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Driving for bucks, a car too: Golfers display power, accuracy at Laughlin Ranch's course

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BULLHEAD CITY - Laughlin Ranch Golf Club is hosting its second annual Pinnacle Exceptional Driver Championship, and the competition started Thursday and it will conclude when the finals start 6:30 p.m. Saturday.

Saturday's championship will be taped by ESPN for its 2 p.m. Nov. 24 broadcast. The event will also be televised several times on ESPN to more than 40 countries throughout the world during the year.

The event features a handful of locals. Tri-state golfers Tyler Christensen, Greg Abdulian, Brad Arnn and Dennis Pukpayat are among the 128 who qualified.

Pat Laughlin, general manager of Laughlin Ranch Golf Club, said the local spectators can chose which Tri-state golfer to root for.

"There is a large golfing community here, and we are looking forward to sending one of our own to the big show, said Mr. Laughlin, prior to this year's Pro Am."

Laughlin said the competitors drive five balls toward the grid, and points are accumulated based on distance and accuracy.

The golfer who comes in first place wins \$50,000 and a 2007 Honda sports car.

The field narrowed to 64 after Thursday's competition, and it will be reduced to eight before Saturday night's final.

Laughlin said the finalists will come from underneath the dark, clubhouse tunnel. "It's dark just like a boxing arena, and the tee box is lit up," he said. "Roger Twibel from ESPN is there, and the cameras, and the lights are on, and these kids come up there, and they walk up there.

"Then they've got to hit the driver, and I mean you talk about something that's terrifying.

"You know you're on ESPN, you know you don't want to fall or do bad because millions of people are watching you."

Laughlin said the event is something to see.

"Long Drivers puts on the production, and they make us look very, very good," he said. "They are absolute professionals and everything is done first class.

"They set up last year. We were worried because we didn't know what to do and how to do it.

"They came in and took over and made us just look super."

Laughlin said he organized meetings to come up with ways to upgrade the event, which included improved lighting at the venue and on the grid. He said there were also touch-ups here and there to make the Pro Am better.



JEFF MANGUM/The Daily News DRIVEN': Bryan Mangas of Richmond, Va., hits some practice balls at the Cobra Launch Monitor booth Thursday afternoon. Mangas is in town to compete in the Pinnacle Exceptional Driver Championship at the Laughlin Ranch Golf Club this weekend.