

E-Z-GO TRI STATE OPEN ROUND 2

There was a feeling of specialness at Williams Golf and Country Club in Weirton, W.Va. as the final round of Tri-State Open was about to begin Tuesday morning.

First, the course was in prime condition, just as it had been for the first round. Then, the leaderboard was set for some fireworks. And, finally, there was a strong group of amateurs that had shown what it could do in the first round and were poised to make a run at the title over the last 18 holes.

The scoreboard fireworks didn't take long as Oakmont Country Club head professional Devin Gee and Allegheny CC's pro John Aber put on a spirited battle that lasted all the way to the 18th green with Gee holding on for a one-shot victory.

"I got a little nervous coming in," Gee, who shot a five-under par 67 that featured an exclamation point of a 20-foot birdie putt on 16 that proved to be the margin of victory. "This meant a lot to me because Bob's (Ford, his predecessor at Oakmont CC) has won this thing eight times and the trophy is named for him. Any time I can be on a trophy with him, that's big. I've won the West Penn Open and this is right there, too."

Aber, who had won the Tri-State Open two times previously, had a chance to tie with a birdie putt on 17 and had another birdie chance from above the hole on 18 that was impossible to make.

"Yeah, I just didn't make a very good putt on 17 and 18 was pretty tough and while I would have liked to win, I looked at this event as a celebration of golf after all we've been through this year," Aber, who bogeyed the first two holes on Monday and went bogey-less the rest of the way, said.

Thirteen players broke par on Tuesday, led by Gee, Jimmy Ellis and Louis Olsakovsky all posting 67s.

The possibility existed for something very special to happen Tuesday when 15-year-old Rocco Salvitti opened with a 67 in the first round. He picked up right where he left off on Monday, making birdies on three of his first four holes to get to 8-under par.

But disaster struck on his last four holes of the front nine when he went bogey-double bogey-bogey-bogey. He shot one-under par on the back and finished with a 73.

"I hit two bad shots that cost me four strokes," he said. "I look at this as a really good way to start the season. This shows me that I can hang with some pretty good players."

For those who paid attention, there were a lot of amateurs who showed they can hang with some pretty good players. Sixty amateurs entered the event, that number more than normal because the West Penn Golf Association's season hasn't begun.

Out of that group, 10 of the amateurs finished among the top 12. Thirteen of those players finished under par for the 36 holes.

Jimmy Ellis finished third overall after a final-round 67 and was the low amateur.

Next up on the Tri-State PGA schedule is the Frank B. Fuhrer Jr. Invitational at the Pittsburgh Field Club June 29-July 1.