

PITTSBURGH – The life of an assistant golf professional is hardly glamorous.

Even at the most prestigious clubs or the best public layouts, the assistants most often have the most menial of tasks, the kinds of things that rarely get noticed but are absolutely necessary to the operation.

Running the range picker, attending to carts, keeping up with pro shop inventory, etc., etc. Those are things that assistants do. Their opportunities to play are often limited to squeezing in 9 holes late in the day.

But occasionally an opportunity presents itself for assistants to show off how much game they have with a very nice reward to those who play best.

That opportunity took place Tuesday at Shannopin Country Club with the 2020 National Car Rental/TSPGA Assistant Championship.

Eighteen holes on the hilly, testy layout were contested with the top two finishers earning trips to the national championship in Florida later in the year.

The two qualifiers were Sam Berry of Pikewood National Golf Club who posted rounds of 71-65 and Alex Patricio of Allegheny Country Club who finished with 67-70. Sam and Alex will represent the Tri-State PGA at the 44th PGA Assistant's Championship held November 12-15 on the Wannamaker Course at PGA Golf Club in Port Saint Lucie, Florida.

Three others gained alternate status: Gunnar Riley of St. Clair Country Club (70-69); Brendan King of Oakmont Country Club (69-70) and Talon Kriebel of Indiana Country Club (70-71).

Berry, a 26-year-old native of Manchester, England who attended college in the United States at Southeast Oklahoma State, made seven birdies and one bogey in his 65.

"I'm pleased with how I played, obviously," he said. "I hit 34 of 36 greens today and I even had a couple three-putts. The par fives here are gettable, we were hitting pitching wedges in on them. This is exciting for sure. I've played in a couple national college tournaments, but never one like this."

For Patricio, who finished T12 in the Dr. John Aber Memorial Classic on Monday, Tuesday was a day of firsts for the 25-year-old.

"This is the first time I've played in this event and the first time I've played this course," said the young man who is the third assistant at Allegheny. "I spent some time looking online Monday night, checking out whatever information I could find about the holes and made some notes about where to hit it and where not to."

A graduate of Cal U's PGM program, Patricio is in his second year at Allegheny Country Club.

"I guess this really hasn't sunk in yet," he said with a smile. "I really don't know what to expect, but I'm going to what I did on the course today: I'm going to take it one step at a time."

It will also be Patricio's first appearance in a national event and he credited that to one thing.

"This was probably the best I've ever played in competition," Patricio said. "My putting was good and I made putts I needed to make. I still have to work on my driver a bit, but it was all pretty good today."

Next up on the Tri-State schedule is the Links Brewing Stableford Championship at Lone Pine Country Club in Washington Monday.

The 36-hole event will be scored using the Stableford system and will get started with an 8 a.m. shotgun.