



LADIES IRISH OPEN PREVIEW

THE GAME FOR THE THRONE

After a stunning victory in last year's Ladies Irish Open, Suzann Pettersen is looking for a repeat, but she'll have to fend off competition from her Solheim Cup teammates to do it. By **Aaron Diamond**

Its a mostly sunny afternoon on the east coast of Ireland in County Meath. Standing in the shadow of Killeen Castle on the 18th hole, Suzann Pettersen lines up her shot. After shooting a course record 63 the previous day, she now sits comfortably in the lead at 18 under par. In no time at all she's on the green completing an almost record-matching round of 64, taking home her second Ladies Irish Open.

Those memorable scenes from last summer epitomised the year for Norway's Pettersen, who was at the top of her game for 2011. After winning the Open at Killeen Castle, she went on to help bring the European Solheim Cup team to victory on the same course. Pettersen, as well as many of her Solheim Cup teammates, will be returning to the great course of Killeen Castle in August. Their camaraderie will be put aside for the moment as they battle

it out to be crowned queen of the castle.

Pettersen started off this year with three top ten finishes on the LPGA tour. However, she's pining for a trophy. Pettersen came close at the Wegmans LPGA Championship in June where she tied for second behind Shanshan Feng. Suzann is on course for another spectacular year; however, hot on her tails is 2010 Ladies Irish Open Champion, Sophie Gustafson.

Gustafson knows what it takes to win in Ireland. Over her career she has won six titles on Irish soil. In an interview with the Golf Channel last year, Gustafson called Ireland her 'second home'. The Sweden native is a real contender for the Open. She showed what she can do at the Solheim Cup. Gustafson won every one of her matches against the Americans - the closest contest being against Brittany Lang and Juli Inkster. Playing with Pettersen,



Sophie Gustafson



Catriona Matthew



the pair pulled out a birdie on the final hole to go 1-up, keeping the title within range.

Another European Solheim Cup teammate joining in the fight for the Open is Catriona Matthew. Matthew is no stranger to the area. Hailing from Scotland, she knows how to handle the landscape and weather that makes this land so unique. She has performed well before in the Open. Last year she placed sixth with 8 under par. Following up this effort were her win at the Aberdeen Ladies Scottish Open at Archerfield Links and an amazing triumph in the Solheim Cup.

When mentioning the Solheim Cup, one player cannot be forgotten – Laura Davies. Having played in every Solheim Cup (12 this past year), Davies is a legend through and through. She is a staple of women's golf helping bring it to where it stands today. At the ripe age of 48 she has no plans of slowing down. Davies wants to continue to add to her amazing tally of 81 tour victories with an Irish Open trophy. She returns to Killeen Castle in hopes of improving on her 11th place finish last year. Laura Davies can always be counted on to bring her best game and attitude to the battle field.

Teeing up once again against the European contingent will be Christina Kim. Back for



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another go at Killeen, the ever effervescent Kim is looking for her second European tour win. She picked up her first last October – the Sicilian Ladies Italian Open. She held her own in the Cup against Sweden's Maria Hjorth, taking it 4 and 2. Kim is a character on and off the golf course. She's well-known for energising the crowds during Cup matches and mixing it up a bit with her attire. However, Christina is serious about

the game. She's prepping her arsenal, ready for the Castle siege in August.

Last year's tournament brought record-breaking crowds, media coverage and course scores. In it's third year at Killeen Castle, the Ladies Irish Open is stacking up to break more records. Returning champ, Suzann Pettersen is looking to hold on to her title, while fellow Solheim teammate Sophie Gustafson is fighting

to reclaim it. Snapping at their heels will be Catriona Matthew, Laura Davies and the American Christina Kim. The field is shaping up nicely, and with the Solheim Cup still fresh in the memory there is sure to be some good action.

Prepare for some heated competition as these women fight for the title and the right to be crowned queen of the castle. The battle begins 3 August at Killeen Castle, County Meath.