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Hale Irwin shoots his age, in the hunt at Senior PGA

BY TOM MARKOWSKI / THE DETROIT NEWS

Benton Harbor— Age is just a number to Hale Irwin, and on Friday the 66-year-old Irwin matched that number for the fourth time in a competitive round.

The youngsters at the first Champions Tour major of the season best beware.

Irwin's 5-under 66 leaves him alone in third place at 137, two shots behind co-leaders John Cook and Roger Chapman after the second round of the 73rd Senior PGA Championship at the Golf Club at Harbor Shores.

Should Irwin win his eighth Champions Tour major and fifth Senior PGA title, he would become the oldest winner of the Senior PGA Championship. Jock Hutchison was 62 when he won the title in 1947. Irwin will turn 67 on June 3.

The oldest winner in a Champions Tour event is Mike Fetchick, who won the 1985 Hilton Head Seniors International at age 63.

And Irwin's round could easily have been better. He three-putted his final hole (No. 9).

"It would have been great to play without a bogey," he said. "I didn't putt well at all. I just played very well.

"But shooting my age, I don't try to think of that. You try to think of what you need to do to play well. I would have loved to have beaten my age. At the same time, it's nice to do that. But it leaves me, rather than one stroke behind, it leaves me two.

"Genetically, I'm put together well. Mentally, I sometimes wonder. It's just my competitive nature, having been in sports all my life. You might beat me but you're not going to out-try me, you're not going to out-heart me, whatever that means."

Conditions were more benign than Thursday's first round on the shores of Lake Michigan on the 6,822-yard Jack Nicklaus-designed course, and the players responded.

Cook also fired a 66 and Chapman, a European Senior Tour player and the first-round leader, shot 67.

"The greens were very receptive," Cook said. "They're firm but the ball's not like bouncing out of control. The wind blew from a different direction so we were playing another golf course today."

Chapman's string of 29 consecutive holes without a bogey ended on his last hole, the 578-yard par-5 No. 9. Chapman rolled his birdie attempt 4½ feet past the hole and missed it coming back.

"My mental state is real good," he said. "I'm just in a good place at the moment."

Steve Pate, in his second year on the Champions Tour, shot 69 and is tied for fourth with Loren Roberts at 3-under, four shots back. Roberts shot 67. Pate is looking for his first victory on this tour. Roberts has won four majors here including the 2009 U.S. Senior Open.

But everyone was talking about Irwin at day's end. Irwin has won 45 Champions Tour events, 16 more than Lee Trevino who is second.

But he hasn't won one since 2007.

"He's an inspiration," Cook said. "Hale just keeps getting it done. He played behind me and I knew he got off to a good start (two consecutive birdies). I go, 'Oh, my God, look at this.' We're battling around there just trying to make pars and here's this 66-year-old just whooping our butts.

"I think it's great. He played well in this (event) last year. When you shoot your age in a major, they should give you bonus points. Lift, clean and throw or something."

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Hale Irwin shoots his age with 66, trails leaders by 2

By Associated Press | Friday, May 25, 2012 | <http://www.bostonherald.com> | Golf

BENTON HARBOR, Mich. — Hale Irwin shot his age — and was so frustrated afterward he might switch putters before playing again.

Just over a week before his 67th birthday, Irwin shot a 5-under 66 on Friday in the second round of the Senior PGA Championship. He trailed leaders Roger Chapman and John Cook by two strokes heading into the weekend, but Irwin wasn't the least bit satisfied with his work on the greens.

"I know the greens are difficult, but some of the putts I missed today are not that difficult," Irwin said. "So I'm a little discouraged with that to the point where I might even change to another putter (Saturday) that's similar, but a different putter. I can't putt any worse."

Cook also had a 66 to match Chapman at 7 under after a more forgiving day at Harbor Shores. Chapman had a 67.

Michael Allen broke the course record with a 64, recovering nicely from a first-round 77. But Irwin was the focus afterward. He even arrived for his post-round news conference while Cook was still finishing his.

"When you can shoot your age in a major championship, they ought to give you bonus points," Cook said. "Lift, clean and throw or something — for the rest of the week."

Chapman, from England, led by a stroke after the first round and didn't make a bogey Friday until the par-5 ninth, his final hole. Irwin also bogeyed No. 9.

That was the lone blemish on Irwin's scorecard, but he was disappointed he didn't shoot an even better score.

Starting his round on the back nine, Irwin birdied four of his first six holes. He went on to add birdies on Nos. 2 and 5.

Most of Irwin's birdies came on short putts from about 5 feet and in. The par-5 fifth was the exception.

"A long putt there — made one of about 12 feet," Irwin said. "Really a big putt, in case you can't see the cynicism in my comments."

Irwin has won this major championship four times, although not since 2004. He was the 54-hole leader last year at Valhalla but finished fourth.

He has won a record 45 times on the Champions Tour, but not since 2007.

Steve Pate (69) and Loren Roberts (67) were tied for fourth, two strokes behind Irwin. Joel Edwards (67) and David Frost (70) were another stroke back, and Allen was part of a larger group at 1 under.

Allen, the 2009 champion at the Senior PGA, is the Champions Tour's money leader this year. No player has recovered from a first-round 77 to win this event, but Allen is at least back in the picture after a terrific performance Friday. He hit 17 greens in regulation after reaching only seven in his first round.

"I didn't get too overly dramatic about it, but I knew I had to play a good round today and I didn't want to come out here and embarrass myself," Allen said. "I love the challenge, like on the Tour, of playing a really hard course, and that's what this is."

After a windy opening day, scores dropped by an average of nearly three strokes at the 6,822-yard course next to Lake Michigan.

"A lot cooler," Chapman said. "It was very hot yesterday for us English boys. It was 88 or something I think yesterday."



Photo by AP

There are still two days remaining, and conditions could easily take a turn for the worse. Earlier this week, players were apprehensive about the difficulty of the greens on the Jack Nicklaus-designed course.

Irwin likened it to the 1974 U.S. Open at Winged Foot, which he won at 7-over par.

"There was a lot of disgruntled players in '74, and 70 percent of them were out of the tournament before the tournament even started," Irwin said. "I think we saw some of that perhaps this week when you see these greens. And they can be maddening. There's no doubt about it."

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TRIBLIVE

Valley's Clemons stays grounded



Steelers seventh round pick Toney Clemons during rookie camp on the South Side May 2012. Chaz Palla | Tribune Review

By **Bill Beckner Jr.**
VALLEY NEWS DISPATCH

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About Bill Beckner Jr.

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It's been one month since Toney Clemons joined the Steelers' congregation, a local kid with big dreams primed to make the most of an opportunity with his hometown team.

On April 28, he was introduced to Steeler Nation, a promising young receiver with a wide smile, thoughtful personality and suddenly, one foot in the NFL door.

In a matter of hours that day, he gained more than 1,000 Twitter followers, his cell phone flooded with texts and calls, his popularity spiked.

In the weeks that followed, Clemons signed a contract, attended rookie camp and organized team activities and learned he'll wear No. 11 if he makes the team.

One would think the whirlwind was life-changing for the Valley graduate.

"Not at all," Clemons said. "I still shop at Family Dollar, go to \$5 movies on Tuesdays and use my Sheetz gas card. I went into Finish Line at the (Pittsburgh) Mills the other day and someone asked me why I was shopping at the mall and not at my mansion. My mansion? It's crazy. It doesn't work like that. When you grow up a certain way, you don't change. You don't forget where you came from.

"I am too down to earth to hang out on Cloud 9."

By all accounts, Clemons, who refers to his team workouts as a 9-to-5 job, was impressive at rookie camp and OTAs, where the 6-foot-2, 210-pounder caught passes and showed his speed.

Still, the seventh-round pick out of Colorado knows nothing is guaranteed and remains humble as he studies the playbook and readies for training camp.

"Nothing has changed," said Clemons' mother, Tonie. "He never had a car, and now he's borrowing a car from a friend to free up my car to get to practice.

"He is staying (in a North Side apartment) so he doesn't have to commute. He's still broke."

Clemons' four-year contract is worth \$2.149 million, with a \$49,824 signing bonus.

His mother said he hasn't received a dime yet, although the bonus is guaranteed.

What's been priceless, Tonie said, is the impact her son has made by simply getting drafted by the Steelers.

"The only change I do see is not so much with Toney but the community and surrounding areas," she said.

"People from New Kensington, Burrell, Tarentum, all over, are so excited and happy for him. Little kids are concentrating and doing well in school. They have a newfound energy — they see what Toney has gone through, living in the 'hood and the obstacles he's had to overcome. They say, 'If he can do it, maybe I can, too.' "

Clemons is aware of his favorable impact.

"It makes me feel amazing to know that I am a walking, talking, breathing example," he said. "Kids can relate to the struggle. These are kids who came from the same neighborhoods and streets and are playing football in the same public housing yards that I did growing up."

Kiski Area and Pitt grad Scott McKillop was selected in the 2009 draft by the San Francisco 49ers. A linebacker, McKillop is now trying to build a career with the Buffalo Bills.

McKillop has been through the rookie process and knows how difficult it can be.

"If I was to give him any advice football-wise, it would be to do everything you possibly can to help the team out, no matter what it is," McKillop said.

"Financially, I would tell him to not be afraid to say no to anyone and keep his surrounding friends and family small. And seeing as he was a late-round draft pick like myself, I would tell him to be ready to work his butt off on special teams."

Veteran players seem to have taken a liking to Clemons.

"You watch guys like Troy (Polamalu), James Farrior and Antonio (Brown) work, and you learn pretty quickly that there are no off days," Clemons said. "There's a whole mentality you have to have. The vet QBs, Ben (Roethlisberger), Charlie Batch, Byron (Leftwich) are always quick to show you what you could have done better or what you can improve on. (Jerricho) Cotchery taught me you can never catch enough passes in practice or after practice.

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“You can never be too polished. You never arrive at this level.”

Clemons said he hasn't been pushed around. His teammates have welcomed him.

“It's not like that,” Clemons said. “You can't single guys out. You're a Steeler. They don't care what year you are.”

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