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Southern Ohio's Bob Sowards holes out for eagle; rallies to victory in the 30th Senior PGA Professional Championship

By Bob Denney
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PORT ST. LUCIE, Fla. (Oct. 28, 2018) - Bob Sowards may live in Dublin Ohio, but when he travels the 1,056 miles to PGA Golf Club, he transforms into a gambler playing with house money.

Perhaps the winningest PGA Professional ever on the property with 17 wins in winter events, Sowards cashed in for his sweetest title yet in the Sunshine State Sunday by holing out for eagle on the 16th hole of the Wanamaker Course to carry him to the 30th Senior PGA Professional Championship.

With holes running out and trailing playing partner Dan Olsen of Robinson, Illinois, by two strokes and Omar Uresti by one, Sowards hit a 5-hybrid into a greenside bunker on the 493-yard, par-5 16th hole. From there, he blasted out and watched the ball trickle into the hole.

Sowards vaulted into the lead and closed by two-putting from 35 feet at No. 18, making a nery five-footer for par for a two-stroke victory. He posted an even-par 72 for a 13-under-par 275 total.

The first Southern Ohio PGA Member to win the Leo Fraser Trophy, Sowards capitalized in his championship debut by collecting a first-place prize of \$21,500. He became the second player in PGA history to win both a PGA Professional Championship (2004) and the Senior PGA Professional crown. Steve Schneiter of Sandy, Utah, also accomplished the feat in 2016.

"I kept telling myself to 'free up, free up' maybe 1,000 times today," said Sowards, the PGA Director of Instruction at Kinsale Golf & Fitness Club in Powell, Ohio. "Today was a complete

grind because of the wind. I'm very proud of myself for hitting that 6-iron 162 yards into the wind to 18 and then making that last putt."

Uresti, a PGA Life Member from Austin, Texas, and the 2017 PGA Professional Champion, three-putted the last hole for a 74 and shared runner-up at 277 with Walt Chapman of Knoxville, Tennessee, who recorded a 69, the day's best round.

Olsen, who shared the 54-hole lead and who was 11-under par on the par-5s through 61 holes, before a disastrous three-putt bogey at No. 16 ended his chances. He finished bogey-double bogey for a 76, sharing fifth with Brad Lardon of Santa Fe, New Mexico (72) at 279.

Sowards, who turned 50 in June, said that he thought he hit a "great 5-hybrid" to the 16th green. Then, he was looking for a "decent" lie in the bunker.

"I was just trying to get it out into the shadow of the flag, but it got even better and better," said Sowards. "Omar knew it was good before I did. That eagle calmed me. I didn't hit a bad shot after that."

Uresti, also making his Championship debut, lamented his putting in an attempt. He faced a 34-footer for birdie at 18, but three-putted. "I may have misread a few of them today and maybe got too quick with some of my strokes, I don't know which, said Uresti.

"It was a grind today. The wind was playing havoc with the ball and you were trying to get the right clubs. We played better than what we scored. I had several opportunities that I missed, as so did Bob. That bunker shot he made on 16 was clutch. It was five or six feet away and I knew it was in and raised my hands."

For Chapman, his steady play, including a pair of birdies on the back nine left himself in contention. "I was really surprised when I saw the board midway through the back nine. I thought, 'I'm still in this thing!' But I never could get the birdie I needed on the final two holes."

The 30th Senior PGA Professional Championship is supported by GolfAdvisor.com and John Deere.

Sherry Andonian of Centennial, Colorado, the first woman to compete in Championship history, closed with a 73 and 1-over-par 289 overall.

"I hit my driver the best that I have hit it all year," said Andonian, the PGA Teaching Professional at Valley Country Club in Aurora, Colorado. "I didn't miss the center of the fairway. On some holes, it was too much. The wind was completely different today than what we had all week. That made it tough."

Andonian, who next week will be honored as the first Colorado PGA Women's Player of the Year, will continue to prepare for April when she debuts in the PGA Professional Championship at Belfair in Bluffton, South Carolina.

Stuart Smith of Reno, Nevada, completed one of the more memorable physical tests among the field. Having lost vision in his right eye a week ago due to a detached vitreous layer, he held on to record a 71 that left him tied for 11th at 271. He will undergo laser eye surgery on Friday.

The low 35 scorers earn a berth in the KitchenAid Senior PGA Championship, May 23-26, 2019, at Oak Hill Country Club in Rochester, New York.

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