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SPORTS



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HIGH SCHOOL GIRLS BASKETBALL



Shadow Hills' Analiah Cardona shoots a 3-pointer while guarded by Calexico's Karly Vasquez during a Dec. 3 game at Shadow Hills High School in Indio. ANDY ABEYTA/THE DESERT SUN

GOLF

Desert to host five US Open golf qualifiers, including at one new site

Larry Bohannon
Palm Springs Desert Sun
USA TODAY NETWORK

A former PGA Tour course in the desert is joining the list of five Coachella Valley courses that will host local qualifying sites for the U.S. Open this year.

New to the local qualifying rotation this year is the Palmer Private Course at PGA West in La Quinta, a former host course of The American Express PGA Tour event. The Palmer Course was the site of David Duval's famed final-round 59 in winning the 1999 American Express, and the course was the host of that event as recently as 2015.

Local qualifiers are the first step for most amateurs and professionals looking to play in golf's national championship conducted by the United States Golf Association. The five desert sites are among the 110 local qualifiers to be played in late April through mid-May in 43 states.

See **GOLF**, Page 2C



Charlie Reiter of Palm Desert hits off the 10th tee during a 2024 U.S. Open golf qualifying round at Bermuda Dunes Country Club in Bermuda Dunes. TAYA GRAY/THE DESERT SUN

DOMINATING FORCE

Shadow Hills won by an average of 51 points in league play

Shad Powers
Palm Springs Desert Sun
USA TODAY NETWORK

A 50-point win in basketball is rare. Last year's Boston Celtics, in fact, set the NBA record with three 50-point wins in one season.

Now get a load of the Shadow Hills girls' basketball team. The Knights went 10-0 in the Desert Empire League with an average win of 51 points. That's how dominant and complete this year's Shadow Hills squad is. They outscored league opponents 718-204 this year, or to move the decimal point over, they averaged 71.8 points in league games and yielded 20.4 points per game.

Offense, defense, chemistry, coaching, outside shooting, rebounding, point-guard play, post-up players. This team has it all. And here's the scary

See **SHADOW HILLS**, Page 9C

MLB: OFFSEASON WINNERS AND LOSERS

Dodgers appear ready to repeat while Cardinals look clueless



Bob Nightengale
Columnist
USA TODAY

PHOENIX – The weather is gorgeous without a cloud in the sky for the opening of the spring training, but everywhere you turn there are orange traffic cones, potholes and detours.

It has nothing to do with the partying and traffic from the wild Waste Management Open in Phoenix, rather the other 29 Major League Baseball teams trying to navigate any possible way to knock off the mighty Los Angeles Dodgers.

The Dodgers, the defending World Series champions, are threatening to strangle the hope out of all their competitors with their sexy array of stars, massive \$380 million payroll and enough talent where they could their divide their team in two, and still wind up playing against one another in the World Series.

If the Dodgers can win the World Series with only three healthy starters, Shohei Ohtani and Freddie Freeman playing injured, and forced to rely on a



Dodgers designated hitter Shohei Ohtani bats against the Mariners during a 2024 spring training game in Phoenix. MARK J. REBILAS/USA TODAY SPORTS

bullpen from the first inning to the ninth, can you imagine how powerful they'll be after spending close to a half-billion dollars in the winter?

They've now got eight starters – nine when three-time Cy Young winner and future Hall of Famer Clayton Kershaw resigns – after signing two-time Cy Young

winner Blake Snell and grabbing Roki Sasaki, perhaps the greatest young pitching talent in Japanese history. Oh, and don't forget they also signed the two best closers on the market, too, with Tanner Scott and Kirby Yates.

Little wonder when Dodgers shortstop Miguel Rojas was recently asked if

the team could break the Seattle Mariners' all-time record with 116 victories in 2001, he flatly predicted they'd win 120 games: "It's not a goal. It's an expectation."

The Dodgers are simply that loaded. Sportsbooks have the over/under on the Dodgers' win total at more than 103 and the team is the overwhelming favorite to win it all.

How would you like to reside in the NL West, where the San Diego Padres had the Dodgers on the ropes in last year's division series and then watched the Dodgers spend \$461 million this winter while the Padres did nothing more than bring back their backup catcher and sign a platoon for left field?

Or the Arizona Diamondbacks, who spent a franchise-record \$210 million on ace Corbin Burnes, only for the Dodgers rotation to improve even more with Snell, Sasaki and the return of Ohtani?

Or the San Francisco Giants, who spent a franchise-record \$182 million on shortstop Willy Adames, only for the Dodgers to snag their ace in Snell and outfielder in Michael Conforto?

See **NIGHTENGALE**, Page 10C

GOLFTHISWEEK

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PGA TOUR

Second time at Torrey Pines in a month

And just like that, we're back at Torrey Pines. This week's Genesis Invitational was moved due to the wildfires that devastated the Los Angeles area, so we'll have to wait another 365 days to enjoy Riviera Country Club, arguably one of the best golf courses on the PGA Tour.

Tiger Woods committed to play in the event put on by his TGR Foundation last week, but withdrew on Monday as he continues to process the loss of his mother.

While fans will miss the GOAT, there are plenty of superstars teeing it up at the South Course this week thanks to the Genesis' elevated status as a signature event. World No. 1 Scottie Scheffler, AT&T Pebble Beach Pro-Am winner Rory McIlroy, Collin Morikawa, Justin Thomas, Ludvig Aberg and Jordan Spieth are just some of the notable names on Thursday's tee sheet.

Sunday's champion will go home with \$4 million of the \$20 million purse and 700 FedEx Cup points.

Who to watch

Rory McIlroy: In three starts at the Farmers, McIlroy has finished T-16 (2021), T-3 (2020) and T-5 (2019). He also grabbed a share of seventh at the 2021 U.S. Open played at the South Course. He dominated at the AT&T Pebble Beach Pro-Am in his last start, and if this is going to be the Year of McIlroy, winning back-to-back events in February would be a great first step.

Taylor Pendrith: He has played some fanatic golf to begin 2025, including three starts against the game's best. He tied for 13th to start the year at The Sentry, finished T-7 at the Farmers and then grabbed a share of ninth a few weeks ago at Pebble Beach. In 2024, the big Canadian tied for ninth at the Farmers, meaning he's posted back-to-back top-10 finishes at Torrey Pines. Driving the ball well is priority No. 1 this week, and Pendrith has done that as well as anyone through four starts this season.

Will Zalatoris: It feels good to put Willy Z back on the card. Over his last four starts at the Farmers, Zalatoris has finishes of T-13 (2024), 2nd (2022) and T-7 (2021). When scoring conditions are tough, like they'll be this week, that's when Zalatoris is at his best.

— Riley Hamel

LPGA TOUR

Pace of play at Founders was better

When it comes to speed, the LPGA got off to a strong start at the LPGA Founders Cup. While the tour's new pace-of-play policy doesn't go into effect until late March, players made good time at Bradenton Country Club.

"There was not one round that we sniffed 4:45," said the uber-quick Nelly Korda. "It was very nice."

Indeed, the median time for threesomes in Rounds 1 and 2 in sunny Florida was 4 hours, 31 minutes on Thursday and 4 hours, 23 minutes on Friday.

For Sunday's final round of twosomes, the tour played in a median time of 3 hours and 48 minutes.

"I just think everybody knows that we need to play faster," said Stacy Lewis, who was on the small committee that helped shape the changes.

It helped, of course, that the weather was nice and the Donald Ross design is an easy walk from green to tee. It's also one of the tour's smaller full-field events, with 120 players, due to daylight. Last November, slow play became a hot topic once again after the tour missed its TV window at The Annika by 51 minutes on Saturday with two of the fastest players in the game — Charley Hull and Nelly Korda — in the last group.

Hull blasted the pace of 5 hours and 28 minutes, saying players should lose their cards for repeat offenses. While that didn't exactly happen, the incident did spur the tour into action. A committee was formed during the offseason and changes were put in place for 2025.

Essentially, players who are taking too much time when on the clock will soon receive strokes instead of fines, with the tour introducing a 1-shot penalty for those who are 6 to 15 seconds over the time allotted and two strokes for those who are 16 seconds or more over.

"I can speak about myself because I am not the fastest player out there," said Gaby Lopez, who thought the new policy was fair.

"I'm trying my best, and I do make an effort. I really work on timing myself out there on the golf course. The thing is we have to take more serious the warnings they are giving us so that avoids us getting on the clock."

Lewis said the feedback she received from players last week was positive.

— Beth Ann Nichols

COLLEGE/AMATEUR

Rueck shines again at Genesis

One time wasn't good enough for Cole Rueck, who on Monday won the 2025 Genesis Invitational Collegiate Showcase for the second straight year.

The junior at Boise State shot 3-under 69 at Torrey Pines' South Course to win the event in San Diego, becoming the first player to win the Collegiate Showcase twice. Similar to this week's Genesis Invitational, the Collegiate Showcase is normally held at Riviera Country Club but was moved to Torrey Pines due to the devastation from wildfires in Pacific Palisades, California. With the win, Rueck earned a spot in the PGA Tour's Barracuda Championship at Tahoe Mountain Club's Old Greenwood course from July 17-20. He birdied the par-5 18th hole to beat Washington's Finn Koelle by one shot for the title. Rueck is the son of Oregon State women's basketball coach Scott Rueck.

The Collegiate Showcase features a standout collegiate golfer paired with three amateurs representing a college/university competing in both a team and individual competition. The team's three amateurs play a best-ball round with the top three-person team winning a \$50,000 donation to the school's golf program. This was the 11th year for the Collegiate Showcase.

Newman secures spot in Open

It didn't come easy, but Bryan Newman earned his spot in the field at the 2025 Open Championship on Saturday. The 17-year-old from South Africa won the 2025 Africa Amateur Championship at Leopard Creek in his home country, punching his ticket for the final men's major championship of the year.

Newman began the day with a five-shot lead and saw that shrink through the afternoon, but he was clutch down the stretch and finished at 8-under 280 for the week to win by two shots over Zimbabwe's

"It feels really amazing. It's so special. To do it here at Leopard Creek makes it even more special," Newman said.

With the win, Newman earned spots in the field at Royal Portrush, the Amateur Championship, the Alfred Dunhill Championship, the Investec South African Open and the Waterfall City Tournament of Champions.

— Cameron Jourdan

Shadow Hills

Continued from Page 1C

part, their three best players are all sophomores.

"This group has a lot of talent and they're not even at their ceiling yet," head coach Timothy Britton said. "But probably their biggest strength is the chemistry. A lot of these girls have been together since fifth, sixth, seventh grade and a lot of that synergy is spilling out onto the court right now."

The team is led by a trio of sophomores whose playing styles complement each other perfectly.

Analeigh Cardona is the point guard. She runs the show, can score and distribute and don't leave her open from the 3-point line. She averages just over 20 points per game.

Skylah Archer is a smooth 6-foot player who gets her share of points in the paint, sure, but she's more of a slashing forward type than a back-to-the-basket center. She can beat you in a lot of different ways. She averages 14.0 points, 7.0 rebounds, 4.3 steals and 1.8 blocks per game.

Ava Hyatt, following in the footsteps of her talented sisters Carla and Victoria, is a 5-foot-8 defensive dynamo. Rebounding, hustle plays, loose balls on the floor are always hers. Her biggest contribution is routinely defending the opponent's best player.

"We're literally inseparable, like in class at lunch, like we don't leave each other's side," said Cardona of her fellow sophomore running mates specifically and the full team in general. "We always have each other's back, and that's what makes it exciting for us to play together, to be on this big stage together. The whole team is like that really. We all work hard together behind the scenes and that helps us be the team that we are. We're like sisters."

The sophomores are the anchor to the team, but they've got company. Rosalee Gutierrez, a sharp-shooting senior transfer from Xavier Prep, is the third-leading scorer on the team. Junior Alexis Chicas is another guard playing major minutes doing all the little things on the court. Freshman Julianna Reyes provides positive minutes off the bench.

As referenced, the 23-5 Knights have not been challenged much in league



Shadow Hills' Ava Hyatt shoots a basket during a Dec. 3 game at Shadow Hills High School in Indio.

ANDY ABEYTA/THE DESERT SUN

play, so they've made a concerted effort to step out of the desert and face traditional powers in higher divisions to test their mettle against the elite competition they will likely face this week when the CIF-SS playoffs start. Shadow Hills opens the Division 2AA playoffs at home against South Torrance on Thursday.

Just last week they played Redondo Union, considered among the top 20 teams in Southern California and the Knights lost by one.

"That's by design, obviously, we like

to test ourselves four or five times spread out during the year and play up so that when we do get to the playoffs there are no surprises," Britton said, adding that the rest of SoCal is starting to learn the name Shadow Hills. "I don't want to say we're getting a lot of compliments, but the remarks that we're getting are like 'You've got a nice team there.' So we're trying to keep a level-head about that, but we've been pretty competitive."

Cardona said those games against tough competition as well as last year's

playoff run into the third round gives her confidence that the team is well-prepared for the postseason.

"I feel like we learned a lot from last year's playoff, which will help us to be better for this year's playoffs," she said. "And playing these tough teams is perfect practice for what we might see at CIF. We're not going to see a team that's better than some of the teams we've already seen."

Shad Powers is a columnist for *The Desert Sun*. Reach him at shad.powers@desertsun.com.