



Paul Claxton Wins 2021 Senior PGA Professional Championship On First Playoff Hole

PORT ST. LUCIE, Fla. (October 24, 2021) - Could we have seen it coming? Perhaps it was inevitable? Considering the tightly-packed and talent-laden leaderboard, why would 72 holes be enough?

In the end, it wasn't.

Extra golf was required. Just enough to set the stage for an old-fashioned putting contest with the Senior PGA Professional Championship hanging in the balance.

For Paul Claxton, a PGA Life Member from (coincidentally) Claxton, Georgia, 73 holes was just enough golf for his putter to regain its magic lost on Saturday.

Claxton twice parred the Wanamaker's always-difficult 18th hole Sunday, once in regulation to cap a final-round, 2-under 70 and again 20 minutes later, in a playoff, to win the 2021 Senior PGA Professional Championship presented by Cadillac over Mark Mielke at PGA Golf Club.

"I haven't played a lot this year, we've all been so busy at work," said Claxton. "I came here with no expectations. I was just happy to have a week off from work and things just fell into place. I played well, hit a lot of good shots and had a great day of putting (Saturday).

"Today, I just held on."

Claxton entered Sunday in a tie for third, two back. He has work to do and ground to make up.

Mielke held the lead most of the day. His birdie on the par-3 6th gave him a one-shot advantage that held until a five-minute sequence on the back 9, when he bogeyed 14 and Claxton birdied No. 15.

Just like that, Claxton has his first lead of the Championship.

But not for long, as Mielke took his turn on 15 and birdied it, too, to reclaim a share of the lead.

A self-employed PGA Teaching Professional from Atlantis, Florida, Mielke jumped back atop the leaderboard with a birdie on the 16th, his first of the week on the Wanamaker final par 5.

Playing in the penultimate group, Claxton's birdie bid from 12 feet on 18 narrowly missed, setting the stage for Mielke to claim victory with a par of his own on the 72nd hole.

That plan went astray as Mielke's drive on 18 shot left, into a bunker. After laying up, his third shot did not reach the top tier of the 18th green, where the hole was cut back-right in its most challenging location.

The ensuing 2-putt bogey capped a closing-round, one-under 71 and left him in a tie with Claxton and, almost, Mike Small, whose 8-footer for birdie on 18 (and a spot in the playoff) slid right, under the cup.

Small, the Men's Head Golf Coach at the University of Illinois, finished solo third at 275. Alan Morin, an Assistant Golf Professional at The Club at Ibis and Bob Sowards, the Director of instruction at Kinsale Golf and Fitness Club, tallied four-day totals of 276 to finish T-4.

"I had not watched the scoreboard all day," said Claxton. "I had chances all day long and just never made a putt. Then I had what I thought might be my last chance on 18 (in regulation) and I hit a pretty good putt, just not with enough break."

On the extra hole, both players put their drives in the fairway and hit approach shots within 3 feet of one another, one tier and 30 feet below the hole. Their third shots had some similarities, with both putts coming to rest 6 feet from the hole, one on each side.

Twelve feet of green real estate would decide the Championship, but there was one fundamental difference.

"(Mielke) had a little tougher putt than I did," explained Claxton. "He had a downhill 'left-to-righter' and mine was uphill, right-to-left. I would've much rather had my putt as opposed to his."

After a Rules Official stepped in to determine which player was away, Claxton stepped forward, like he did all day Saturday, and confidently made his 6-footer, leaving little doubt as it split the middle of the cup.

Mielke tried to answer but could not. His putt dipped below the hole for his second bogey of the day on the 18th, a hole he won't soon forget.

"I played with (Mielke) on (Saturday) and he played and putted so well, I expected him to make it," said Claxton, who played bogey-free golf for his final 30 holes, including the playoff, enroute to four-day tally of 274.

Third-round leader Rob Labritz, the PGA Director of Golf at GlenArbor Golf Club in Bedford Hills, New York, started slowly with three bogeys on the front 9, unable to carry over the momentum he gained with Saturday's 66. His final-round 75 rendered a sixth-place finish.

Defending Champion Omar Uresti, made the late push, finishing seventh thanks to a 67 on Sunday.

While Claxton secured the Leo Fraser Trophy, named after the 16th president of the PGA of America, and the winner's share of \$26,000, he also secured an exemption into the final stage of the 2021 PGA Tour Champions Qualifying School - Final Stage, where he will be joined by Mielke, Small, Sowards and Morin.

Claxton will lead a contingent of 35 Senior PGA Club Professionals into the 2022 KitchenAid Senior PGA Championship, May 26-29, at Harbor Shores Golf Club in Benton Harbor, Michigan. He will be joined by Mielke, Small, Sowards, Morin, Labritz, Uresti, Chad Sorensen, Walt Chapman, Jimmy Farrell Jr., Neal Lancaster, Tracy Phillips, Ray Franz Jr., Tim Fleming, Dave McNabb, Larry George, Eric Chiles, Del Ponchock, Michael Crowley, Mike Genovese, Micah Rudosky, Frank Esposito Jr., Tim Cantwell, Jim Empey, Dave Bahr, Mike San Filippo, Jonathan Mansfield, Kelly Mitchum, Don Winter, Doug Rohrbaugh, Chad Proehl, Roy Biancalana, Jim Carter, Jeff Roth and Michael Valicenti.

The top eight finishers — Claxton, Mielke, Small, Sowards, Morin, Labritz, Uresti, Sorensen — automatically qualified for next year's Senior PGA Professional 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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