

Ex-Buff Portie wins first Colo. Open

Birdies on first six holes pave way for his largest career payday

By Gary Baines For the Camera
Boulder Daily Camera

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DENVER -- The legacy of Mark Simpson is evident when looking at the list of winners of the HealthOne Colorado Open.

Going into last week, six owners of the championship trophy played for the longtime University of Colorado head golf coach, who passed away in 2005. And on Sunday, a seventh Simpson player took home the hardware.

Ben Portie rode a torrid start to the Colorado Open title and joins Steve Jones (1988), Jonathan Kaye (1996), Bill Riddle (1999), Scott Petersen (2000), John Douma (2007) and Derek Tolan (2009) as Simpson golfers who have won the tournament.

Portie made an emphatic statement by carding birdies on the first six holes Sunday at Green Valley Ranch Golf Club en route to his second tournament victory in eight days. On July 17, the left-hander from Westminster claimed the South Dakota Open title.

At Green Valley Ranch, the win was worth \$23,000, marking Portie's biggest payday ever -- and the top victory of his career.

"I've always dreamed of this," said the 34-year-old Portie, who calls the Colorado Open "my major."

Portie's 6-under-par 30 on the front nine led to a 6-under 65 on Sunday, which gave him a 16-under 268 total and a three-shot win over defending champion Nathan Lashley of Scottsdale, Ariz.

Last year's runner-up, Gunner Wiebe of Aurora, closed with a 66 to finish four behind, tied with Clay Ogden of Farmington, Utah, for third place.

Wiebe shot an impressive 67-67-66 the last three days, but was still no match for Portie, who went 64-67-65 the final three rounds.

"Shooting 4 under par on the front, I thought I was going to be in good shape -- and I lost ground," Wiebe said. "I was four back starting the day and I was six back going into the back nine. It's hard when you see someone scoring that low."

Lashley almost kept pace with Portie in the early going, carding a 5-under 31 on the front nine, but even that wasn't good enough.

"He just played great," Lashley said of Portie. "I've never seen a putting round quite like that, to be honest with you. So there was nothing I could do. He just played better."

After trailing by one at the turn, Lashley was the only threat to Portie down the stretch. But the Arizonan failed to make a birdie after No. 8 and went into the final hole two behind.

On No. 18, Portie gave Lashley a glimmer of hope by putting his approach shot into the front bunker. But, with a strong wind in his face, the ex-Buff placed his long bunker shot just 4 feet from the cup and sank the putt. Lashley, winner of the Waterloo Open a week earlier, three-putted for bogey to make the final margin three.

The victory makes July a month that Portie will remember for a long time. After finishing second in a playoff at the Wyoming Open two weeks ago, he's won the Colorado and South Dakota opens on consecutive weekends.

"It's hard to give it up," he said about playing tournament golf. "I always keep coming back to it. I've been playing really good this summer. Just when you think you're ready to quit and get a job, this is what happens."

Nevertheless, Portie has been applying for various college coaching positions, and he's considering seeking the job of assistant coach for the CU men's team -- a position he previously held during the 2007-08 season.

But whatever job he might land, Portie is hoping that he still has time to play a few tournaments each summer -- most notably the Colorado Open.

"Now I don't have to qualify (for the tournament) for the rest of my life, and I'm going to play it as much as I can," he said.

Meanwhile, two other Boulder-area golfers also finished in the top 10 on Sunday.

Steve Ziegler of Broomfield shot 66-66 on the weekend to place sixth at 274 in one of his first professional tournaments. And first-round leader Charlie Soule, a Longmont High School graduate, posted his third consecutive 70 to end up in ninth place at 275.

"There's a lot of good signs from this week," said Ziegler, a two-time state high school champion. "I feel like I'm making some strides forward."

As for Soule, he hit 17 greens in regulation on Sunday but his putter failed him.

"You burn edge after edge (with putts), you question yourself, and then your confidence goes down a little," Soule said after his third top-10 showing at the Colorado Open. "Then you get (mad) and you drink a bunch of beer."

Colorado Open

At Green Valley Ranch GC

7,243 yards, Par 71

a-amateur

Ben Portie, Westminster 72-64-67-65--268

Nathan Lashley, Scottsdale, AZ 67-70-66-68--271

Gunner Wiebe, Aurora 72-67-67-66--272

Clay Ogden, Farmington, UT 68-66-69-69--272

Zack Byrd, Murrels Inlet, SC 70-67-65-71--273

Steve Ziegler, Broomfield 73-69-66-66--274

Jason Allred, Scottsdale, AZ 67-72-68-67--274

Nicholas Mason, Denver 66-69-70-69--274

Nathan Tyler, Tucson, AZ 71-65-71-68--275

Chris Kamin, Phoenix, AZ 71-67-69-68--275

Charlie Soule, Denver 65-70-70-70--275

James Love, Calgary, Canada 69-69-67-71--276

Byron Smith, Palm Desert, CA 70-69-72-66--277

Gabe Maier, Cody, WY 69-72-69-67--277

James Woodson, Richmond, VA 75-65-67-70--277

Blake Trimble, Rancho Sante Fe, CA 67-72-71-68--278

Benoit Beisser, Scottsdale, AZ 67-69-71-71--278

Mike Grob, Billings, MT 71-71-71-66--279

Jordan Holley, Greensboro, NC 71-69-72-67--279

Zac Blair (a), Ogden, UT 68-69-74-68--279

Tom Glissmeyer, Colorado Springs 69-70-69-71--279

Also

Jon Lindstrom (a), Broomfield 69-69-71-73--282

Perry Holmes, Boulder 71-67-74-73--285

Pat Grady, Broomfield 70-71-76-70--287

Mike Troyer, Boulder 73-68-76-73--290

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golf

Ben Portie wins HealthOne Colorado Open by three strokes

By Tom Kensler
The Denver Post

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If Ben Portie had clutched his HealthOne Colorado Open trophy any tighter, some sap might have squeezed out.

"It's hard to give it up, you know," he said.

Portie, 34, was talking about hanging on to his dream of winning big as a professional golfer. A dozen years have passed since Portie's college days at Colorado, but a hot round such as his 6-under-par 65 on Sunday at Green Valley Ranch has convinced Portie to keep going.

With a 72-hole score of 16-under 268 and a three-stroke victory margin over runner-up Nathan Lashley, Portie earned the biggest tournament check of his career, \$23,000.

That's important to a family man. So is the self-satisfaction of knowing that, when he gets it going, this lefty can really play.

Portie began the final round Sunday with six consecutive birdies.

"That's the best round of putting that I think I've ever seen," said defending champion Lashley, from Scottsdale, Ariz.

Playing in the final group with Portie, Lashley sizzled to a 5-under 31 on the front nine Sunday — and still dropped a stroke to Portie.

Portie chipped in for birdie on No. 1 from just off the green; made a 20-foot birdie putt on No. 2; hit a wedge 6 inches from the cup on No. 3; two-putted the 326-yard, par-4 fourth after driving the green; made a 7-foot birdie on No. 5; and drained a 30-footer on No. 6.

Following his second birdie, Portie never trailed after leapfrogging third-round leader Zack Byrd of Murrells Inlet, S.C. Portie needed only to play his final 12 holes in even par, including a birdie at No. 14 and a meaningless bogey at 17.

Lashley made a birdie 2 on the 174-yard eighth to pull within a stroke of Portie. But Lashley played the back nine in 2-over.

"I've had six birdies in a row before, but never starting out (a round)," Portie said. "It never felt like six in a row, because Nate birdied four of the first five. I felt like I had to keep doing it just to keep pace. But I did feel good standing over the ball on the greens."

Portie grew up in Westminster and calls the Heritage at Westmoor his home course. His voice cracked with emotion as he posed for post-



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tournament photos with kids who are enrolled in Green Valley Ranch's First Tee program.

In addition to playing in mini-tour events and state opens, Portie was an assistant golf coach at CU for a year, and he served a spell as head pro at Sterling Country Club. Portie wants to get back into college coaching. That plan will have to wait. His competitive juices just got an injection of confidence.

"I'm a product of junior golf in this state," said Portie, a alumnus of now-defunct Ranum High School, "and this tournament is my 'major.' That's what I tell everybody.

"Now (as a past champion), I won't ever have to qualify to get in. And I'll be back to play this every year, no matter what I'm doing."

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