

Moody's sees brighter outlook for U.S. gaming

By J.D. Morris, Las Vegas Sun

Moody's Investors Service is feeling much better about the financial future of gaming than it did around the same time last year.

The credit rating agency said today that it has upgraded the outlook for the U.S. gaming industry to stable from negative. Moody's assigned the industry a negative outlook last June partly because of declining gaming revenue, but a new agency report now anticipates that revenue will rise for the next 12 to 18 months.

Moody's Senior Vice President Keith Foley said in a statement that the agency thinks gaming revenue will increase by as much as 2 percent each month compared to the year before. He said that should result in increases of 3 percent to 4 percent in the industry's earnings before interest, taxes, depreciation and amortization.

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Timberlake brings out the crowds to Edgewood; Wagner, Mulder top ACC leaderboard



Justin Timberlake has a phalanx of Douglas County deputies at the golf tournament. Photo Copyright 2015 Carolyn E. Wright

By Kathryn Reed

STATELINE – The biggest name in this year's ACC celebrity golf tournament can't be found in the top 10 after Day 1, but the fans don't care. Justin Timberlake is No. 1 with the crowd – at least based on gallery size – no matter his score.

The singer-actor is tied at 20 with Ray Allen and Joe Carter. As he approached each hole the throng of autograph seekers and admirers swelled compared to the other groups. Plus, he had five Douglas County sheriff's deputies walking the course with him to ensure fans didn't get out of hand.

This is the first year Timberlake has played in the 26-year-old event at Edgewood Tahoe. He didn't disappoint on Friday.



Actor Jack Wagner is seeking his third ACC title. Photo Copyright 2015 Carolyn E. Wright

“He’s really social and he’s one of the guys. He’s very easy to hang out with. And it’s really a big, big plus for this tournament, I think,” actor Jack Wagner said at a press conference.

While there are other entertainers in the field of 91 athletes, it is dominated by athletes. This duo met at the tournament this week. Both are serious golfers.

Timberlake was showing he could entertain and play golf at the same time. He and Alfonso Ribeiro (“The Fresh Prince of Bel Air” and 2014 “Dancing with the Stars” champion) appeared to see who could swivel their hips the best. It brought out

rousing whoops and hollers from the crowd.



Kevin Nealon and Charles Barkley are comedic with their play and fan interaction. Photo Copyright 2015 Carolyn E. Wright

For Charles Barkley – ex-NBA star – hip swiveling is about the last thing he can do. While Sir Charles has always been challenged on the golf course, it's even more apparent this year because he is awaiting a hip replacement. Still, he isn't in last place. That distinction goes to former model Kim Alexis.



Former soccer star Brandi Chastain has not lost her touch. Photo Copyright 2015 Carolyn E. Wright

Alexis and Brandi Chastain played together July 17. Chastain showed off some footwork that might have made her eligible for this year's U.S. women's World Cup championship team. On hole 17 she was bouncing a mini soccer ball like it was a Hacky Sack, then sent a spiraling football into the crowded beach and sunk a basketball with her feet into a mini soccer goal.



Willie Robertson gives the broadcast crew an earful.
 Photo Copyright 2015 Carolyn E. Wright

Chastain is in 80th place, tied with Larry the Cable Guy. He played with Willie Robertson of “Duck Dynasty” fame, who in his lime green headband with feather still looked like he had walked off the set of the TV show. At one point he sprawled out on the ground and began talking into one of the microphones on the grass.

Some familiar and not so recognizable names are atop the leaderboard after the first day of the three-day tournament. (A modified Stableford scoring system is used.) Past champions Wagner, Billy Joe Tolliver and Rick Rhoden are in the hunt. Wagner is tied with Mark Mulder for first place. Wagner won the event in 2006 and 2011.

Pos	Player	July 17			
T1	MULDER, Mark	26			
T1	WAGNER, Jack	26			

Pos	Player	July 17			
3	TOLLIVER, Billy Joe	25			
4	SCOBEE, Josh	24			
T5	GAGNE, Eric	22			
T5	FISH, Mardy	22			
T7	SMOLTZ, John	21			
T7	GORMAN, Rodney	21			
T7	PFEIFER, Chad	21			
T7	DEL NEGRO, Vinny	21			
T7	SHARPE, Sterling	21			
T7	RHODEN, Rick	21			



Mark Mulder has been prepping for this tournament with the goal of winning it.
Photo Copyright 2015 Carolyn E. Wright

Mulder, a former pitcher with the A's and Cardinals, got his groove on when he moved to the front nine after starting the round on hole 10. By the end of the day he proved pitchers transition well to a sport with a smaller white ball.

"I'm looking to win it. And I'm going to be disappointed if I don't because I know my game's good enough and I've worked on it enough to try to be prepared to do that," Mulder said at a press conference.

Studies: World's water basins being depleted

By Rosanna Xia, Los Angeles Times

More than a third of the largest groundwater basins in the world are being depleted faster than they are getting replenished, and there are little to no accurate data showing just how much water is left in them, according to two studies published Tuesday.

Researchers used data from NASA satellites to examine the 37 largest aquifers in the world. They found that eight were being depleted with almost no natural replenishment and five, including the Central Valley, were “extremely” or “highly stressed,” with not enough water flowing back to offset how much is sucked up. Saudi Arabia, India, Pakistan and northern Africa have the most stressed aquifers, according to the research.

The studies spotlight increasing sustainability concerns as regions like California rely more and more on groundwater during times of severe drought.

Read the whole story

Snowmaking may help save

disappearing glacier

By Julie Dugdale, Outside

The disheartening rate of glacial retreat in the face of climate change isn't a new concern for scientists and outdoor enthusiasts. But ski behemoth Whistler Blackcomb has a particularly vested interest.

As one of two North American resorts to offer summer skiing and snowboarding on a glacier, the revered ski area—specifically, Blackcomb Mountain's Horstman Glacier—has become a summer training destination for ski and snowboard teams from around the globe.

The problem: A couple of sparse snowfall years combined with rising summer temperatures have caused the glacier's mass balance to dwindle, which puts the resort's summer season—and the revenue it generates—at risk.

The proposed solution: snowmaking. The idea is to stabilize the glacier's movement enough to support resort operations and, ideally, to reverse the recession—eventually.

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**Officials: Forest health,
fire, water all related**



Forest thinning projects help create a healthy watershed. Photo/LTN file

By Kathryn Reed

What happens in the Sierra, does not stay in the Sierra. That is the message those tasked with managing land, water and fire suppression in the mountains are trying to convey to people downstream and to politicians in Sacramento and Washington, D.C.

The goal is to change how forests are managed. In part this has to do with the U.S. Forest Service now spending more money on fire suppression than on fire prevention. Prevention – aside from education – comes in the form of thinning forests so they are healthy and less prone to a catastrophic fire. Healthy forests also allow for more water to enter the aquifers because there are fewer trees absorbing the moisture. With them spaced out more, it means more snow on the ground.

All of this is important to the Lake Tahoe Basin because the Forest Service owns about 80 percent of the land. And most of the 25 million acres in the Sierra Nevada are controlled by the USFS, with National Parks, Bureau of Land Management and private owners making up much of the rest of the ownership puzzle.



The 2007 Angora Fire helped spur collaboration in the basin. Photo/Lake Valley Fire

Richard Solbrig, South Tahoe PUD general manager, told *Lake Tahoe News* that a comprehensive approach to the ecology of Lake Tahoe is critical.

Fires are burning hotter because of the massive amount of fuel in the forests. The mortality rate from the drought will compound that scenario. It used to be the burn rate on average was 20 percent. The Rim Fire by Yosemite was 40 percent and the King Fire by Pollock Pines was 50 percent.

“There’s a lot of landscape with too many trees. It’s not healthy. It’s not the way it was historically,” Jim Branham, executive officer of Sierra Nevada Alliance, said.

He was one of several speakers July 15 at a forum hosted by South Tahoe Public Utility District about the threat of high intensity wildfire at Lake Tahoe. The nearly 40 people in attendance represented the USFS, CalFire, most fire districts in the basin, Association of California Water Agencies, Tahoe Regional Planning Agency, League to Save Lake Tahoe, Tahoe Fund, Tahoe Resource Conservation District, staff from the offices of Sens. Barbara Boxer and Dean Heller and Reps. Mark Amodei and Tom McClintock, and others.



Jerry Brown on April 1 stands in a field by Sierra-at-Tahoe that should be covered in snow.
Photo/Susan Wood

“It took the drought for the governor to stand in a meadow and see the significance of the Sierra,” Branham pointed out. This was in reference to when Jerry Brown attended the last snow survey at Echo Summit this spring.

With the majority of California’s potable water coming from the Sierra, the value and importance of this swath of land cannot be understated. The lack of snowfall is like turning the spigot off for the rest of the state.

The Association of California Water Agencies, which is comprised of 430 public water agencies in the state, this spring came out with a framework to improve the resiliency and management of headwaters like the Sierra.

One of the recommendations was: “Stakeholders should invest and participate in landscape-level research that explores water and forestry relationships, including ecological forest thinning which can have multiple benefits for water supply reliability, water quality and ecosystems.”

The Sierra Nevada Conservancy this spring launched the Sierra Nevada Watershed Environmental Improvement Program. The key outcomes are to increase funding for the watersheds and identify policies that impede the process of creating a healthy watershed.

It was acknowledged that ultimately laws might need to be changed at the state or federal levels to get a better functioning system.

Money – or the lack of it – was a reoccurring theme among the speakers. While there is some disagreement on what should be done, let alone the priorities, the bigger issue is there isn't enough money for projects no matter what decisions are made.

The short-term goals of Wednesday's gathering were to get people talking and to build on collaboration that already exists.

Dennis Cocking, who is working as a consultant to South Tahoe PUD, spoke about how the water agencies in the basin have been collaborating for a number of years, especially after the 2007 Angora Fire. This has allowed the group to be able to get funding for projects. The agencies are also working so water can flow from one district to the others. It happened with Gondola Fire in 2002 and Angora.

The other immediate point was for political operatives to hear the message. This is critical with the latest version of the Lake Tahoe Restoration Act having been introduced this month. That \$415 million piece of legislation includes \$150 million for fire prevention.

California adopts strict lawn-reduction rules

By Phillip Reese, Dale Kasler and Ryan Sabalow, Sacramento Bee

The era of lush, green lawns adorning new California homes moved a dramatic step closer to ending Wednesday.

Drought-tolerant plants must dominate lawns around new homes and businesses across California under new regulations unanimously approved by the California Water Commission.

The new rules effectively limit the amount of turf grass around newly constructed homes to 25 percent of landscaped area. Under prior rules, turf grass could take up about one-third of landscaped area.

The restrictions will apply to all homes with more than 500 square feet of landscaped area – essentially, all new, single-family, detached homes in the state. Old rules only applied to new homes with more than 2,500 square feet of landscaped area. California homes, on average, feature about 2,500 square feet of landscaping, state officials said.

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Planned

Parenthood

controversy Placerville

reaches

By Sammy Caiola, Sacramento Bee

StemExpress, a Placerville biotech firm specializing in stem cell procurement for scientific research, is under fire after being mentioned in a viral YouTube video created by abortion opponents.

The video, posted Tuesday, shows footage of Dr. Deborah Nucatola, senior director of medical services at the Planned Parenthood Federation of America, discussing over lunch the harvesting of fetal organs for research. She's talking with two actors from the anti-abortion group Center for Medical Progress, who were posing as representatives from a biotech firm.

The eight-minute undercover clip, which has garnered over 1 million views and inspired the popular anti-abortion Twitter hashtag "#PPSellsBabyParts," is edited in a way to suggest Planned Parenthood and its affiliates profit from fetal tissue and organs procured during abortions, which is against federal law.

Read the whole story

Celebs practice before teeing off in ACC



Mark Mulder watches son Dax, as his other children Xander, 7, and Tatym, 5, look on. Photo/Carolyn E. Wright/Copyright

By Kathryn Reed

STATELINE – The next generation of celebrity golfers was on the links at Edgewood Tahoe on Wednesday.

Mark Mulder – a two-time All Star pitcher with the Oakland A's and current ESPN analyst, made July 15's practice round a family event. After the adults took their turn on the 17th hole it was time for 7-year-old Xander to tee off. Following him was little brother Dax. The 3-year-old took two tries with his pint-sized club before he whacked it straight down the fairway.



Former Kansas City Chief's head coach Herm Edwards, left, gets advice from Edgewood Tahoe pro Ron Blum. Photo/Carolyn E. Wright/Copyright

The annual American Century Championship is a mix of frivolity and serious golf. Some of the 92 celebrities are there to have fun, while others are competing for a chunk of the \$600,000 purse. The three-day tournament starts Friday.

Musician and sometimes actor Justin Timberlake, who is playing in the event for the first time, drew a sizeable crowd Wednesday that was several people deep. At the driving range he was getting advice from Jack Wagoner.



Tennis player James Blake is back playing the sport that made him famous, at least in exhibition matches. Photo/Carolyn E. Wright/Copyright

Wagoner, a two-winner of this event, was looking sharp.

The sports book at Harrah's-Harveys has four-time champion Billy Joe Tolliver at 7:2 odds to beat defending champ Mark Rypien. Rypien is at 5:1 to win it, Timerlake is 40:1. In the cellar is Charles Barkley with 5,000:1 odds to win the 26th annual tournament. Barkley is a crowd favorite. He likes this event so much he postponed hip surgery so he could play here.



Ex-49er QB Steve Young signs autographs; including the jersey of Mason Saso, right. Photo/Carolyn E. Wright/Copyright

The fans, well, they appreciate the antics – especially on hole 17 – as well as the competition. Mostly they come to see Hollywood stars and athletes in person, with many seeking autographs and photos.

Twelve-year-old Mason Saso of Colusa was wearing a Steve Young jersey that looked more like a night shirt. And while he is clearly too young to have seen the former 49er quarterback in action, most of his family are fans of the team so that's how he got hooked.



Justin Timberlake is destined to be this year's gallery favorite. Photo/Carolyn E. Wright/Copyright

"He's a great football player," the youth said of Young. "He played for my favorite team." That alone was reason enough for him get the QB to sign the back of his jersey with big No. 8 on it.

This is the third year Sharon Cornelius of South Carolina has headed west for the tournament.

"I just love the camaraderie. Everyone is so nice," she said as she waited for players to come by.

Cornelius is on a quest over the next few days to get several

photos of her with the celebrities. She won't be alone.

State ruling: Supervisor Novasel not banned from all aspects of Meyers Area Plan

By Kathryn Reed

El Dorado County Supervisor Sue Novasel is allowed to engage her constituents in discussions about any topic. The same is not true when it comes to staff or other board members. And some items she won't be allowed to vote on.

At the urging of county counsel she asked the Fair Political Practices Commission to rule on potential conflicts of interest. The FPPC made its decision in late June. Most electeds at the local level recuse themselves from time to time on issues. This is because they are not allowed to vote on a matter that could financially benefit them.



Sue Novasel

With Novasel, her two big issues – that are known today – are the inability to vote on the Meyers Area Plan and the proposed courthouse in Placerville. The former is because she has

property in the plan area, the latter is because her husband through his company has given a loan to the property owner.

What the FPPC said is Novasel may discuss these issues with the public and media, but not with staff or other supervisors. The limit on staff-board interaction is so she is not influencing them in their work and decision making. She is allowed to receive all material that is available to the public.

“County counsel still advises me to be careful when discussing things with the public to avoid even the perception of influencing,” Novasel told *Lake Tahoe News*. “I can listen so when the plan goes through in whatever form I could help with specific projects that the community wants. I will be part of helping in any way.”

She wants to set up town hall meetings and/or coffees to hear what the residents of Meyers want.

“There are structural and design standards; what do we want for our roadways; if people want the bus station moved, I want to help. There are a lot of things in that plan,” Novasel said.

Once the plan is adopted, Novasel wants to be an integral part of moving it forward.

The supervisors will be having their annual Tahoe meeting on Aug. 31 starting at 9am at Lake Tahoe Airport. The Meyers Area Plan is anticipated to be one of the topics.

Novasel recognizes the frustrations constituents have with her not being able to vote on the Meyers plan, but it's the law. She pointed out, though, that everyone in the county is represented by five electeds – not just one. And then each vote carries the same weight.

Her inability to vote on the Meyers plan will also carry over

to the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency Governing Board. However, the county has an alternate for that board.

As for the courthouse, the 88,000-square-foot facility is slated to be built on land owned by El Dorado County adjacent to the existing county jail just off Forni Road in Placerville as well as on an adjoining 5.2 acres owned by John Briggs, father of former El Dorado County Supervisor Ron Briggs, grandfather of ex-Placerville Planning Commissioner Brian Briggs and father-in-law of Superior Court Judge Steve Bailey.

Novasel & Schwarte Investments Inc. has loaned money to the Briggs Family Trust. This is the company her husband is a part owner and principal of. The supervisor has never worked for the company, but because she financially benefits from the company there is a conflict of interest that prevents her from voting on the courthouse issue. Since her election last November, she has had to recuse herself once.

While the company is incorporated in Nevada, it has filed the paperwork to exist in California as a foreign corporation. This keeps everything legal. The main office is in Meyers, with a branch in Zephyr Cove. Kelly Krolicki, step-daughter of Dick Schwarte, is part of this company. She is married to Brian Krolicki, former lieutenant governor of Nevada. All of the vetting of this financial company has been done multiple times because of Brian Krolicki's various political offices.

Nev. students to face heavy year of testing

By Trevon Milliard, Reno Gazette-Journal

Last school year was anything but normal for Washoe County students.

From elementary to high school, every state-required standardized test was replaced with a new one designed to demand more of students, including the exit exams required to graduate in Nevada.

High school students were also forced, for the first time, to take an additional test – the ACT college-entrance exam. Students who don't participate won't graduate.

All these new tests will return this fall and affect even more of Nevada's 450,000 students. But the state has some big kinks to work out. Almost every standardized test stumbled in its 2014-15 rollout, with some exams falling flat on their faces.

For the first time, students took to the computer for the annual tests given to every Nevada student from third through eighth grade. They were supposed to be "smart" tests, adjusting the difficulty of the next question based on students' previous answers.

Read the whole story