

## Back in the Olympics, but Exotic for Brazil

By THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

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SÃO PAULO, Brazil (AP) — The golf world is starting to pay attention to the land of soccer.

With Rio de Janeiro preparing for golf's return to the Olympics after an absence of more than 100 years, some of the sport's top names are starting to show an interest in Brazil, especially in the opportunity to design the course that will host the historic tournament at the [2016 Games](#).

[Robert Trent Jones Jr.](#) visited Brazil last week and secured a spot in the race to build the course, joining a field that includes [Jack Nicklaus](#), [Arnold Palmer](#), [Gary Player](#), [Nick Faldo](#), Seve Ballesteros and [Greg Norman](#).

"I've been a longtime Olympic activist and obviously was very happy golf rejoined the games," Jones said. "We want to be part of it; it would be a wonderful thing."

Golf made its debut at the second modern Olympics in Paris in 1900 but was dropped after the 1904 Games in St. Louis. [The sport was returned to the roster by an International Olympic Committee vote in 2009](#) that also guaranteed it a place in 2020, but its participation beyond that will largely depend on an [I.O.C.](#) evaluation after the Rio Games.

"The game of golf is in Brazilian hands," said Jones, who formed a partnership Wednesday with the retired Brazilian golfing great Mario González to vie for the Olympic course design work.

Norman will team up with Lorena Ochoa, and Nicklaus announced last year that he would join forces with [Annika Sorenstam](#).

"We have dozens of designers interested in this course," said Paulo Pacheco, the Brazilian golf confederation's vice president for marketing. "The international reaction has been great. I think it's even possible that one of these designers will offer their work free of charge just because of the importance of having their name associated with this historic tournament."

Brazilian Olympic organizers and local officials are in the final process of choosing the course's location, and the decision may be announced before I.O.C. officials arrive in Rio for a project review in late April.

Though it is possible an established private course will be renovated, more likely a new course will be built in the [Barra da Tijuca](#) neighborhood of Rio, where most sports will be played during the Olympics, Pacheco said.

"Once you make the decision on the land, it takes about two years to build the course, then another year of preparations," Jones said. "If construction starts by January 2012, the course would be ready by 2015."

Officials want a public course to help raise the sport's profile locally and develop it after the Olympics. Organizers also want to build training academies and schools to develop golf professionals. Brazil has only one player in the PGA Tour, [Alexandre Rocha](#).

"A public course will make all the difference to the growth of the sport in Brazil," Pacheco said. "It would help attract more people to the sport and would also become an important tool for social inclusion."

Among the private courses that could be improved, one option would be Itanhanga Golf Club, which hosted a European Tour event in 2000 and will be home to an [L.P.G.A.](#) tournament in May. Gavea Golf and Country Club would also be available, although many changes would be needed to accommodate a high-profile event like the Olympics.

Brazilian golf officials want to bring other high-profile events to the country ahead of the Olympics, and the Presidents Cup may be played in Rio in 2015.

Local governments will handle the cost of building or revamping a course for the Olympic competition, which will consist of a 72-hole stroke-play event for men and women, with 60 players in each field. Golf officials have promised the I.O.C. that they will not stage any major championships on the dates of the Olympic tournament.

Though golf has grown in popularity in Brazil, it remains an elite sport in a soccer-mad nation with fewer than 30,000 golfers and a few more than 100 courses. The only true public course is the nine-hole [Japeri Golfe Clube](#) in Rio de Janeiro.

There is hope the Olympics will change that, helping attract more courses and making the sport more popular, changing the perspective many Brazilians have about the sport.

"The Olympics will show that golf is not a pastime for the older generations," Jones said. "It's a sport for the young people of the world."