

Former CU Buff Ben Portie 1 back at Colorado Open

Golfer in midst of solid run

By Gary Baines For the Camera
Boulder Daily Camera

Posted: 07/23/2011 11:30:59 PM MDT

DENVER -- Ben Portie has had a stellar month of July on the golf course, and you'll excuse him if he wants to get a little greedy by adding considerably to his success.

The former University of Colorado golfer finished second in a playoff at the Wyoming Open a couple of weeks ago, and just last Sunday he won the South Dakota Open.

Now, after shooting 64-67 the last two days at Green Valley Ranch Golf Club, the left-hander from Westminster is just a stroke out of the lead heading into today's final round of the HealthOne Colorado Open.

"It would mean a lot (to win here)," Portie said. "I've played here 11, 12, 13 years and you see the same guys year after year. A few of my buddies have won it, so it would feel great. It would mean a lot."

South Carolina pro Zack Byrd, who qualified for last month's U.S. Open, fired a 6-under-par 65 on Saturday to grab a one-stroke lead over Portie, defending champion Nathan Lashley of Arizona and 2005 U.S. Amateur Public Links champion Clay Ogden of Utah. Lashley would have held a one-shot lead, but after the round he was assessed a two-stroke penalty for improving the line of play for his second shot on the par-4 first hole. That turned a 64 into a 66.

Longmont High School graduate Charlie Soule, the first-day leader, shot his second consecutive 70 -- this one of the scrambling variety -- and stands at 8-under-par 205, three strokes behind Byrd.

"I didn't shoot myself out of it, but I did not play very well," said Soule, who hit only 11 greens in regulation. "I hit it all over the joint. (Friday) was like an easy 70. Today I was grinding my butt off."

As for Portie, after an up-and-down front nine, he heated up down the stretch, making three birdies in his last five holes.

"I feel good," the 34-year-old said. "I'm hitting it pretty good and putting good. And I'm right there (in contention). You can't win it (Saturday), but you can shoot yourself out of it and I didn't do that."

Portie has been in similar situations several times at the Colorado Open. Since 2004, he's finished in the top six three times, placing third in 2004, fourth in 2005 and sixth in 2007.

Soule, who plays out of Green Valley Ranch, likewise has contended at the Colorado Open. He finished fourth in 2005 as an amateur and eighth in 2008 as a pro. And if he can return to his form of Thursday, when he shot 65, he might have a shot at the top prize.

"You just play the game as well as you can and hopefully if you put up a great number (today), a couple guys at the top falter," the 27-year-old from Denver said. "You play the first four holes like 3 or 4 under and then you're right in it. If you can put your name up top (the leaderboard) and have guys chasing you, it's obviously ideal, and then you hope they falter a little coming in."

Two Broomfield players still have an outside chance at the title. Two-time state high school champion Steve Ziegler, who just turned pro, stands at 208 after a 66 Saturday, and Jon Lindstrom is at 209 and tied for low amateur.

Colorado Open

At Green Valley Ranch G.C.

7,280 yards, Par 71

Zack Byrd, Murrels Inlet, S.C. 70-67-65--202

Nathan Lashley, Scottsdale, Ariz. 67-70-66--203

Ben Portie, Westminster 72-64-67--203

Clay Ogden, Farmington, Utah 68-66-69--203

Zen Brown, Arvada 68-70-67--205

James Love, Calgary, Alberta 69-69-67--205

Nicholas Mason, Denver 66-69-70--205

Charlie Soule, Denver 65-70-70--205

Gunner Wiebe, Aurora 72-67-67--206

James Woodson, Richmond, Va. 75-65-67--207

Jason Allred, Scottsdale, Ariz. 67-72-68--207

Chris Kamin, Phoenix, Ariz. 71-67-69--207

Ty Capps, Palm Coast, Fla. 72-66-69--207

Benoit Beisser, Scottsdale, Ariz. 67-69-71--207

Jamie Marshall, Denver 67-69-71--207

Nathan Tyler, Tucson, Ariz. 71-65-71--207

James Drew, Las Vegas, Nev. 66-69-72--207

Steve Ziegler, Broomfield 73-69-66--208

Tom Glissmeyer, Colo. Spgs. 69-70-69--208

Brady Stockton, Cave Creek, Ariz. 71-72-66--209

Mike Northern, Colo. Spgs. 71-69-69--209

a-Matt Schovee, Cherry Hills Village 71-69-69--209

a-Jon Lindstrom, Broomfield 69-69-71--209

Kane Webber, Lismore, Australia 72-69-69--210

Gabe Maier, Cody, Wyo. 69-72-69--210

Wil Collins, Albuquerque, N.M. 69-71-70--210

Chadd Coc, Bend, Ore. 69-70-71--210

Blake Trimble, Rancho Sante Fe, Calif. 67-72-71--210

Brandon Smith, Tucson, Ariz. 68-71-71--210

Michael Baird, Castle Rock 71-67-72--210

Byron Smith, Palm Desert, Calif. 70-69-72--211

Todd Demsey, Scottsdale, Ariz. 71-68-72--211

a-Zac Blair, Ogden, Utah 68-69-74--211

Jesse Wheeler, Logandale, Nev. 72-72-68--212

John Douma, Phoenix, Ariz. 74-68-70--212

Jordan Holley, Greensboro, N.C. 71-69-72--212

Justin Bardgett, St. Louis 70-68-74--212

Perry Holmes, Boulder 71-67-74--212

Mike Grob, Billings, Mont. 71-71-71--213

Dale Smigelsky, Fort Collins 69-70-74--213

a-Zahkai Brown, Arvada 69-70-74--213

Kyle McCarthy, Denver 71-73-70--214

Scott Tashie, Memphis, Tenn. 71-72-71--214

Scott Petersen, Parker 67-76-71--214

a-David Schroeder, Colo. Spgs. 77-65-72--214

Nate Stevenson, Steamboat Spgs. 72-70-72--214

a-Brandon Bingaman, Montrose 67-77-71--215

Riley Arp, Fort Collins 73-71-72--216

a-Jonathan Park, Denver 71-72-73--216

a-Jim Knous, Basalt 72-71-73--216

Brant Kummerfeld Thermopolis, Wyo. 69-72-75--216

Joshua Warthen, Pismo Beach, Calif. 69-70-77--216

Pat Grady, Broomfield 70-71-76--217

Mike Troyer, Boulder 73-68-76--217

a-Brian Dorfman, Greenwood Village 72-69-76--217

Caine Fitzgerald, Parker 69-75-74--218

James Blair, Ogden, Utah 69-73-76--218

Scott Chipokas, Cedar Rapids, Iowa 72-72-75--219

a-Kory Harrell, Colo. Spgs. 71-67-81--219

Christopher Manning, Cody, Wyo. 72-71-77--220

Nick Travers, Boise, Idaho 72-70-78--220

Close Window

Send To Printer

U.S. SENIOR OPEN**Open season at any age for Irwin****Veteran has won U.S. and U.S. Senior titles**

BY DAVE HACKENBERG
BLADE SPORTS COLUMNIST



Hale Irwin lines up a putt at the ninth green at Inverness Club in the final round of the 1979 U.S. Open and later held up the championship trophy, the second of three U.S. Open crowns he won.

He has won three U.S. Open championships and two U.S. Senior Open titles. He is the only active professional golfer to have won both.

He is the most successful player in Champions Tour history with 45 wins -- next best is 29 -- including seven senior majors.

He has a combined 65 victories and \$31.5 million in official earnings between careers on the PGA Tour and Champions Tour.

How many names have you come up with so far?

OK, one more hint, which should give it away.

His three U.S. Open victories came at Winged Foot, the most sadistic USGA layout of all time in 1974; at Inverness Club in 1979, and at Medinah in '90, when he made a 45-foot putt on the 72nd hole to force a 19-hole Monday playoff at the end of which he became the oldest Open champion ever.

"Looking back at all those special moments sort of makes it even more fleeting," said Hale Irwin, who turned 66 last month. "I'm older. I know I'm not the player I was, but I still think I'm capable. It's a game of ebbs and flows, though. The last several years, I've been in the doldrums."

Irwin, whose last victory came in 2007, hopes to turn back the clock this week as he returns to Inverness for the U.S. Senior Open.

"When we played the Senior Open there in 2003 I had to withdraw because I'd hurt my back," Irwin said. "I was very saddened by that because I'd been pointing my game for Inverness. So I'm really looking forward to going back. The fact I've won there will give me some reason for optimism, even though it has been a long time."

It has been 32 years and Irwin was then among the game's best, especially in big tournaments on tough courses. And it all started with the biggest and toughest at Winged Foot. A year earlier, Johnny Miller had shot a startling final-round 63 during the Open at Oakmont and the USGA wasn't about to let such a thing happen the following summer.

"Yes, I think Winged Foot in '74 was the exclamation point on difficulty," Irwin said. "More recently, the greens got away one year at Shinnecock and Bethpage was brutally long, but during my [PGA Tour] career, Winged Foot was the epitome of pushing the envelope to the limit."

He won what was dubbed "The Massacre at Winged Foot" with a 7-over-par 287 total after hitting a memorable 2-iron shot to inside 20 feet on the final hole. The top-10 finishers included Arnold Palmer, Tom Watson, Gary Player and Jack Nicklaus.

A 2-iron shot had a lot to do with his '79 win at Inverness, too. Irwin took control on the par-5 13th hole during the third round when he hit a shot from 225 yards to within three feet for eagle.



Hale Irwin sinks a putt at No. 18 to win the 1998 U.S. Senior Open at Riviera Country Club in Los Angeles. He also won the title in 2000.

From 1975-78, Irwin compiled what is now the fourth longest streak in PGA Tour history with 86 consecutive cuts made. Only Byron Nelson, Nicklaus and Tiger Woods are ahead of him on that list.

"I played some great golf from the mid-to-late 1970s," Irwin said. "I wouldn't say Inverness was the end of things, but it was a cap to a great run. From a career perspective, winning another Open meant I wasn't a one-and-out. It put me back in the major championship picture."

By 1990, though, Irwin was pretty much out of that picture when he arrived at Medinah, where two days of rain turned the longest Open course, to that date, even longer. He was tied for 20th after 54 holes and all he thought about walking to the 11th tee on Sunday was that "if I played 1-under from there, I'd probably get in the Open again the next year without having to qualify."

So he birdied four straight holes and then made the dramatic birdie putt on the 18th green to tie Mike Donald and force a playoff.

"I was fortunate in my career to hit some great shots at the most opportune times," Irwin said.

In addition to those three Open victories, Irwin won tour events at Muirfield Village, Pebble Beach and Harbour Town, and added Senior Open titles at Riviera and Saucon Valley.

What made him such a horse for tough courses?

"Well, I guess it's partly my background in athletics. As a college football player (at Colorado) I was never the most blessed in size or speed. There were so many guys I played with and against who were as good or better. But I think I had the desire to excel; the heart.

"When I started as a tour golfer, my goodness, I realized there were players with huge talents that had played for much longer than I had. So I had to approach it with the same attitude. I had to try harder and find a way to make my game work.

"That's what I took with me onto those great courses that you face during a U.S. Open. I had to learn a way to beat them. The rough is up, the fairways are narrow, the greens are small and firm. I always drove it relatively straight, which was a factor at Inverness. I was a good iron player, which was a key with the small greens there. I was a consistent putter.

"I'd say I wasn't outstanding at anything, but I wasn't deficient at anything. I believed in myself and I always tried to be as good as I could be."

And Irwin turned out to be one of the best, even if you may have had trouble identifying him at the start of this story.

Copyright 2010 The Blade. By using this service, you accept the terms of our [privacy statement](#) and our [visitor agreement](#). Please read them.

The Toledo Blade Company, 541 N. Superior St., Toledo, OH 43660, (419) 724-6000

To contact a specific department or an individual person, [click here](#).

The Toledo Times ®