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Amateur Players to Watch at the 2016 LAAC

With just a few days away from the start of the second edition of the Latin America Amateur Championship (LAAC), this will take place January 14-17 at Casa de Campo's Teeth of the Dog course in the Dominican Republic. Expectations are growing for both championship competitors and area spectators.

Golf is unpredictable and often lower-ranked players can spring surprises in championships. A case in point is Chilean Matias Dominguez, winner of the 2015 LAAC in Buenos Aires, Argentina, who started the event ranked 412th on the World Amateur Golf Ranking™ (WAGR™) and went on to win by one shot from Argentina's Alejandro Tosti, ranked 64th. Needless to say, both players are contenders to win the championship at Teeth of the Dog, but they will face a strong group of players who have trained hard to arrive at Casa de Campo in top shape.

Trinidad & Tobago is represented by, Talin Rajendranath, Matthew Marquez, Sachin Kumar and Liam Bryden who are all capable of springing a surprise on the better known competitors.

Of the field's 108 players, the highest-ranked player in the WAGR is Uruguay's Juan Alvarez (No. 34), who will undoubtedly be one of the favorites, not only because of his top-20 finish at the 2015 LAAC but also because he had an outstanding performance at the VISA Open de Argentina (PGA Tour Latinoamérica), where he was runner-up and achieved low amateur honors. Next are Chileans Claudio Correa and Joaquin Niemann. Correa, a student at the University of South Florida, won a NCAA tournament in 2015, while Niemann won the 2014 Junior Orange Bowl, an elite event in American junior golf. Then there is Brazil's André Tourinho, who tied for third at the 2015 LAAC, Venezuela's Jorge Garcia and Colombian Santiago Gómez. Other players to keep an eye on are Mexicans Roberto Ruiz and Álvaro Ortiz, Argentina's Matias Simaski and Gaston Bertinotti, and Costa Rica's José Méndez. Additionally, one cannot dismiss the

local players who are used to the playing conditions at Teeth of the Dog: Dominicans Juan José Guerra, Chad McCann and José Hernández.

All of them will be looking forward to becoming the next heroes of the region. There's no doubt that the prizes extended by The Masters Tournament, The R&A and the USGA are a huge incentive to the players. The championship grants the winner the opportunity to play in the 2016 Masters Tournament. In addition, the winner and the runner(s)-up will be exempt into The Open Qualifying Series for the 145th Open at Royal Troon and into sectional qualifying for the U.S. Open Championship at Oakmont Country Club next year. Finally, the champion will receive full exemptions into The Amateur Championship in 2016, the 2016 U.S. Amateur Championship and any other USGA amateur championship for which he is eligible.