

Lauri Merten aims to keep Open title

BY JIM TOTHI
STAFF WRITER

There is more on the mind of Lauri Merten heading into the 1994 U.S. Women's Open than your average defending champion.

One of the more colorful individuals touring on the Ladies Professional Golf Association circuit, Merten has the unenviable task of juggling marriage around a successful defense of her 1993 U.S. Open Women's Championship when the 1994 U.S. Open Championship tees off July 18-24 at Indianwood Golf & Country Club in Lake Orion.

"It's been difficult," responded Merten about the prospects of planning her June 18 wedding (to Louis Capano Jr., a real estate developer from Delaware, whom she met during a pro-am tournament event in the late 1980s), while at the same time, preparing herself mentally and physically for a title defense.

"I wanted to start this season off well, and I did that with a couple second-place finishes. But then I found out I had to plan a wedding. It's been kind of tough going back and forth."

Merten, 34, joined the LPGA in 1983 after a highly successful college career at Arizona State University. While at Arizona State, Merten won the Arizona Match Play title in 1980 and was the 1980 and 1981 Western Collegiate Athletic Association champion.

Her 12-year professional career, however, has had its share of ups and downs.

Undoubtedly the high point of her career came in 1993 when eight top-10 finishes — highlighted by the Open title won at Crooked Stick Golf Club in Carmel, Ind. — lifted her to a sixth-place finish on the money list. Included in her efforts was a runner-up showing at the Mazda LPGA Championship, a tie for third place at the

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McDonald's Championship, a tie for fourth at the SAFECO Classic and fifth-place ties at the Las Vegas LPGA and Kyocera Inamori Classic.

"It ended a nine-year slump," said Merten of her 1993 achievements. "My first couple of years on tour, I was this feisty little character who won. But then I quickly fell into this slump, lost some confidence and never could get out of it. I thought about giving it up."

Merten credits Capano as the one person who helped her get back on the right track.

"He was there at the right time of my life," Merten said. "He brought me out of my shell. You could say he nurtured the other side of me, and that's the side I play the best."

Merten, who gained interest in the sport at age 14 while caddying for her father, George Merten, in Phoenix, has indicated the 6,244-yard, par 71 layout on the "Old Course" at Indianwood is foreign to her.

"From what I've heard, it's a great golf course with a lot of heather out there," Merten said. "Everybody says I

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DAN DEAN/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Defending champ:
Newlywed Laurie Merten aims to defend her U.S. Women's Open title at Indianwood Golf & Country Club.

Course no stranger to pros

BY JIM TOTHI
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They must be doing something right at Indianwood Golf & Country Club.

For the second time in five years, the Ladies Professional Golf Association has selected the par 71, 6,244-yard "Old Course" at Indianwood Golf & Country Club in Lake Orion as the site for the 49th U.S. Women's Open Championship. No other club has hosted two Women's Open championships in such short a time.

The field of 150 of the world's top players will take part in the \$850,000 event, which tees off Thursday, July 21, and concludes Sunday, July 24.

Playing host to a major event is nothing new to Indianwood. In 1969, Betty King carded a six-under-par 278 to battle past Nancy Lopez for the first of what would be two straight Open titles. The club also played host to the Michigan PGA Championship in 1948 and 1949. Horton Smith and Ed Furgol claimed the respective titles on the Wilfred Field designed course.

In the 1930 Western Open at Indianwood, Gene Sarazen emerged victorious.

Besides Indianwood, the only other Michigan site for a Women's Open was Forest Lake Country Club in Bloomfield Hills. Forest Lake hosted the 1958 Women's Open, won by Mickey Wright. The victory would be the first of four Women's Open titles for Wright.

Defending U.S. Women's Open champion Lauri Merten attributes the continuous boom in women's golf to increases in exposure as well as women becoming a part of the business world.

"You have more women conducting more business on the golf course," said Merten, who won by one stroke over Donna Andrews and Helen Alfredsson in the 1993 U.S. Women's Open at Crooked Stick Golf Club in Carmel, Ind.

"More women are taking more clients out on the golf course to conduct business in a relaxed atmosphere.

"Also, the women's game has received a great deal more exposure in recent years, and people see this and want to become a part of it," Merten added.

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