

FSU Pair At Augusta National Women's Amateur

By Jim Henry

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It's a busy, entertaining and historic week for the Florida State women's golf team.

Coach Amy Bond spent part of Wednesday online watching the leaderboard from the inaugural Augusta National Women's Amateur. The 54-hole tournament will hold Saturday's final round at the famed Augusta National Golf Club, home to the Masters Tournament.

Two Seminoles - junior Amanda Doherty and freshman Beatrice Wallin - are competing in the three-round tourney that started Wednesday at the private Champions Retreat Golf Club, north of Augusta in Evans, Georgia. Wallin briefly led the event at 3-under par and sits tied for sixth with a 1-under 71, three off the lead.

Across the country, FSU freshman Frida Kinhult, the current No. 1 ranked player in women's college golf, was preparing for the ANA Inspiration that starts Thursday at the Mission Hills Country Club in Rancho Mirage, California. Kinhult, named the ACC Golfer of the Month for March by the league office, was one of five amateurs to receive an invitation to play in the first major tournament of the 2019 LPGA season.

To top it off, a young but talented FSU team enters the upcoming Clemson Invitational that starts Sunday riding a two-match win streak. The Seminoles won the team championships at the Evans Derby Experience in Alabama (March 23-25) and the Darius Rucker Intercollegiate in South Carolina (March 8-10).

"It's pretty cool but it's also a tribute to them and all their hard work," said Bond, who also squeezed in a round of golf Wednesday at Southwood. "Their belief in each other is huge." Bond also added with a good-natured laugh: "It has been pretty fun with four freshmen and a junior in the lineup."

After a slow start to the season, the Seminoles have found their rhythm as they've gained experience. The Evans Derby Experience featured five of the country's top-10 teams and all 14 teams in the field were ranked in the top 45 nationally.

Kinhult, a native of Sweden, finished in first place in the individual standings at the Darius Rucker Intercollegiate and in a tie for third place at the Evans Derby Experience. She was 10 strokes under par in the two events. Kinhult turned down an invitation from the Augusta National Women's Amateur to compete in the LPGA event.

While Kinhult will miss the Clemson Invitational, Doherty and Wallin will join the team following their Augusta experience.

Women have been playing as guests at Augusta National for decades. But there has never been an official tournament for women played at the site of the Masters. Seventy-two amateur women, ages 14 to 24 and representing 25 countries, were invited to play in a 54-hole tournament.

The field will be trimmed to the top 30 players after Thursday's second round. After the entire field plays a practice round at Augusta National Friday, the final round will be played over the iconic course on Saturday and will be telecast live by NBC starting at noon.

Doherty is tied for 30th at 2-over par (74) heading into Thursday's second round.

Bond called it an honor to have two golfers in the tourney, saying it is a ground-breaking event for women's amateur golf. World Golf Hall of Famer Annika Sorenstam told the Los Angeles Times that it is "a milestone in the

game." It is expected the women will play Augusta from the members' tees at just over 6,200 yards. The yardage for the Masters is more than 1,000 yards longer.

"It's an exciting opportunity for them to play Augusta National in tournament conditions and participate in such a prestigious event," Bond said. "This is a tremendous treat for every player and it is history in the making." Bond, a former Seminole player, added, "I am jealous. I would give anything to go back and have that opportunity. It's really exciting to see where women's golf is going."

Doherty, whose 73.10 stroke average is ranked as the second lowest in school history, told Seminoles.com, "I think it (playing at Augusta National) is really cool being from Georgia. I've only been there once to watch it with my dad. It's a special place, so I'm just excited to go there and participate in this event."