

Stars pull out of Wellington golf event

By KENT GRAY

WORLD women's golf No 1 Karrie Webb is no longer coming to Wellington.

A sponsorship deal gone sour in Australia has robbed February's inaugural New Zealand Women's Classic of the Australian sensation and United States stars Juli Inkster and Meg Mallon.

All three had originally intended playing the Australian Women's Masters the week after the February 22-25 Classic. But the withdrawal of a sponsor and the subsequent cut in prizemoney has seen the Australian tournament lose its United States LPGA status.



Webb

Classic spokeswoman Gail Allport confirmed the trio would not come to Wellington now that the Australian Masters no longer counted as an official US LPGA order of merit event.

Former US Open champions Lotta Neumann and Jane Geddes had also been key signings for the Classic but are now unlikely starters.

"It's disappointing but understandable," Allport said.

"They're saying if it's not part of their [US LPGA] tour then there is no reason to come Down Under. They might as well take a holiday.

"I'm not too sure at all who [else] we've lost. The door is still open and maybe some of them will come. We won't know until the entries come in."

Allport has still promised a "great" field for the event, which is co-sanctioned by the Ladies European Tour and Australian Ladies Professional Golf. With a purse of \$650,000, it remains New Zealand's richest golf tournament (the NZ Open men's tournament at the Grange in January is worth \$500,000) and will still boast the highest-quality field, men's or women's, ever assembled in this country.

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Four years jail for golf promoter

The man who promoted the failed New Zealand Women's Golf Classic was jailed for four years today on \$1 million fraud charges.

Wellington District Court judge Michael Green jailed Frank Burgess, 46, an administrator of Hataitai who had pleaded guilty to two charges of using documents with intent to defraud and one of forging a document. The Serious Fraud Office began investigating Burgess in January 2001.

Judge Green said Burgess, who had been the administrator for Sports Services Ltd, breached the trust of the national sporting organisations the company had been the umbrella organisation for.

He said those people might like to know that Burgess had started off as a dishonest young man, having convictions from age 16 for false pretences, burglary, uttering cheques, forgery and credit by fraud. His last conviction, at age 25, in 1981 was for theft as a servant.

He said there was some hope Burgess might have outgrown his dishonesty but years later he was back "bigger and brighter and for more money".

Burgess had used the rent paid by the sporting organisations for himself rather than pay it to the landlord of the building, the Wellington City Council. It was noticed only once the rent was significantly in arrears. The total lost was \$99,221.17 - Burgess repaid \$37,976.43.

He also made applications to charitable trusts which distribute the funds of gaming machines in pubs. He made 188 false applications of behalf of the Marist Amateur Football Club, Sports Services Ltd and the New Zealand Women's Golf Classic for funds. This amounted to funds of \$976,990.



JAILED - Frank Burgess.

Judge Green said he forged a letter from Pat O'Rourke chairman of New Zealand Tennis and signed the name of Bronwyn Little on application forms.

The judge said there were 310 separate offences and Burgess was systematically stealing.

He said there were sporting organisations who would have got money except for Burgess' theft.

Defence counsel Bruce Davidson said Burgess had been hounded by the media and felt that had been punitive.

He said Burgess had always regarded the Women's Golf Classic as a legitimate venture and wanted to apologise to all involved.

Mr Davidson said Burgess accepted he was going to jail and it was only a question of for how long. Burgess had co-operated with the Serious Fraud Office and frankly acknowledged his offending.

Sportswoman of the year

Valerie Adams (athletics), Luisa Aviaki (league), Lynette Brooky (golf), Temepara Clark (netball), Fiona Docherty (duathlon), Francesca Jackson (ice speed skating), Barbara Kendall (board sailing), Hannah McLean (swimming), Melissa Moon (mountain running), Lucinda Mosey (windsurfing), Carol Owens (squash), Sarah Ulmer (cycling), Irene van Dyk (netball).

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Britain's former world No 1 Laura Davies is a confirmed starter, along with her playing partner at the Women's World Cup of Golf in Malaysia last week, Trish Johnson. New Zealand's team of Marnie McGuire and

Lynette Brooky finished 11th in Malaysia and they will head the strong Kiwi presence in the field.

Reigning British Open champion Sofie Gustafson and Swedish compatriot Helen Alfredsson will also play and are to be accompanied by Europe's triumphant Solheim Cup captain Dale Reid.

"The Australian Masters is now co-sanctioned by the European tour so we'll get some very good European players down here. They all want to get on the LET order of merit [money list] early to qualify for the Evian Masters in France which carries a £1 million purse," Allport said.