

Georgia golf represented well at PGA

By Garrett Johnston

St. Louis, MO – The 100th PGA Championship begins Thursday at Bellerive Country Club in St. Louis, Missouri.

This is the final year where this major will be last on the schedule of four majors as next year the PGA heads to May as the year's second major following The Masters.

Many eyes this week will be on Jordan Spieth as he pursues his career grand slam. Of course the question of will Tiger Woods win another major comes up as well.

But there are a few players with Georgia ties teeing it up as well.

Former Augusta State Star Patrick Reed returns to the PGA with good vibes after last year's strong finish.

"I feel good to come back to a tournament I finished second in last year," Reed said.

At that time, it was his best finish in any major by a country mile, a whopping 12 spots better than his two previous T-13s.

The PGA is the one major that Reed has made the cut in every time he's played it.

"I'm looking forward to this week," Reed said. "The course layout seems pretty self-explanatory, right in front of you, and the biggest thing for me is to continue improve and really execute my golf shots.

"If I can do that, hopefully I'll have a good chance at it come Sunday."

Players with Georgia ties also include former Tech Star Matt Kuchar, whose most recent close call in a major came at last year's Open Championship where he finished second to Jordan Spieth in heartbreaking fashion.

"Matt is such a strong player and he has a great presence that's good for this championship and other big ones like the Ryder Cup...because he can be such a calming presence and a great teammate," 3-time major winner Hale Irwin said.

"Matt's definitely one of the old guys now," Irwin chuckled, "but he's doing just fine, and I expect him to play well this week."

Also in the field is former Georgia Amateur winner Brian Harman who Irwin likes to watch because of the intangibles he brings to the table.

"You can measure distance and trajectory in this game, but you can never measure heart," Irwin said. "And Brian Harman has so much heart and determination, it's inspiring to see and I'm glad

for him that he has a chance to fight for a Ryder Cup spot this year.”

Indeed Harman ranks 16th at the moment in his pursuit of his first US pro team appearance.

He would need a strong next couple weeks to firmly get into a good position.

Georgia Bulldog Russell Henley makes his sixth start in the PGA Championship on the heels of two top 25s in 2018 majors and two top 25s in his previous three PGA Championships.

His game has gathered the attention of renowned swing instructor Michael Breed.

“Russell Henley has a lot of talent and we saw that this year in the way he started so strongly at the US Open,” Breed said.

The 29-year-old co-lead the Open at Shinnecock Hills and if not for a late bogey on the eighteenth in round 1 he would have slept on the solo lead.

The Macon native finished 25th that week on Long Island.

Former GSGA junior golfer Ollie Schniederjans makes only his second ever major start as a professional, and first start in the PGA Championship.

It’s the fourth overall major start for the 25-year-old because he played the 2015 US Open and Open Championship as an amateur.

The former All-American at Tech is coming off a fifth place finish last week at the Barracuda Championship and feels his game is rounding into form.

“I feel like I didn’t start the season the way I would have liked, but I’m starting to see progression in where everything is going, especially in my full swing,” Schniederjans told GSGA.

Should he find himself in the hunt late on Sunday, the young gun is up for the challenge.

“That’s what we play for, and that’s why I love golf,” Scheniderjans said, “to have a chance to win the biggest trophies.”

Former UGA players Kevin Kisner, Bubba Watson, and Chris Kirk are also in the field this week.

Georgia Golf Hall of Famers and Ryder Cup veterans Stewart Cink and Davis Love III are also teeing it up.

For Love, the 96 Champ, it will be his 100th major championship.

This 100th PGA kicks off round one on Thursday morning.