

Torrid Lefever wins Lanco Open

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BY JASON FULGINITI

Fires 8-under 64 for one-shot victory over Hornberger, Fieger

As he lingered around the leaderboard at Crossgates Golf Club Monday afternoon, the handshakes, high fives and “congratulations” came at Connor Lefever in waves.



Blaine T. Shahan / Staff **Craig Hornberger, who shared second place with Chris Fieger at 65, follows his fairway shot on the 18th hole at Crossgates.**

Deservedly so, considering the 24-yearold, recently-turned professional had just put together a blistering 8-under 64 to win the Lanco Lancaster Toyota Open by a shot over Craig Hornberger and Chris Fieger.

But as the well-wishers came and went, somewhere deep down, Lefever — while appreciative of what he’d accomplished — felt a sense of unfulfillment. In a weird way, maybe even a little guilt.

"To be completely honest, I didn't win a golf tournament today," Lefever said. "I just won a golf outing. I played the best today."

Call him a glutton for punishment. Or perhaps it's just the competitive nature inside of him. But in a perfect world, Lefever would have loved to put Monday's bogey-free 64 — which was his career-low tournament round and one off the Crossgates course record — on the line for at least one more day.

On the line against guys like Fieger, the reigning Lanco Player of the Year, who Monday continued to play like a teenager instead of a guy in his 50s en route to his 7-under 65.

Against Hornberger — a Division I college player at Campbell University and Lefever's next-door neighbor — who also shot 65 to finish one back in a tie for second.

Against three-time Lanco Amateur champion Jarred Texter, three-time Lanco Open champ Terry Hertzog and perennial contender John Barry, all of whom shared fourth after carding 4-under 68 — on a day when 20 percent of the field (10 of 50 players) broke par.

And against his close golf buddy and reigning Lanco Amateur champion David Denlinger, who, despite posting 1-over 73 Monday, Lefever knows is capable of going low anytime he touches a club. During a late nine holes between the two Sunday evening at Lancaster Country Club, for example, Lefever lost by eight shots when Denlinger nearly shot 29.

Much to his disappointment, though, Lefever will have none of those worries or challenges.

"I would just really rather it be two days, because I'm not sleeping on a oneshot lead and having to think about it. It doesn't put pressure on someone," said Lefever, an aspiring teaching professional who graduated from West Chester University last December. "If we played tomorrow I could go out and shoot 71 and Craig could shoot another 65. The more rounds the better.

"That's the whole part about golf and golf tournaments is pressure," he added. "There's a lot that can happen at a two-day event ... and shooting another good round tomorrow, that would prove to me a lot more than just a one-day tournament."

Not that Lefever is about to give back his newlyacquired champion's crystal, which is his first in an individual event on the Lanco circuit.

"It does feel nice to go out and put one solid round together with no bogeys," he said. "If you would have told me on the first tee today that I could take 64 or go out and play and see what happens, I would have taken 64 and run away with it."

While he was never able to run away from the field Monday, it wasn't for lack of effort.

Lefever missed just one green all day — thanks to what he called "an awful 8-iron" at the par-3 sixth — and was never remotely in danger of making a bogey, by his own account.

All day, he carved through Crossgates' 6,131-yard layout with a series of 330-yard tee shots, which he said were landing "within a five-foot box of where I wanted to land them," and, with the help of his caddie, was "seeing every putt."

Fact is, but for birdie putts that lipped out on Nos. 1, 2, 10 and 15, Lefever might have gone lower.

"Everything kind of clicked today," he said. "I'd say it was a pretty easy 64. I hit a lot of good putts."

Drained birdie putts on Nos. 3, 4, 7 and 9 left Lefever 4-under at the turn. And after getting miffed by another birdie try that lipped out at the par-5 10th, he responded by making birdie on his next three holes, leaving 7-under through 13 holes.

"When I got to 7(-under) through 13," he said, "I thought this is my tournament to lose. If I keep doing what I'm doing."

But after adding a birdie to get to 8-under at the par-3 17th, word began to spread that Hornberger was also around 6 or 7 under, forcing Lefever to rethink his strategy on the par-5 18th.

"I was planning on hitting driver on 18 because I knew the course record was 63 and I kind of wanted to tie it or maybe have an eagle putt to shoot 62," Lefever said. "But my caddie told me to hit 3-iron ... and just make par, which probably was the smarter play."

And when Lefever knocked in a winding threefooter for par on the home hole, he had enough.

Even if, for him, it wasn't enough golf to feel completely satisfied. Either way ... "A win is a win," he conceded. "I did play better than anyone else, today."



Hole of the Day: Playing in the day's first pairing, Marlin Detweiler, Terry Hertzog and Ken Phillips went 1-2-3 at the par-3 17th. After Detweiler hit a hole-in-one, Hertzog followed with a birdie, before Phillips made a nearly impossible up and down from the left side of the green. Rumor was that Phillips' par-save was nearly as sterling as Detweiler's ace.