

Sunday News – 07/26/11

Drescher rallies to claim his 3rd Lanco

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Zak Drescher got back into the mix by hitting the best shot of the tournament. He won it by erasing some of his worst.

Drescher overcame a four-stroke deficit during a torrid march Saturday through the final round of the Lanco Janney Montgomery Scott Amateur Championship, repeating as event king with a two-day, 6-under-par 136 at Groff's Farm Golf Club.

A 6-under-par 65 on Saturday sealed it, besting his friend Mike Burkhart, who lost by a single stroke when he lipped out an 18-footer on the final hole.

Brixton Albert (68-70-138) was two off the lead in third, followed by King Knox (71-68-139), who shot his age on Saturday.

Knox won the event 49 years ago and went on to win seven more after that.

But, this time, it was the 22-year-old Drescher who gripped the trophy, which now bears Knox's name. It was the third Lanco Amateur crown for Drescher, who has won all three times (previously in 2008 and 2010) with a score of 136. He said the repeat was extra special. "I always like coming home, and I hadn't done this yet," said Drescher, a Hempfield High graduate and senior at Campbell University in North Carolina. "I came over a hurdle for it." Or two -- specifically holes 17 and 18.

Drescher didn't know it, but he was tied with Burkhart atop the field after 16 holes.

Then came his tee shot on 17. Way right.

He stood over his second shot and appeared ready to swing when a couple carts zoomed into his sight line. "What can you do? It's the game of golf," he said afterward.

He pulled back, re-focused and struck a beauty chip to save par.

"I had no idea what anybody else was doing," he admitted. "I was just trying to grind out pars at the end." It almost came to a halt when Drescher sailed his second shot on 18.

Again, he saved par -- with a little luck. He struck his chip shot a bit too solid, but the ball dinked off the pin, leaving him with a 5-footer.

It was Drescher's work early in the day that put him in contention.

Trailing by four strokes after a first-round 71, Drescher knew it would take a few good holes to make up ground. Turns out, he only needed one: an ace on the 95-yard eighth hole. A straight-downhill that Drescher said he couldn't find the pin on, he nailed it within 5 feet on the fly.

"And it just sucked back in," Drescher said. "Everyone shouted, so I figured it got in."

Meanwhile, the par-3 holes proved to be Burkhart's Achilles' heel.

Tied for the lead after a day, he was 3-over Saturday on the five par-3 holes.

"You can't do that and expect to win. That's what's really going to bother me," Burkhart, 23, admitted.

Yet, he was in it to the very end. Like Drescher, he had no clue of the scoreboard coming down the stretch. In fact, he thought he was hitting his first putt on 18 -- an 18-footer -- for the win.

And he felt he hit it just right, but the ball lipped out, drawing gasps from the spectators who bunched around for the finish. Burkhart's par left him a single stroke short. Drescher stood silently at the back of the group, then gracefully shook a few hands. "I wanted him to make it, for sure. I love the guy," Drescher said afterward. "And I thought it was in." It seemed everyone did. "It just kind of slid right under the hole," Burkhart said. Any chance of seeing a replay in his nightmares? "No way," he said with a smile. "I never even contended in this tournament before. I don't think there's any shame in losing to a 65. Zak just torched it. "I'll take second." Hempfield graduate shoots 6-under 65 to edge friend Mike Burkhart by a shot and repeat as champion.

Intelligencer Journal/Lancaster New Era

First-round deadlock – 06/25/11

Burkhart, Gast share early lead at 4-under 67 First-round deadlock
BY JASON FULGINITI, Sports Staff

After so many years of playing the unpredictable -- sometimes maddening -- game that is golf, Mike Burkhart and Corey Gast have both experienced their share of days when the cup feels like its the size of a thimble.

Friday wasn't one of those days. For either of them.

"It felt like I was putting into a peach basket," Burkhart said Friday afternoon. "It just felt automatic with the putter today."

Gast could relate. "I hit the ball pretty well today," he said. "And I putted like a madman."

Riding those hot putters around Groff's Farm Golf Club's 6,403-yard layout, Burkhart and Gast both posted 4-under 67 to share the lead after the first round of the Lanco Janney Montgomery Scott Amateur Championship.

Brixton Albert and three-time Lanco Amateur champion Marlin Detweiler are both one shot off the pace after posting 69 Friday, while defending champion Zak Drescher is four shots back in a tie for eighth after carding an opening-round 71.

The 41 players who shot 77 or better Friday made the cut for today's final round, which begins at 10:20 a.m. back at Groff's, with the final pairing of Burkhart, Gast and Albert teeing off at 12:30 p.m.

All told, 15 players are within five shots of the lead heading into today's final.

"I'm not really thinking about winning or losing, I just want to play well and see what happens," Burkhart said about sleeping on the lead in the county's most prestigious event.

"That doesn't mean I won't be thinking about it all night tonight," he added. "But I just want to be aggressive again and not play not to lose."

In short, kind of like he did Friday during a rollercoaster round that featured seven birdies, three bogeys and eight pars.

Burkhart actually got to 4-under seven holes into his round, before a pair of bogeys on the par-3 eighth and the par-4 10th took him back to 2-under.

But after erasing a birdie at No. 11 with another bogey at the 12th, he got back to 4-under by draining a 10-foot birdie putt on the par-5 13th and a 15-footer for bird on the par-3 16th.

"The last two weeks I've been hitting it really well but the putts haven't been going in," said Burkhart, 23, who works for his father's excavating company. "Today was the first day in a while where I had it (together) tee to green for all 18 holes."

Earlier in the day, Gast's round was hardly drama-free.

Playing in the day's first group, the 25-year-old financial advisor -- who actually had his boss as his caddie Friday -- began with a birdie-birdie start, only to make the turn in even-par 35 thanks to a double bogey on the par-5 seventh.

Gut check time.

"I had a little faux pas on seven, but I just kept my head in the game and just kind of plodded along, where in the past I probably would have blown up and shot 75," said Gast, who has two Lanco Match Play championships, one Lanco Better Ball, one Lanco Scramble and one City-County mixed title to his credit.

"But I knew the back (nine) was there for the taking," he added, "and I just took advantage of it."

After negating a birdie at the 10th with a bogey on the par-3 12th, Gast got into red figures for good with a birdie at the par-4 14th. An eagle at the par-5 15th and another birdie at the par-4 17th got him to 4-under.

Good news for Gast and Burkhart -- both members at Meadia Heights -- is that they've enjoyed playing plenty of golf together over the years, which could come in handy today as the rest of the field tries to chase them down.

"I think him and I are going to do a pretty good job tomorrow of just keeping it light," Gast said.

If their putters light up the way they did Friday, that might not be too hard.

Intelligencer Journal/Lancaster New Era

Drescher out to change (his) history

Drescher out to change (his) history

BY JASON FULGINITI, Sports Staff - 06/24/11

Once he arrived home from Campbell University in North Carolina each summer, Zak Drescher had gotten used to mixing it up with the same old familiar foes -- namely, a handful of other accomplished college players who had taken turns dominating the Lanco Golf Association's major championships over the last eight years.

But something suddenly feels a little different.

Sure, it's been a few years now since four-time Lanco major winner Dan Walters, three-time Lanco Amateur winner Jarred Texter and 2004 Lanco Am champ Shawn Hall moved on to play professionally.

But as Drescher begins defense of his Lanco Janney Montgomery Scott Amateur Championship title today at 8 a.m. at Groff's Farm Golf Club, three other college-aged powerhouses will also be missing from the field.

That trio includes recent North Carolina State University graduate and 2009 Lanco Amateur champ Brandon Detweiler; Ben Rowe, who finished second to Drescher last year at Tanglewood; and accomplished Charleston Southern University junior David Denlinger, who won the Manada Individual in Harrisburg this past Saturday.

How does that change the complexion of this year's event?

"I feel like this is a year when a lot of younger players can step up," Drescher said Wednesday night. "And there are a lot of good young players, kids who are in high school or freshmen in college."

Not that that changes anything for Drescher, a Hempfield grad, who will be going for his third Lanco Amateur title in the last four years and his fifth win in the last eight Lanco majors.

"It's still me against the golf course," said Drescher. "So it doesn't matter who's playing and who isn't playing. It's me against Old Man Par."

When it comes to Drescher, "the old man" has been getting the edge in that battle in recent months a little more than the 22-year-old would prefer.

Drescher's coming off a spring senior season at Campbell, where he played in five of six events, with his highest individual finishes being a tie for ninth and a tie for 16th. He finished third on the team with a 74.0 stroke average.

But a bright spot came in late May, when he bested a 62-player field to win the Keith Hills Amateur in Buies Creek, N.C. in a three-hole playoff.

"I won't tell you I'm head-over-heels happy about it, but it's all right," Drescher said of the current state of his game. "I'm working on a few things."

Among them is a change in his backswing, which Drescher said he's trying to make more compact.

"I haven't always had the most compact swing, but I made it work," he said.

Especially here at home, where Drescher has captured a Lanco major each of the last four years (the 2008 and 2010 Lanco Amateurs and the 2007 and 2009 Lanco Opens).

Then again ... "I've never (successfully) defended a (Lanco) title," Drescher said.

"So technically, if this continues," he added light-heartedly, "I'm not going to do very well at this (year's) tournament."

Keep in mind another piece of history, though.

The last time Drescher played at a venue on which he'd already won a major, like he will this weekend, it worked out pretty well.

After picking up his first Lanco major at the Lanco Open at Bent Creek in 1997, Drescher won the Lanco Amateur there the following year.

The key to repeating that feat at Groff's Farm?

"There are some holes on the front nine -- seven, eight and nine -- where you can really get into a lot of trouble," Drescher said. "But I personally think if you can survive the front nine, I think on the back nine you can make birdies in a good amount."

Although he's won five of the last eight Lanco majors, including three Lanco Amateurs, the Hempfield grad has not defended any of the titles. He gets a crack at rectifying that today.