



Late Birdie Puts Rob Labritz Atop Talented Leaderboard At The Senior PGA Professional Championship

PORT ST. LUCIE, Fla. (October 23, 2021) - It's Saturday at the Senior PGA Professional Championship and it's "only" the 54-hole mark, but there seemed to be a bit more on the line than usual.

There is for Rob Labritz, who birdied the 18th hole to grab a one-shot lead at 202. He's playing in this Championship for the first time, having turned 50 in late May.

Labritz's late birdie capped a 6-under 66 and provided a one-shot cushion over a daunting leaderboard.

Mark Mielke, a self-employed PGA Teaching Professional from Atlantis, Florida is in second place. Playing in the penultimate group, Mielke (68-68-67, 203) carded a third-round 67 that was good for a piece of the lead, that is, until Labritz worked his magic on the final hole.

"I had 129 yards in, 135 with the wind," said Labritz, the PGA Director of Golf at GlenArbor Golf Club in Bedford Hills, New York, of his approach on the Wanamaker's 18th hole. "That set me up for a wedge, which I hit to two and a half feet and made the putt."

Mike Small, the head golf coach at the University of Illinois and Paul Claxton, a PGA Life Member from Claxton, Georgia are two back.

Claxton (68-69-67, 204) birdied 15 and eagled 16 to move within a shot of the leaders, which included Small for a brief moment. That is, until Small bogeyed 18, one group ahead of Labritz.

Alan Morin, the second-round leader, is alone in fifth place and just three off the pace. He posted a 1-under, 71 on Saturday.

The winds that defended PGA Golf Club on Friday were not as prevalent Saturday, leaving conditions ripe for scoring on the normally challenging Wanamaker layout.

The top five players on the leaderboard — Labritz, Mielke, Small, Claxton and Morin — combined for just five bogeys during the third round, with Labritz and Mielke authoring bogey-free rounds.

Mielke turned heads at the turn with birdies on 7, 8 and 9. His inward 9 began with a pair of pars, then his lead reached three after another birdie on the 12th. He parred the final 6 holes and seemed destined for the lead — or least a piece of it.

When Mielke was suddenly three shots clear, Small responded with a birdie of his own on 12, then three more on 13, 15 and 17 to charge into a share of the lead. A three-time PGA Professional Champion, Small has never won the Senior PGA Professional Championship. With a trio of 68s and a three-day total of 204, he will have an opportunity to check that box on Sunday.

Labritz entered the weekend two back after notching rounds of 69 (Ryder) and 67 (Wanamaker) on Thursday and Friday, respectively. His 66 on Saturday matched Mike Genovese for the low round of the Championship on the Wanamaker Course, where he did most of his damage on the par 5s (three birdies).

“When you see names like Mielke, Small and Claxton, you know it is a talented and packed leaderboard,” said Labritz. “Tomorrow is going to be a challenge. That one shot can mean a lot. If I play like I did today and hit some fairways, greens and putts, I’ll be in a good position. But right now, (tonight), I am happy with this round and I am thrilled to be here.”

Following the third round, a second and final cut was made, as the low 70 scorers and ties — 78 in all — advanced to play on Sunday.

The final round gets under way Sunday morning, for the second consecutive day, on the Wanamaker Course.

In addition to the Leo Fraser Trophy, named after the 16th president of the PGA of America, players are competing for a \$318,000 purse, including the winner’s share of \$26,000.

The low 35 scorers also earn a berth into the 2022 KitchenAid Senior PGA Championship at Harbor Shores Golf Club in Benton Harbor, Michigan, May 26-29.

The Senior PGA Professional Championship’s top five finishers also garner an exemption into the final stage of the 2021 PGA Tour Champions Qualifying School - Final Stage.

Those who finish in the top eight, including ties, will automatically qualify for next year’s Championship at Twin Warriors Golf Club at Hyatt Regency Tamaya Resort and Spa and Santa Ana Golf Club, both in Santa Ana Pueblo, New Mexico, October 13-16, 2022.

PGA Golf Club — the PGA of America’s premier 54-hole facility — hosts multiple PGA Member championships annually, such as the National Car Rental Assistant PGA Professional Championship, Senior PGA Professional Championship (biennially) and the PGA’s Tournament Series and Winter Championships.

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