

Intelligencer Journal/Lancaster New Era

Denlinger wins Open – 07/29/2011

Final-round 65 secures four-shot victory over Texter Denlinger wins Open

BY JASON FULGINITI, Sports Staff

He's been playing golf since he was a little kid.

But in case David Denlinger didn't pick up on it through the years, the 22-year-old junior-to-be at Charleston Southern University learned a valuable lesson about the game over the last few days.

"Golf is such an up and down sport, he said Friday afternoon, "and you're going to have bad days. But you've just got to forget about them and play the next day and keep trying to get better."

Denlinger conducted a clinic on that subject this week.

Notching birdies on his first three holes to set the tone, Denlinger finished off a wire-to-wire victory at the Lanco Kelly Cadillac Open Friday afternoon at Four Seasons Golf Course, where he fired a final-round, 5-under 65 to win going away.

Combined with an opening-round 66 on Thursday, Denlinger's two-day total of 131 was four shots better than runner-up Jarred Texter (68-67--135) and six shots clear of defending champion Rusty Harbold (71-66--137), who finished alone in third.

"It feels amazing," Denlinger said afterward. "I've been playing in this since I was like 13 or 14. And just watching all these good players and dreaming about maybe someday I'll win this ... it's big."

Especially considering how the game had treated him Tuesday afternoon, when he was among the leaders at the Pennsylvania Amateur Championship at Lancaster Country Club, before a back-nine collapse left him over the cut line.

Ironically, his return to LCC to watch the final round of the state amateur the next day factored into Friday's victory, according to Denlinger.

"Matt Burkhart gave me some inspiration from his solid play at the PA Am," Denlinger said of his long-time friend and former Lancaster Mennonite teammate, who finished one shot off the pace in second Wednesday. "We kind of grew up playing together, and seeing him play well kind of made me want to play well."

As the rest of the field learned in a hurry Friday, when Denlinger jumped out of the gate with birdies on the par-4 first (lob wedge to five feet), the par-4 second (chip to within two feet) and the par-5 third (chip to five feet).

"That kind of sparked the fire," Denlinger said. "And I'm hitting it well so I just kept thinking 'Hit greens and see what happens.' But I'm definitely (still) thinking there is a lot of golf left. You can't give it to yourself at that point."

Especially not with three-time Lanco Amateur champ Texter keeping pace in the group ahead. Thanks to birdies on Nos. 1, 2 and 5, Texter -- who started the day two shots back -- matched Denlinger's front-side 32 to stay within two at the turn.

Meanwhile, Denlinger's playing partners in the final group, Zak Drescher and Gregg Hostetter, were already starting to fade.

Hostetter fell three back with a 1-under 34 on the front, while Drescher dropped five off the pace with a front-side 36.

The damage got worse for those two when Denlinger rolled in a four-foot birdie putt on No. 10 and a 13-footer for another birdie at the 12th.

Denlinger parred in from there to finish with a two-day total of 9-under. It was more than enough to hold off Texter, who could never muster a charge down the stretch.

Texter made three birdies and three bogeys on the back nine en route to an even-par 35 that left him 5-under for the tournament.

"It was on (No.) 17 I guess when I thought 'I'm going to win this if I just keep it together,' " Denlinger said.

Unlike Tuesday, he did this time.

"I definitely redeemed myself a little bit," he said.

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Denlinger rebounds in a hurry – 07/28/2011

Sets early pace with 4-under 66 Denlinger rebounds in a hurry

BY JASON FULGINITI, Sports Staff

The beauty of failure is that it always harbors a lesson.

For a prime example, take 22-year-old PGA Tour phenom Rory McIlroy, who won this year's U.S. Open by a commanding eight shots, just two months after a titanic collapse on the final nine holes at Augusta National cost him The Masters.

On a much smaller scale, David Denlinger can relate.

Two days after suffering a second-round implosion at the Pennsylvania Amateur Championship, Denlinger fired 4-under 66 Thursday at Four Seasons Golf Course to take a one-shot lead after the first round of the Lanco Kelly Cadillac Open.

Gregg Hostetter and Zak Drescher both posted 3-under 67 to move into a tie for second, while Jarred Texter is alone in fourth after carding 2-under 68.

All told, 14 of the 24 players who made the cut (73 or better) are within five shots of the lead heading into today's 8:50 a.m. final round, including defending champion Rusty Harbold, who shot 1-over 71 Thursday.

The final pairing of Denlinger, Hostetter and Drescher will tee off today at 10 a.m.

That Denlinger is the leader could be seen as impressive, considering what he'd been through just two days earlier.

Holding steady at 1-under par through 31 holes at Lancaster Country Club, Denlinger -- who started on the back nine Tuesday -- was lurking within two shots of the lead at the Pennsylvania Amateur when the wheels suddenly came flying off, starting with a double bogey at the par-4 fifth.

It snowballed from there.

A tee shot into the water led to another double at the par-3 sixth. He doubled No. 7, made quadruple bogey 7 on the par-3 eighth and finished with a bogey on the par-4 ninth.

That quickly, he went from being one of the tournament's leaders to missing the 36-hole cut with a second-round 82.

"I kind of lost my head a little bit," recalled Denlinger, a Lancaster Mennonite graduate who will be a junior on the golf team at Charleston Southern University this fall. "I just really wanted to win. And you make two doubles and you kind of lose it a little bit.

"It's kind of cliché," he added, "but (the lesson was) never give up. I just hit one bad shot and that kind of led to another bad shot. If you hit a bad shot you've just got to leave it and go onto the next. I definitely learned from it."

In fact, being able to get right back on the horse, Denlinger said, was therapeutic.

"It's kind of nice to have a tournament right after (that incident) to kind of leave it be," he said. "I've definitely put it behind me."

That much was obvious Thursday during a five-birdie, one-bogey round, which could have been even better had Denlinger not missed five birdie putts of 12 feet or less.

"I'm hitting the ball well," he said.

Not that he was rewarded for it right away Thursday, thanks to a 3-putt bogey from the back fringe on the short, par-4 first, and a missed four-foot birdie putt on the second.

A par on the par-5 third was also a mild disappointment, according to Denlinger.

"I was kind of frustrated," he said. "But I was just kind of like 'Be patient, there's lots of birdies (out there).'"

Denlinger found them on Nos. 5 (wedge to six feet), 7 (pitching wedge to two feet), 10 (drove green, two-putt), 12 (8-iron to seven feet) and 17 (approach to within a foot).

All good signs after his debacle a few days ago.

"I'm just trying to put myself in a spot (Friday) where (you're in the hunt) coming down the last five holes," Denlinger said. "That's what it's all about."

A lesson he no doubt learned on his final five holes Tuesday.

