



HIGH DEFINITION GOLF

'Just like being out there'

By Palm Beach Post Staff Report

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When Ernie Els reached the 15th tee box early in his round Thursday morning, he had been battling 40-degree temperatures and a chilly wind en route to an opening-round 67.

"We are in South Florida, aren't we?" he said later.

Inside the clubhouse, Honda Classic spectators took on the same hole — at room temperature and without wind.

PGA National recently installed a High Definition Golf simulator, and opened it to the public during this week's tournament.

For \$10, fans get a sleeve of Nike Power Distance balls and three tee shots at a virtual No. 15, which is a par-3, 179-yarder on The Champion course. Anyone who placed their shot within 15 feet of the pin earned a dozen balls, and proceeds benefit the Nicklaus Children's Healthcare Foundation.

"It's got everything but the wind — other than that, it's just like being out there," said Tom Gillis, a golf pro who lives in West Palm Beach. "Except it's warmer, which is nice."

Earlier in the week, Honda Classic competitors Johnson Wagner and Lucas Glover stopped by to check out the machine before they began the tournament.

Wagner and Glover challenged each other to a longest-drive contest, but the simulation is more than just a video game.

"It tells you everything about your club face, your path and how fast you're swinging," Gillis said. "It gives you more information than anyone could. It can actually teach you."

The simulator also uses a variety of devices to read the angle of attack and the speed with which the ball spins after impact.

Pete Byman, a Boca Raton-based Nike representative who manned the station in the afternoon, said fans were amazed by the details.

"I think they're surprised how realistic it is," Byman said.

"When you hit a shot to the right, you can feel it and it's literally the shot you're seeing on the simulator. The shot is very similar to the real shot on a golf course."

The simulator is relatively hidden near the pro shop.

