

ILLINOIS GOLFER THE OPENING 9

Monday,
June 20, 2022

Hardy was hale at U.S. Open

1 There was a moment early in Sunday's final round of the 122nd United States Open where **Nick Hardy**, whose pluck had pushed him into the lead for a time on Friday and who woke up on Sunday morning sitting solo 10th, was making more noise than someone sitting 371st in the world rankings had a logical right to make.

He had birdied the third and fourth holes. NBC, focusing on the luminaries and the leaders, the McIlroys and Rahms of the world, grudgingly turned a camera his way as he did.

This Hardy kid, the pride of Northbrook and an alum of Illinois' golf team, was not going away.

He had hung tough a few weeks earlier at The Glen Club, losing in a playoff for the WGA-sponsored NV5 Invitational on the Korn Ferry Tour.

That was surely helpful experience, but this was different. This was not stepping-stone tour golf. This was the knee-buckling National Open at one of American golf's cradles, The Country Club in Chestnut Hill, Mass. (Brookline, the next town over, somehow has assumed squatters rights on datelines over the decades, but the post office knows better.)

The birdie on No. 3 on TCC's composite championship course was a nearly-straight 12-footer directly into the middle of the cup, no worries. That brought him back into red numbers and three strokes behind **Matt Fitzpatrick**, **Will Zalatoris** and **Scottie Scheffler**, the tri-leaders at 4-under at that moment.

His birdie on No. 4 put him but two in arrears, with a share of fifth place, and stuck his name on the leader board in the corner of the TV screen.

Could it stay there? He went to the par-3 fifth, a 188-yard test on Sunday. It was an excellent save after overshooting the green, a 14-footer that kept him 2-under and in the hunt. Maybe it could.



Hardy

the Canadian Open the Saturday before, chasing every kid's dream.

It can happen.

On the par-5 eighth hole, it happened not for Hardy but to him.

The dreaded double-bogey. Back to even par. Back to four strokes behind, then five as the leaders surged. He turned at even par, fell to 2-over with bogeys on the 12th and 14th, sank a 16-foot birdie on No. 15 after a fine approach – by now it was proud papa **John Hardy** supplying the video for Americans on YouTube, as only Sky caught the action live for the United Kingdom audience – and a final bogey at the last set his final-round score at 2-over 72, the total of 2-over 282 good for a share of 14th place.

That was tremendous stuff from the 26-year-old who came onto the scene via the Illinois Junior Golf Association, first made noise among adults at the 2014 Western Amateur at Beverly Country Club by knocking off fellow 18-year-old Scheffler in the quarterfinals, became a stalwart on **Mike Small's** golf powerhouse at Illinois, and now is proving his worth as a pro.

Normally, we would next write that it was the best finish in a U.S. Open for an Chicago-area-connected player in years. However, Fitzpatrick spent a quarter under the guiding wing of **Pat Goss** at Northwestern, and all Fitz did on Sunday was win the whole shooting match, nine years after capturing the U.S. Amateur at TCC. (It was immediately

Anything, after all, can happen in the final round of the Open. Here was Hardy, the second alternate who didn't know he was in until the phone rang while he was in

The Week Ahead

Illinois

CDGA

Illinois Amateur Qualifying, four sites, June 20-22

Illinois PGA

IPGA Stroke Play, Chicago GC, June 20

National

PGA Tour

Travelers, CBS / Golf

LPGA

Women's PGA, NBC / Golf

Korn Ferry

Maine Open

Champions

U.S. Senior Open, NBC / Golf

International

DP World Tour

BMW International Open, Golf

Tour Guide

How Illinois bred and connected players fared last week:

U.S. Open / PGA Tour

Matt Fitzpatrick	1	\$3,150,000
Nick Hardy	T-14	\$ 241,302
Thomas Pieters	T-27	\$ 127,002

Wichita Open / KFT

Tee-K Kelly	T-29	\$ 5,250
Brad Hopfinger	MC	-0-
Brian Campbell	MC	-0-
Vince India	MC	-0-
Luke Guthrie	MC	-0-

Simply Give Classic / LPGA

Elizabeth Szokol	MC	-0-
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The Quote

"The feeling's out of this world. I can retire a happy man tomorrow."
– Matt Fitzpatrick after winning the U.S. Open at The Country Club.

after that he came to Northwestern, then left and turned pro to play the European Tour. He and Goss are still friendly, and considering what Fitzgerald accomplished even before Sunday, winning on the Euro circuit eight times, it looks like avoiding Evanston winters was the right move.)

Hardy, then, posted the best finish of a Chicago-bred player in the National Open since a tie for 10th by **David Ogrin** in 1997.

(Meanwhile, **Thomas Pieters**, another of the Illini alumni and a European [DP World] Tour regular, tied for 27th.)

One thinks more is to come for Hardy. While he's not an overly-long hitter (he averages about 300 yards on the circuit, and was 58th of 64 players making the cut at the Open with an average of 293.5 yards off the tee), his swing is textbook and fairways are usually his friend (he hit 29 of 56 in four rounds, but only 11 over the weekend). He hit 47 greens in regulation, figured out The Country Club's fast greens quickly. Nick Hardy is on the verge. Even he said as much on Friday, when a 68 added to Thursday's 69 brought him the most attention he's gotten since graduating from Illinois.

"I feel like I have gotten better and better year after year since I was a really young kid," Hardy explained. "Maybe not as fast as I would like, but I kind of progress at my own pace, and I feel like I have understood that for a while now. I feel like I have enough experience under my belt to be ready to play well this weekend."

Hardy was off for about of month because of a sublimated ECU tendon in his right wrist, happening at the Zurich Classic. His return to play was at The Glen Club – he could sleep in his old bed in Northbrook – and he nearly won it. Now, after getting into the U.S. Open, he challenged through 54 holes, if not longer.

2 Radix Cup to the amateurs: Last year, the Radix Cup date was moved from the first Wednesday in June to Thursday of the U.S. Open. Not that there are any golf reporters at daily newspapers in Chicago any longer, but the switch has the effect of burying the



Illinois Junior Golf Association

DOUBLE ACE Donald Barnett holds the scorecard of a lifetime.

best day of local golf in the agate.

Thus, it's the second item which we report the amateurs carrying the CDGA torch won for the first time in three years, beating the pros of the Illinois PGA 10-8, and came from behind to do so on a day of howling winds at Oak Park Country Club.

The clinching points came from the final amateur duo, big-hitting **David Keenan** of Lincolnshire Fields in Champaign and **Mark Small** of Prestwick in Frankfort. Small, 58, in his first Radix appearance since 1998, said he rode the coattails of Keenan, but together they knocked off **Reece Bartlet** of SMART Golf & Fitness and **Roy Biancalana**, like Small a senior, of Blackberry Oaks.

"It was great being back here after so long," Small said. "Today was a test against the elements. I was really happy I played as well as I did."

It improved Small's career record to 4-5 in the showcase, and ended a personal four-match losing streak.

The pros won the first two matches before the amateurs rallied. Since the series began in 1962, the amateurs have won 21 times, the pros 37, and there have been two ties. The series, interrupted by COVID-19 in 2020, is even at 7-7 since 2008.

Small's next big stop, by the way, is the Senior British Amateur at Royal Dornoch.

3 It's junior week: The 104th Western Junior, the first such championship in the world – and for one year titled the Junior Championship of the United States – starts Tuesday and runs through Thursday's 36-hole finale at Naperville Country Club, sporting 156 players from 13 countries and 29 states. Since it switched to a stroke-play format, winners have included **Collin Morikawa** and **Rickie Fowler**. **Jim Furyk** is among the winners in the match-play era.

The Women's Western Junior, also this week, still goes the traditional amateur route of stroke-play qualifying followed by match play to determine the winner. The 78-player field covers nine countries and 23 states. The 95th edition runs Tuesday through Friday at Prestwick Country Club in Frankfort, precisely 50 years after **Nancy Lopez**, the pride of Roswell, N.M., won the title there, the first of her three straight.

4 This kid is aces: A hole-in-one is a lifetime achievement to most anyone fortunate enough to accomplish it.

How about two when you're a teen? How about making them in a span of three holes?

Meet 17-year-old **Donald Barnett** of Antioch, who did that at Bristol Oaks in Bristol, Wis., Friday in an Illinois Junior Golf Association tournament. He aced the 13th and 15th holes, tests of 180 and 159 yards, respectively, and won the 16-to-18-year old boys bracket. He



Tim Cronin / Illinois Golfer

STYLISH HOME The new clubhouse at The Preserve at Oak Meadows.

birdied the par-4 14th so played three holes in 5-under. Crazy, he finished with a 5-over-par 77 to win by a stroke.

The odds on two aces in one round? Just 77 million to one.

5 Big doings in Wheaton: Normally, the Monday stroke-play tournaments for Illinois PGA members don't draw much attention. Today is different, because the site is Chicago Golf Club. It's been ages since the tradition-laden club has hosted local pros.

To say the least, it was a popular choice, drawing a field of 116 players. The previous stroke play, at The Hawk on May 31, attracted 61 starters.

6 The Fitzpatrick-Chicago connections: Suddenly, **Pat Fitzgerald** isn't the most famous Fitz associated with Northwestern. At least for a while, the football player-turned-coach will have to take a back seat to **Matt Fitzpatrick**, whose stay was short but, thanks to



winning the U.S. Open, now casts a long purple shadow. Fitzpatrick still wears purple on occasion in tournament rounds, and has an N stamped on the back of his putter.

That putter, incidentally, is a Bettinardi DASS BB1 Flow Tour Dept. model. The Tinley Park-based putter creator and Fitzpatrick have been together for a while. The SUFC on the putter is for Sheffield United, the soccer team he fancies.

7 News from up north: If you've been to Erin Hills the last few years, you almost surely have run into **Rich Tock**, the course's ambassador. Tock, a native Illinoisian, has been at Erin Hills since 2010, spreading the word about the unique course carved out of the moraine left by a receding glacier.

Our friend **Gary D'Amato** reports in today's Wisconsin *Sweet Spot* that Tock is retiring at the end of the year, his 50th in the golf business. Why? To play more golf, of course. Cheers to him.

8 The Preserve has a winner: It was 8 years in the making – delayed, like everything else, by COVID-19 – but the DuPage County Forest Preserve District finally got to show off the flashy new \$12.68 million, 18,018 square-foot clubhouse at The Preserve at Oak Meadows last Monday.

More than merely functional, the design by **Daniel Wohlfiel Design** is something of a work of art. Glass walls almost take you onto the course, showing off the redesign and flood mitigation project by golf architect **Greg Martin**. It's the final piece of a puzzle the district, headed by district boss and golf pro **Ed**

Stevenson, had been working toward since the old clubhouse, the holdover from the course's days as the Elmhurst Country Club, burned after being hit by lightning.

9 The USGA's TV dilemma: NBC pays \$93 million annually (with help from Fox, which gave up the rights) – also known to **Greg Norman** as a sheik's ransom – to broadcast the U.S. Open. The rights include all the other USGA baubles, many of which are also aired, but this is the one that draws the public.

Thus, there are commercials. A lot of commercials. The number of them drew the ire of viewers, especially on Saturday, when they piled up like cars out of control on the Dan Ryan in a snowstorm. The beefs were louder than the ones complaining about NBC's ping-pong programming approach, moving the show from Peacock to USA to NBC and back again. Anywhere, in fact, except Golf Channel, which it owns.

The complaints reached the ear of USGA boss **Mike Whan**, who Tweeted on Sunday morning that he'd look into it, but calling NBC the best operation in sports.

Viewers are more demanding than ever. If you grew up when only the final four holes were covered, the modern era is a bounty. But newer viewers have the option of selected groups online – hey, NBC, put one of those on Golf Channel, will ya? – and virtually instant everything.

What will happen? Beyond continuing the Rolex-sponsored commercial free final hour of Sunday play, probably nothing. The USGA pours the dough into the purse and into all its programs, from the Green Section to boosting the number of players. It needs the money to support a big operation.

This isn't the Masters, which dictates to CBS the hours of coverage, the number of commercials per hour (holding at a mere four minutes since 1967 or so) and recruits the sponsors itself. Augusta National can live with a comparatively low rights fee, since it sells out tickets, sells millions in merchandise, and rakes in big foreign TV rights fees.

At least Whan's heart is in the right place. – **Tim Cronin**