at Killeen Castle in Ireland. The opportunity to be associated with these events is a wonderful chance for us to introduce our collection that combines stylish ladies golf apparel and accessories and contribute to the continuing fight against breast cancer by donating 10% of all sales to Action Breast Cancer in Ireland.”

**Player Profiles:**

Norway’s **Suzann Pettersen** - the World No. 3 is relishing the opportunity to go one better in this event having finished runner-up to Iben Tinning at Killarney in 2002. The 27 year-old was runner-up in April’s Kraft Nabisco Championship in the United States, and only two weeks ago carded a phenomenal 22 under par for three rounds to claim the Swiss Open title. This week she is defending the LPGA Tour major the McDonald’s LPGA Championship. She ended last season as World No.2, behind Lorena Ochoa, having recorded six victories, five on the LPGA Tour, one on the Ladies European Tour (LET).

Major winner **Morgan Pressel**, one of the brightest talents on the LPGA Tour, became the youngest-ever winner of a major title in LPGA history last year when she won the Kraft Nabisco Championship aged just 19. Pressel is currently ranked No. 13 in the Rolex World Rankings.

Swedish star **Maria Hjorth** is a three-time winner on the LPGA Tour, where she spends the majority of her time. Her highest ranking on that Tour came last year when she placed 11<sup>th</sup> at season’s end with just under one million dollars in earnings after seven Top 10’s and one victory, in the Navistar LPGA Classic.





At present Hjorth is ranked No. 16 in the world and has also claimed back-to-back English Open titles on the Ladies European Tour in addition to three appearances in The Solheim Cup.

England's **Henrietta Zuel** is on the fast track to becoming one of the poster girls of the LET. The 18-year-old rookie has attracted a great deal of attention for her striking looks, but it is her talent at golf and long-driving, which has ear-marked her for future success. Last year's British Girl's Champion is adamant that success at golf is what really motivates her and in an interview with the Times of London in April, made her feelings very clear: "When I dream of what I can do in the future," she says, "it is of me walking up the 18th fairway with my name on the leaderboard, not being on the cover of Hello! It has to be about the golf." Succeed at that and the magazine covers will follow.

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**Player photos being sent electronically**

