

Golf: Bigger and better is the plan for this year's Showcase

By [Jeremy Millsop](#) on May 1, 2019 at 12:00 p.m.



Pierz High School graduate Robert Bell watches his drive during last year's Brainerd lakes area Showcase at Cragun's Legacy Courses. Brainerd Dispatch / Steve Kohls

Calculated ambition.

That's the best way to describe the next step of the Brainerd Lakes Area Tour Showcase, which is the brainchild of Ron Sanders and now a committee of 25 members to bring the PGA's Web.com Tour to Brainerd.

Last year's inaugural showcase was a success on many fronts. From player feedback, to tournament conditions and the fluidity of the event, praise was high. But to catch the PGA's attention, Sanders knows his Showcase needs to be bigger and better.

"Financially, we need to build this to \$100,000 to \$500,000-\$600,000 to a million in 2020," Sanders said. "We're trying to be positioned for 2020 to be an official tour event. We think we have about a 50/50 chance. It's all about community support and it's all about money. At the end of the day, the PGA Tour doesn't want to come some place where they don't see financial

viability. They don't want to bring the tour to town and then have it fail. They don't want to do that and we don't want to do that either.

"We've kind of shifted our focus a little bit. We didn't change our focus, but we refocused. We've had tremendous support from the community organizations. They've all now gotten behind this and we've actually formed a little community action committee."

Sanders received an operations guide from the PGA tour that was 75 pages long. That prompted him to grow the tournament committee to oversee the different details needed for the Showcase into a tour event.

The entire premise or focus of the event is to showcase central Minnesota.

"Our whole purpose in doing this in central Minnesota and in Brainerd is for economic development," Sanders said. "A claim can be made that in the 50-mile radius of the area here, there are probably more championship golf courses than there is any place else in the country. Yet, when I live in Phoenix and people ask me where my tournament is going to be and I tell them Brainerd, they always say, 'Well, where is that?'"

"So we're trying to do two things. We're trying to enhance the community and charitable causes in the community and we're trying to put Brainerd on the map as a golf destination."

To do that he's taken key recreational assets and featuring them in the four-day event, which kicks off Monday, Aug. 19 at Cragun's Resort.

Monday's events will feature a morning and afternoon fishing tournament followed by a pairings gala complete with live entertainment.

"Last year, we brought in five fishing guides and we took people out in the morning and in the afternoon," Sanders said. "We want to do this so the pros enjoy themselves, but we want them to go back to their tours and say, 'Not only do these guys have their stuff together, but they even have a fishing tournament.'"

Sanders hopes to line up 20 guides in the morning and 20 guides in the afternoon to accommodate 40 groups. Each group will consist of a professional angler, a professional golfer and a sponsor participant."

Last year's event featured a pro-am scramble. This year the event will feature two pro-ams. A morning scramble followed by an afternoon stroke play format.

Both pro-Ams are scheduled for Tuesday, Aug. 20.

"I visited with Camp Ripley and the military is going to be involved somehow," Sander said. "I haven't totally figured it out yet. Then I'm going to meet with Brainerd International Raceway to bring the motorsport piece into it. I think we can do some cross marketing and putting together VIP packages. It just so happens the weekend before our event is the NHRA Nationals. That's all in the thinking stages, but it's these types of things that keep me up at night thinking."

On the 21-22 will be a two-day unofficial tournament featuring players from multiple tours. Sanders is hoping to bring in 100 players to compete for the \$100,000 purse.

"We've talked to a number of professionals from various tours along with some section professionals and people are excited to play for the type of purse that we're putting out there, which is \$100,000," Cragun's Legacy Courses Director of Golf Chuck Klecatsky said. "They'll

probably go out as threesomes throughout the entire day because we're hoping to have 100 players.

"We are going to put our best foot forward as far as the conditions of the greens go. We will probably have the rough a little bit longer, but we're not trying to make it unplayable because it is just one week out of our summer and we're busy before that and after that. Although the greens will probably be a little bit speedier, the rest of the course will be the same. Matt McKinnon (Cragun's course superintendent) keeps it in tournament shape every day. It won't be that different."

Bud Chapman is scheduled to return as the honorary starter. The 96-year-old is still playing golf five days a week.

"Things will look pretty much like it did last year, but it will be twice as big," Sanders said.