

Three players share first round PGA lead

Written by George Browning
Friday, 08 August 2014 00:00 -

The PGA of America is pleased to provide all credentialed media with information pertaining to the 96th PGA Championship at Valhalla Golf Club in Louisville, Kentucky. This is the Notebook for Thursday, Aug. 7.

CHAPPELL, PALMER, WESTWOOD SET PERSONAL BESTS, SHARE FIRST-ROUND

LEAD: Kevin Chappell, making just his sixth major championship start, Ryan Palmer, who has never finished among the top 15 in this major championship, and Lee Westwood of England, who began his 67th major championship today at Valhalla Golf Club, each fired 6-under-par 65 to share the opening-round lead in the 96th PGA Championship.

Chappell, who missed the cut last year in his only previous PGA Championship appearance, had no bogeys in posting his lowest round in a major championship. He needed just 26 putts. A resident of Fresno, California, Chappell shot 66 in the final round of the 2011 U.S. Open at Congressional Country Club and tied for third, for his best finish in a major.

Palmer's top finish in a major championship is a tie for 10th at the 2011 Masters, and like Chappell he has never led or shared the lead after any major championship round. Palmer had seven birdies today and held the lead until he bogeyed the par-3 eighth hole (his 17th of the day).

Carrying on momentum from his final-round 63 Sunday at the World Golf Championships-Bridgestone Invitational, Westwood birdied his last three holes of the round (Nos. 7-9) today to gain a tie for the lead.

Westwood made nine birdies (most of the round), which more than offset a double bogey at No. 1, his 10th hole of the round. He had only 25 putts to gain at least a share of the lead in a major championship for the fifth time. This is the first time Westwood has led any round of the PGA Championship.

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Westwood's 65 today:

- Is his best in 53 PGA Championship rounds
- Ties his lowest single-round score in any major (third round in 2011 U.S. Open)

In his last three PGA Championship rounds at Valhalla, dating to 2000, Westwood is 14-under par. He tied for 15th in 2000.

Interestingly, Westwood missed the cut in the 2014 U.S. Open and Open Championship.

MAJOR FIGURES: The group of Bubba Watson, Martin Kaymer and Rory McIlroy, who won the first three major championships of 2014, combined for 12 birdies and an eagle today. They were 7-under par as a group. Specifically:

McIlroy shot 5-under-par 66 and had 8 birdies

Kaymer shot 1-under-par 70 and had 2 birdies

Watson shot 1-under-par 70, with 2 birdies and one eagle

McILROY AMONG FIVE JUST ONE BACK: McIlroy and four others – Jim Furyk, runner-up in the 2013 PGA Championship; Edoardo Molinari of Italy; Henrik Stenson of Sweden; and Chris Wood of England -- shot 66 today and are one shot out of the lead. But it's McIlroy, the 2012 PGA Champion, who easily had the roller-coaster round among that group. With a birdie at No. 9, McIlroy got to 3-under par for the round. Then, at the par-5 10th, he hit his second shot out of bounds and made double bogey. He made bogey at 11 and suddenly was even par.

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Nonplussed, McIlroy roared back with four consecutive birdies. When he two-putted for birdie at 18, he had played the last seven holes in 5-under par. McIlroy's 66 also is the low score among the 13 PGA Champions who completed the round.

53 PLAYERS UNDER PAR: A total of 53 players finished the opening round under par. By comparison, 51 players were under par after the first round in the 1996 PGA Championship at Valhalla; 21 were below par through one round of the 2000 PGA Championship at Valhalla.

CHAPPELL ONE OF FOUR WITHOUT A BOGEY: Good scoring was on display in the first round, with those 53 rounds under par. Kevin Chappell (65), Jim Furyk (66), Chris Wood (66) and Shawn Stefani (68) were the only four who did not have a bogey or worse on their scorecards.

CAPTAIN CONSISTENT: Incredibly, a mere four weeks before he turns 65, United States Ryder Cup Captain Tom Watson parred the first 15 holes in the opening round. Watson, who won the 2011 Senior PGA Championship at Valhalla, made bogey at No. 16 but parred his final two holes for 72.

Entering this week, Watson ranked second in scoring average among those who have played 100-plus rounds in the PGA Championship – Jack Nicklaus, 71.37 scoring average (128 rounds); Watson: 71.72 scoring average (114 rounds).

KENTUCKY PRIDE: Kentucky natives J.B. Holmes and Kenny Perry have gotten a lot of local love this week. Today, Holmes had six birdies and shot 3-under-par 69. He is tied for 11th. Perry, who received a special exemption to play in what is likely his final PGA Tour event, had three birdies but also four bogeys and is tied for 78th place after shooting 72.

Both Holmes and Perry represented the victorious United States Team in the 2008 Ryder Cup at Valhalla.

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No. 2 TOUGHEST, 18 THE EASIEST: The second at Valhalla, converted from a par 5 in the 1996 and 2000 PGA Championship to a par 4 this year, was the hardest hole in the first round. The par-5 18th hole was the easiest.

Key statistics for No. 2, which today played to a 496-yard par 4:

Scoring Average: 4.445

4 Birdies

92 Pars

47 Bogeys

10 Double Bogeys

Worse Than Double Bogey 2

Key statistics for No. 18, which today played to a 528-yard par 5:

Scoring Average: 4.626

7 Eagles

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67 Birdies

59 Pars

21 Bogeys

1 Double Bogey

DEFENDING CHAMPION FORCED TO WITHDRAW: Defending PGA Champion Jason Dufner withdrew because of neck issues after playing 10 holes in the first round. Dufner made 8 on the par-5 10th hole to fall to 8-over par for the round before he stopped playing.

KUCHAR WITHDRAWS, HUH SHOTS 78: Matt Kuchar withdrew today before the start of his round because of back spasms. John Huh of Dallas, Texas, took Kuchar's spot in the group that teed off at 9:05 a.m. on No. 10. Huh shot 78.

PHIL UP, TIGER DOWN: In the marquee group of the day, four-time PGA Champion Tiger Woods made just one birdie and shot 3-over-par 74. Woods is tied for 109th. Phil Mickelson, the 2005 PGA Champion, fared much better, making five birdies and shooting 2-under par 69. Mickelson is tied for 20th.

SCHNEITER LOW PGA CLUB PROFESSIONAL: Steve Schneiter of Sandy, Utah, used two birdies en route to a 1-over-par 72 and took the lead among the 20 PGA Club Professionals competing in the 96th PGA Championship.

Schneiter's experience at Valhalla, having competed in the 1996 PGA Championship and the 2002 PGA Professional National Championship, helped him salvage some of his round.

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"I drove the ball pretty well, so that's a big plus out here obviously, in any major," said Schneider, 50, a PGA assistant professional at Schneider's Pebblebrook in Sandy. "I hit quite a few greens but there were some cute pins out there. I mean, there really were. You know, some that could have been Saturday or Sunday pins."

Ryan Helminen of Menasha, Wisconsin, shot 73 and is second among the PGA Club Professional contingent.

"My round was better than I thought it would be," said Helminen, a PGA teaching professional at Ridgeway Country Club in Neenan, Wisconsin. "Overall, I felt like I played well, but had a couple of mental errors, a couple of shots I wasn't ready to hit. That's just what happens. You get ahead of yourself."

"I'm enjoying it, this is what we do. I grind it out whether I'm playing in the State Open or a pro-am back in Wisconsin. Golf doesn't always come easy. I felt a lot better when I got on the golf course."

Rod Perry of Port Orange, Florida, the 2013 PGA Professional National Champion, and Eric Williamson of Shoal Creek, Alabama, each had 74.

FIRST OFF, NORMAN SHOOTS 78: PGA Club Professional Brian Norman of The Colony, Texas, who grew up in Henderson, Kentucky, hit the first tee shot Thursday in the 96th PGA Championship. Norman, a PGA assistant professional at The Lakes at Castle Hills in The Colony, Texas, shot 78.

THE (AMERICAN) YEAR OF MONTY: Until 2014, Colin Montgomerie had never won an official event in the United States. That all changed in May when he captured the Senior PGA Championship presented by KitchenAid, which earned Montgomerie a spot in the PGA Championship. He continued his stateside victory tour in June, with a win at the U.S. Senior Open.

In the opening round today, Montgomerie kept the mojo going. He parred his first eight holes,

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then birdied No. 18 for a 35 on the back nine. Montgomerie added two birdies and two bogeys on the front nine to shoot 1-under-par 70.

Montgomerie played in the two previous PGA Championships held at Valhalla – he missed the cut in 1996 and tied for 39th in 2000.

FRIDAY LOOKS WET: A line of showers and storms over the Mississippi River Valley will move toward the region this evening. This activity is expected to weaken as it approaches, but showers will become likely for Louisville after midnight and through much of the day Friday. A few embedded thunderstorms will accompany these rain showers.

Rainfall amounts will range from .75 inches to 1.5 inches by late Friday night. On Saturday, the low pressure system causing the wet weather will be slow to move through the area, so we can expect a continued threat for showers and possible storms. Slightly drier air will reduce the rain threat for Sunday to 30% or less.

BY THE NUMBERS

3 Consecutive birdies by Jim Furyk today to complete his 5-under-par 66

4 Consecutive birdies by Lee Westwood today to complete his 6-under-par 65

9 Eagles made in the opening round, with seven coming at the par-5 18th hole

9 Birdies made today by Lee Westwood, most of any player in the field

34 Rounds in the 60s in the first round

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72.21 Scoring Average for the field in the first round