

The Shell Houston Open's Masters plan is working.

FEBRUARY 7, 2008—Phil Mickelson, the world's second-ranked golfer, said he will play at the SHO this April 3-6 at the Redstone Golf Club Tournament Course.

Mickelson revealed his decision, which gives the SHO commitments from three of the world's top eight players, on Wednesday at the Buick Invitational in La Jolla, Calif.

He cited as a major factor the SHO's efforts to set up the Tournament Course as a tuneup for Augusta National Golf Club. The SHO runs the week before the Masters, which features firm-and-fast playing conditions and little rough. Tournament director Steve Timms unveiled the Augusta approach last year, when the SHO moved from its old late-April date to the week before the Masters.

"The tournament director (Timms) came up to me last year and said, 'You know, I just wanted you to know we're really making an effort to have the golf course match up to the Masters,'" said Mickelson, whose 32 victories include three major championships. "We're going to have the rough the same height, green speed the same, practice facilities to accommodate.' And I thought that was really cool, and it provides a great spot to get ready for The Masters."

The combination of setup and date already had produced early commitments from Ernie Els (No. 5), defending champion Adam Scott (No. 8) and two-time SHO winner Stuart Appleby (No. 37).

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