

Hto Daily: A Sizzling Start, On And Off Course

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What a way to get out of the gate. At 6:20 this morning, the Ho Tram Open commenced with Bluffs head pro Patrick Kelly striking the first tee shot — a dart right down the middle. A short while later, a crowd that would soon swell gathered on the 10th tee to watch tournament favorite Sergio Garcia begin his quest for victory by splitting the fairway as well.

Impressive starts, both. And a sign of what was to come: sizzling displays of golf on a day when the air got progressively warmer too.

The heat certainly didn't discourage spectators though. Golf and entertainment enthusiasts came out in droves to watch the action and experience the Championship Village, where a BMW X6, giant big-screen TV and miniature golf course served as the main attractions.

The media center was abuzz most of the day, especially when Brian McFadden popped in for a quick interview session. The former Westlife frontman talked about winning the Long Drive Contest in yesterday's pro-am, his passion for golf and, of course, the concert

he'll be performing at The Grand Ho Tram hotel on Saturday night — an event that's expected to draw more than 2,000 people.

"It's going to be bigger than I originally thought, but I'm all for it," the amiable Irishman said. "The welcome I received on Tuesday, and the hospitality I've experienced since, has been out of this world. I'm looking forward to taking the stage."

As the afternoon wave of players tried to maintain their focus in increasingly breezy conditions, VIPs could be found mingling within the friendly confines of the hospitality pavilions surrounding the 18th green. There, they were treated to an array of appetizers, ice-cold beverages and a barrage of birdies as the world's best players took advantage of the wind direction.

"How's this spot?" one giddy spectator was overheard saying (rhetorically, of course). "I could get used to this!"

The excitement continues tomorrow as Kelly, Garcia and 129 other attempt to reel in Korea's Charlie Wi, who set a course record in the opening round with a blistering 62 (9-under-par). He goes off at 11:20 a.m. alongside America's Brett Munson and Switzerland's Raphael de Sousa, both of whom are within striking distance.