

ILLINOIS GOLFER

THE OPENING 9

Saturday,
August 20, 2022

Scott lurks – in first place

REPORTING FROM WILMINGTON, DELAWARE

1 Adam Scott quietly shot one of the less appreciated 65s in the history of golf on Thursday, thanks to being paired with **Keegan Bradley**, who authored a 64 to grab the first-round lead in the BMW Championship.

Friday at Wilmington Country Club, in sweltering 89-degree heat and with most of the gallery occupied with **Rory McIlroy** and similar luminaries, Scott even more quietly stitched together a 2-uder 69. Those who were trudging about with Rors will be surprised to know that entering Saturday's third round, Scott, he of the long putter, leads this \$15 million derby by a stroke at 8-under-par 134.

He nearly had company in **Jordan Spieth**, but the Texan followed his 31-foot birdie putt on the 17th hole with a bogey on the 18th for 4-under 67 and a total of 7-under 135, same as Masters champion and World No. 1 **Scottie Scheffler**, rookie **Cameron Young** and Canadian **Corey Connors**.

Scott was not faultless, double-bogeying the 17th and squandering two-thirds of a three-stroke advantage, but a leader is a leader and Scott fits the role nicely. He's still a gate attraction – not that it matters Saturday, as the third round, like the second round, is sold out – and has the resume befitting one, his 14 American tour wins including a green jacket.

He also came into the week fighting to get into the top 30 to advance to next week's Tour Championship, the weighted handicap tournament in Atlanta for which the winner receives a pot of gold and a case of Coca-Cola. That's a bigger deal for some than this, the 119th edition of the Western Open, and 16th under the BMW crest. For 42-year-old Scott, the turnaround came last week in Memphis.

"The competition is tough out here, and I certainly haven't had my best stuff for quite a while," Scott said. "It's been a



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HEAT WAVE The 11th tee as seen from a distance almost looks like a mirage.

battle for sure. But that's how this game is.

"There's so many parts to old broken pros trying to put it all together. It would be a long answer. I think there's points in your life that there's different levels of focus on different things, and it's not for lack of trying, but trying to manage myself has been challenging the last couple years.

"I tried to stay calm and put it all together, and it happened in one way or another in Memphis, and I think I got a bit of confidence out of that, out of just having a result, even a top 5. It felt like a result rather than feeling pretty good about things and finishing 20th."

Tying for fifth in Memphis jumped him to 45th in the PGA Tour's point standings and advanced him to the BMW. He needs to finish 23rd or better to jump on the plane to Atlanta for more than sightseeing. (Last year, **Eric van Rooyen** came in 45th and advanced, so it is possible.)

2 McIlroy, a lock to advance, helped his cause for the week with a second straight 3-under 68 and stands 6-under 136 at the halfway point. Key to his round was the finish, a pair of birdies on the last four holes, including at the par-3 15th,

where he made triple-bogey on Thursday.

"Yesterday it was like 5-iron, but I need to take some off it and cut it, and today it was just a step up there and make a good swing with a 6-iron, and if I strike it well, there's no chance of it coming up short, but at the same time, it wasn't really going to go long, either. It was just a really nice yardage (234 yards).

"I said to **Harry (Diamond**, his caddie) walking off the green, if I can make two more 2s on that hole, we'll play it even par for the week."

The crowd loved that, and loved his chip-in at the last from the rough 31 feet away for a birdie 3 to cap it off.

"It seems like there's a lot of Irish people in the Philadelphia area, so probably a few extra cheers," McIlroy said.

3 Spieth was a poor approach on the 18th from being bogey-free. Only five players did that Friday.

"I thought that would have been pret-

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ty impressive today, this afternoon,” Spieth said. “I feel like I’m doing everything good, nothing spectacular, but I feel like in every facet of my game, it’s trending and improving, and I know what to do to get it better and better.”

For Spieth, it’s the unknown that is difficult. Wilmington South is a new stop.

“The course is changing a lot. It would be nice to have course knowledge, but nobody has it,” Spieth said.

4 **Sahith Theegala** would be two off the lead except for the par-3 13th. He has double-bogeyed it twice.

5 Wilmington isn’t the toughest course Scheffler has played this week. After he flew into Philadelphia, he made a beeline for a course across the border in the wilds of New Jersey: Pine Valley.

“I think I shot 3-under, which was pretty good,” Scheffler said. “Some cad-die golf. We flew straight in, went straight to the first tee. Had a sandwich in the clubhouse for like two minutes and then went straight to the first tee, so it was a little different than my usual warm-up routine.”

6 Scott couldn’t remember the last time he’d led through 36 holes. It was the 2019 Masters won by **Tiger Woods**.

7 **Jason Gore** was hired by the PGA Tour on Friday as the senior VP and player advisor to commissioner **Jay Monahan**. Essentially, he’ll serve as a player advocate, much as he did for the last three years for the USGA.

Gore, who won on the PGA Tour and nearly won a U.S. Open, is credited with mending a fractured relationship between the pros and the USGA.

“I’m surprised the USGA let him go because he is so good, but it’s a great addition to the Tour,” McIlroy said.

That the Tour has hired him in a similar role shows how worried the executives are that more players will sign with rival LIV Golf.

In that regard, a rumor resurfaced Friday: **Hideki Matsuyama** about to jump for \$400 million – double **Phil Mickelson’s** haul and about half what Woods was offered. This first popped up in late June. Supposedly the deal is set

Saturday Pairings

No. 1 Tee (Central Time) TV: ESPN+ 6:30 am; Golf: 11am; NBC 2 pm

7:00	Si Woo Kim	148	Wyndham Clark	153
7:09	Kevin Kisner	146	Mito Pereira	147
7:18	Tony Finau	145	Luke List	146
7:27	Davis Riley	145	Alex Smalley	145
7:36	Sebastian Munoz	144	Lucas Glover	145
7:45	Mackenzie Hughes	143	Sepp Straka	144
7:55	Jon Rahm	143	Taylor Moore	143
8:05	Brendan Steele	143	Brian Harman	143
8:20	Matt Fitzpatrick	142	Joohyung Kim	142
8:30	Billy Horschel	142	Viktor Hovland	142
8:40	Max Homa	141	J.J. Spaun	142
8:50	Maverick McNealy	141	J.T. Poston	141
9:00	Chris Kirk	141	Troy Merritt	141
9:10	Cameron Tringale	141	Alex Noren	141
9:20	Tom Hoge	140	Andrew Putnam	141
9:35	Denny McCarthy	140	Sahith Theegala	140
9:45	Lucas Herbert	140	Keith Mitchell	140
9:55	Matt Kuchar	140	C. Bezuidenhout	140
10:05	Taylor Pendrith	139	Marc Leishman	139
10:15	Justin Thomas	139	Sungjae Im	139
10:25	Seamus Power	139	Collin Morikawa	139
10:35	Chez Reavie	139	Trey Mullinax	139
10:50	Emiliano Grillo	139	Will Zalatoris	139
11:00	Sam Burns	138	Adam Hadwin	139
11:10	Keegan Bradley	138	K.H. Lee	138
11:20	Tyrrell Hatton	138	Russell Henley	138
11:30	Kurt Kitayama	137	Shane Lowry	137
11:40	Hideki Matsuyama	137	Harold Varner III	137
11:50	Aaron Wise	137	Joaquin Niemann	137
12:05	Xander Schauffele	136	Patrick Cantlay	136
12:15	Scott Stallings	136	Rory McIlroy	136
12:25	Jordan Spieth	135	Cam Davis	136
12:35	Cameron Young	135	Corey Connors	135
12:45	Adam Scott	134	Scottie Scheffler	135

for after the Presidents Cup.

Matsuyama avoided a sketchy penalty call Friday thanks to **Jon Rahm**. Matsuyama took a practice swing from rough near a bunker on the seventh hole and the ball then fell into a bunker.

A PGA Tour rules official questioned Matsuyama, asking if the swing caused the ball to move, which would have meant a penalty stroke and replacing the ball. Rahm, playing with Matsuyama, insisted that was not the case, and Matsuyama was allowed to then play from the bunker without penalty. He parred.

8 Considering who was running the most important meeting of the week in the Hotel DuPont, why doesn’t the PGA Tour just hire Tiger Woods as

vice-commissioner? His speaking at the meeting of the top 20-odd players on Wednesday speaks volumes about who has the ear of the players. He has assumed the role once held by **Arnold Palmer** and then **Jack Nicklaus**, a legend with a sense of stewardship.

9 **Course stats:** Familiarity breeds low scores, shown by the field averaging 69.985 strokes on Friday, even though the wind was up and the greens began to acquire a brown sheen befitting grass desperately in need of water. Thursday’s average was 70.250. ... The ninth and 11th holes tied for toughest, .176 strokes over par, while the par-5 third was the pushover, at 4.588 strokes, never mind the 576-yard trek. – **Tim Cronin**