

Intelligencer Journal – 07/28/12

Albert has answer

Meets Hostetter's challenge to win Lanco Open Albert has answer

BY JASON FULGINITI, Sports Staff

The second the ball exploded off the club face of Gregg Hostetter's driver, Brixton Albert started having flashbacks.

He'd seen the shot before from Hostetter on Foxchase Golf Club's 17th hole -- the towering fade that, more times than not, clears the greenside pond at the 355-yard par-4 and lands within feet of the pin.

And when Hostetter -- tied for the lead with Albert at the time -- pulled it off again in Friday morning's final round of the Lanco Kelly Cadillac Open, Albert knew it was game on.

"For a split second, a thought went through my head that one bad swing and this tournament is over," said Albert, who initially planned on laying up. "So I needed a great shot there."

He got it.

After driving the green to match eagles with Hostetter on No. 17, Albert stuck his approach within a foot of the hole on No. 18, leading to a kick-in birdie that gave him a final-round, two-under 69, a two-day total of 7-under 135, and his first Lanco Open title.

Hostetter (66-70--135) finished alone in second, one shot off the pace, while defending champion David Denlinger (69-69--138) and Andrew Turner (72-66--138) shared third.

"This week I felt like I had a really good chance," said Albert, a 24-year-old Warwick High School and Radford University graduate who works in sales for an e-commerce company. "I just started playing better golf (recently), and I went out today and I thought 'I really think I can get it done.' And it was a nice feeling to have. (The win) means a lot."

Especially considering what Albert has been through since March, when a weight-lifting accident led to a severely broken left arm that surgeons had to reconstruct.

But Friday, any lingering effects of that injury weren't noticeable to Hostetter, who found himself involved in a form of match play with Albert as the first-round co-leaders squared off in the day's final twosome.

"It was pretty close the whole way through," Hostetter said.

At times, their rounds were nearly identical.

They both birdied two holes on the front side, both bogeyed the par-3 third and double-bogeyed the par-3 sixth. The only difference was a bogey from Albert at the ninth that gave Hostetter a short-lived, one-shot lead at the turn at 4-under.

After hitting his tee shot out of bounds en route to another double on the par-4 10th to fall a shot behind Albert, Hostetter countered Albert's birdie at the 14th with two of his own at 12 and 15 to force another tie at 4-under with two holes to play.

"No one really pulled out ahead by too much," said Hostetter, a 25-year-old Conestoga Valley High School and Campbell University graduate who works for Fulton Bank. "I thought maybe once I hit it out of bounds on 10, that might have taken me out of it, but I was able to kind of hang tough."

Meanwhile, also hanging tough was Turner, who -- having started on the 10th tee Friday -- was busy fashioning the day's low round of 66 on the opposite nine.

In fact, at one point, Turner had the outright lead at 6-under.

Not that it mattered in the end, thanks to the drama that unfolded between Hostetter and Albert on the 17th.

"I had no doubt I was going to hit driver (on 17)," Hostetter said. "I felt really good about the swing. And I just kind of picked out a good target and pulled the trigger."

When Hostetter landed his tee shot within three feet of the hole, Albert was forced to re-evaluate his options.

"I was going to lay up until I saw Gregg (hit)," Albert said. "Then I'm thinking if I do lay up, I have to get up and down (for birdie) just to stay within one."

That said, Albert opted instead to hit driver himself; a decision that was rewarded when he landed his tee shot 12 feet beside the hole.

But with Hostetter all but assured of making eagle, there was work left.

"I pretty much knew I had to make (the putt)," Albert said. "It didn't even cross my mind thinking I was going to miss it."

He didn't. Nor did Hostetter, leaving the twosome tied at 6-under with one to play.

Hostetter was first to play his second shot to the par-4 closing hole. And when his approach checked up 20 feet below the pin, the door was open for Albert.

"I just saw a window of opportunity there," Albert said. "I had 110 (yards) and I was like 'I really just need to knock this in tight.' "

He nearly knocked it in altogether, for another eagle.

After wedging his second shot just past the flag, Albert watched his ball spin back, lip out, and come to rest a foot left of the hole, leaving him a tap-in for birdie.

Game over.

"I just got flat-out beat today," Hostetter said with a smile afterward. "You play the last six holes here 4-under and you lose by one ... that's just getting beat."

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Needed breaks

Needed breaks

BY JASON FULGINITI, Sports Staff

As Gregg Hostetter would certainly attest these days, sometimes the best way to find a fresh perspective in life is to take a big break.

Or, to suffer one, in Brixton Albert's case.

Back in the fold after enduring a four-year burnout period that kept him away from competitive golf, Hostetter set the early pace Thursday at Foxchase Golf Club, where he fired 5-under 66 to grab a share of the lead after the first round of the 40th Lanco Kelly Cadillac Open championship.

Later in the day, Hostetter was joined at the top of the leaderboard by what seemed to be an unlikely 66 from Albert, who was playing one of his first competitive events since suffering a severely broken arm back in March.

As a result, Hostetter and Albert will take a two-shot lead over Craig Hornberger and Brian Groff into today's final round, which gets under way at 7:10 a.m. back at Foxchase.

The lead pairing of Hostetter and Albert will start on the first tee at 7:42 a.m.

Hovering in the groups behind Hostetter and Albert are defending champion David Denlinger, three-time Lanco Amateur champ Jarred Texter and Ben Hollinger, all of whom are three off the pace after carding 2-under 69 Thursday.

The 21 players who shot 73 or better Thursday advanced to today's final round.

"It feels good to be back out here," said Hostetter, 25, who works as a relationship manager in the wealth management department at Fulton Bank. "I have a little bit of a different perspective on it now. I don't feel any pressure I just kind of feel like (golf) is something I enjoy and something I look forward to. I think perspective's the key there."

It just took him a while to find it.

A highly successful high school golfer at Conestoga Valley in the early 2000s, Hostetter won back-to-back Lancaster-Lebanon League titles in 2003 and 2004 before joining the golf team at Division I Campbell University in North Carolina.

But somewhere around his junior year in college, Hostetter's love for the game inexplicably evaporated. Soon after, he quit the golf team at Campbell, from which he earned a degree in 2010, and basically fell off the golf map for the next four years.

Hostetter finally resurfaced at last month's Lanco Amateur at Conestoga Country Club, where he finished tied for seventh. It was his first Lanco start since losing an epic seven-hole playoff to Texter in the 2007 Lanco Am at Foxchase.

More importantly, the fire was suddenly back.

"I really just missed the competitive nature of it," said Hostetter, who still works in the pro shop at Foxchase on Sunday mornings. "It's nice when you have other things going on and you kind of put golf in the big realm of things and you enjoy playing again."

"You enjoy the good shots, you enjoying hitting good putts, and when you can get that enjoyment again, that's really what it's all about."

Hostetter was certainly enjoying himself Thursday during an eight-birdie, three-bogey round -- the highlight of which came in the last five holes.

After falling back to 1-under with back-to-back bogeys on Nos. 12 and 13, Hostetter rattled off four straight birdies from Nos. 13-17 to get to 5-under, where he finished.

"Those last four or five holes, I felt pretty comfortable and kind of settled in like it was just another day-to-day round for me," he said. "And once I got to that point â€¦ I was able to get a few things going my way coming in."

As was Albert, who, according to his doctor's initial prognosis, wasn't even supposed to be playing in Thursday's event.

While lifting weights in the first week of March, Albert dropped a 190-pound bar on his left arm, which shattered the main bone.

That was followed by a three-day stint in the hospital, where doctors used 15 permanent screws and a permanent plate to surgically reconstruct his left arm.

Left with a 15-inch scar and no strength in his left arm to this day, doctors told Albert he might be able to start working back into playing golf in late July.

A fair assessment, considering ...

"If I do a pushup," Albert said, "I feel (the pain) for a day."

Instead, through rigorous physical therapy, Albert cut that time in half and started playing again in May.

Ironically, Albert said, the whole ordeal turned out to be a blessing.

"I think the break kind of put a lot of things in perspective in my life," said Albert, a 24-year-old Warwick High School and Radford University graduate who currently works in sales for an e-commerce company. "It's made a lot of things better."

"When I was laying there in the gym in excruciating pain for two hours, before going into the hospital for three days, I just kept thinking 'Something good is going to come out of this. This happened for a reason.' I got excited about it in a way. I looked at it as a challenge."

As with Hostetter, the reason Albert found himself on top of the leaderboard Thursday could be attributed to his final few holes.

Plugging away at even-par through the 13th, Albert got things going when he hit a wedge within a foot at No. 14 to set up a birdie.

He followed that by driving the green on the par-4 15th and knocking in a four-footer for eagle that bumped him to 3-under, before adding another eagle at the par-4 17th, where he hit his tee shot to the back fringe and holed a 50-foot chip to get to 5-under.

Good times, for sure.

And, according to both Albert and Hostetter, better times are on the way today, regardless of the outcome.

"It would mean the world (to win), it really would," Hostetter said. "But more than anything, I'm just going to come out and enjoy every single moment of it."

Hostetter and Albert can do that now. Now that golf is finally in perspective.

All it took was a break.

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nComing back from time off, Hostetter, Albert shoot 66 to set the early pace in the Lanco Open at Foxchase.

Intelligencer Journal – 07/26/12

Denlinger set to defend Open crown

Denlinger set to defend Open crown

BY JASON FULGINITI, Sports Staff

The majority of David Denlinger's time on the golf course is spent battling some of the nation's top collegiate and amateur players.

That said, it's not hard to see why defending a "major" championship on the Lanco golf circuit for the first time in his life isn't exactly a big deal -- at least not from a stress standpoint.

"I look forward to it because it's a local tournament," Denlinger said of defending his title at the Lanco Kelly Cadillac Open, which begins with today's first round at Foxchase Golf Club at 8 a.m. "I look at it as fun. And I'm just going to play my game and try to win it."

For everyone in the 63-player field, the winning strategy, in regard to attacking the course, could be markedly different than it was even a few weeks ago, when Lancaster Country Club -- a long, difficult track that will host the 2015 U.S. Women's Open -- was set to house the event.

Those plans changed in the last month, when LCC -- which had recently undergone a major greens reconstruction project on its Old Course -- notified the Lanco Golf Association that it was having some trouble with nine of its new putting surfaces, and feared the damage would become worse by hosting a major event.

According to Lanco president Andy Tompos, the association and the club "tried every scenario," including using LCC's Highlands nine for the tournament. But in the end, moving the event to Foxchase -- which was scheduled to host next year's Lanco Open -- was deemed to be the best solution.

"Lancaster wanted to do (the tournament) right," Tompos said. "And they felt very bad about what was going on."

If history is any indication, there could be a lot of interesting things going on today at Foxchase, starting with a marquee 8:30 a.m. pairing of Denlinger, professional Jarred Texter and Lancaster Country Club assistant pro Rusty Harbold -- a trio that finished first, second and third, respectively, at last year's Lanco Open at Four Seasons.

Denlinger, a 21-year old Lancaster Mennonite graduate who will be a senior on the golf team at Charleston Southern University this fall, is coming off a spring season in which he notched four top-16 finishes in six events, before receiving an at-large bid to compete in the NCAA Division I Championships for the first time in his collegiate career.

Since then, Denlinger has added a tied-for-eighth finish at the Monroe Invitational in New York and a pair of tied-for-22nd showings in the prestigious Rice Planters tournament in South Carolina and the North/South Amateur in Pinehurst, N.C.

"I feel like I played pretty well this summer," Denlinger said. "Nothing over the top, but I feel like I'm working pretty hard and I feel pretty good about my game."

A three-time Lanco Amateur champ who is yet to win a Lanco Open, Texter's game also appears to be in shape.

Since February, Texter has made eight cuts in the 13 events he's played on the North Carolina-based eGolf Professional mini tour (formerly the Tar Heel Tour), including five top-25 finishes and two top-10s.

Since mid-June, Texter has finished in the top-26 in three of his last four eGolf events.

And then there's Harbold, who's become a force in the Lanco Open in recent years.

After finishing tied for sixth in 2008 and '09, Harbold won the Lanco Open in 2010, before finishing third last year.

"I'm definitely looking forward to (playing in) that pairing," Denlinger said.

But another player who commands attention at this point is Foxchase's own Gregg Hostetter, who finished tied for sixth in this event a year ago.

After finishing tied for seventh at the Lanco Amateur in June, Hostetter teamed with Connor Lefever to win the Lanco Better Ball on July 15.

Craig Hornberger, a senior-to-be at Manheim Township, also bears watching, having finished tied for third at last month's Lanco Amateur.

Currently the Senior Division points leader on the Lancaster County Junior Golf Tour, Hornberger shot 6-under 66 in an LCJGT event Tuesday at Crossgates.

"I think you have to make birdies to have a chance," Denlinger said.

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nLancaster County's leading players tee off this morning at Foxchase.