

ILLINOIS GOLFER

THE OPENING 9

Friday,
July 9, 2021



Tim Cronin / Illinois Golfer

MARKETING 101 Nothing says John Deere Classic more than the equipment perched on a man-made island in the pond by the 18th hole Harrison Frazer parred the hole but shot 76 and has an uphill climb to make the cut Friday.

It's Deere season for Ghim

REPORTING FROM SILVIS, ILLINOIS

1 Three years ago, **Doug Ghim** of Des Plaines – and a Texas Longhorn – received a sponsor's exemption into the John Deere Classic.

Usually, that's good for 36 holes, and 36 more for making the cut.

Ghim lasted 18.

"I ended up getting pretty bad food poisoning," Ghim recalled Thursday after a 5-under-par 66 placed him among the leaders of the 50th JDC. "So I've been circling this one on the calendar for a while. I wanted to make amends for not being able to finish the tournament."

He's tied for seventh, three strokes back of **Sebastian Munoz** and **Chesson Hadley** after 18 holes. Munoz played the back nine in 6-under 30 for 9-under 63. Hadley went around in 31-32, hitting 16 greens and needing only 28 putts.

Ghim's had a good year that he believes could be even better. He's 81st in the PGA Tour standings and has earned \$1.15 million, with five top 15 finishes highlighted by a tie for fifth in

Palm Springs.

"I've had a lot of opportunities to make it a really good year," Ghim said. "I've had a lot of growing pains. Considering where I started from last year, it's been a huge improvement. I've gotten a lot more comfortable out here."

Much of the learning came in the final round of the Players Championship. The 25-year-old was in the penultimate pairing with eventual winner **Justin Thomas**, but shot 78 and cost himself a high finish while watching Thomas play his way to victory.

"That was the first time as a professional golfer, playing with someone who won the tournament," Ghim said. "To have a front-row seat, that was cool. I remember dealing with the nerves for the first time. To be in that position against a player like that, against many other players of that caliber on a course like that was daunting.

"I knew I could do it and didn't realize how badly I wanted it until I walked off the 18th green."

Deere Numbers

The Leaders

T 1	Sebastian Munoz	33 30 63	- 8
T 1	Chesson Hadley	31 32 63	- 8
T 4	Hank Lebioda	33 31 64	- 7
T 4	Chez Reavie	32 32 64	- 7
T 4	Camilo Villegas	31 33 64	- 7
6	Ryan Moore	31 34 65	- 6
T 7	Doug Ghim	33 33 66	- 5
T 7	Luke List	33 33 66	- 5
T 7	Kevin Tway	34 32 66	- 5
T 7	Cameron Champ	31 35 66	- 5
T 7	Michael Gellerman	33 33 66	- 5

Other Notables

T12	Cam Davis	34 33 67	- 4
T12	Kevin Na	34 33 67	- 4
T24	Dylan Frittelli	33 35 68	- 3
T24	Lucas Glover	34 34 68	- 3
T29	Zach Johnson	32 36 68	- 3
T52	Danny Lee	37 32 69	- 2
T52	Daniel Berger	33 36 69	- 2
T52	Doc Redman	35 34 69	- 2
T76	Steve Stricker	32 38 70	- 1
T76	Brian Harman	36 34 70	- 1
T102	Charles Howell III	34 37 71	E
T129	Beau Hossler	35 38 73	+ 2
T129	Bill Haas	37 36 73	+ 2

Illinois-Connected

T29	Mark Wilson	33 35 68	- 3
T94	D.A. Points	36 35 71	E
T119	Kevin Streelman	34 38 72	+ 1
T136	David Perkins	36 38 74	+ 3
152	Michael Feagles	40 37 77	+ 6

The Quote

"This is home to me." – Steve Stricker

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Ghim, whose runner-up finish in the 2017 U.S. Amateur brought him national renown, has caught on to **Bobby Jones'** thought that golf is played between the ears.

"A lot of it is stuff that doesn't even happen on the course, trying to manage expectations and all that," Ghim explained of his improvement. "I always knew that I could play well, that I could be in contention and have a chance to win tournaments. It was just a matter of trying to figure out the right balance – to hold myself to a higher standard and trying to be realistic at the same time.

"It's very easy to want to skip many flights of stairs on the progression when you watch other guys who are younger than you or even the same age, whom I've played against for a long time – I see them do well and it makes me really want to do well as well."

Ghim started on the back nine Thursday and commenced to birdie the 13th, 14th and 17th holes, then made the turn with birdies on Nos. 1 and 2 before parring in for a bogey-free round. Good playing, but he knows it's early.

"It's a little too early to be talking about the leader," Ghim said. "Scores always are low here. Golf's a funny game. You have to make your birdies when you can. If you push too hard, you're going to shoot yourself out of the tournament. It's not like I was going out and trying to shoot 59 – although there have been years where that has happened." You can be sure he was careful where he dined Thursday night.

2 Steve Stricker is an old softie.

That's why he's playing the John Deere Classic this week. He's 54, nine years removed from his last victory on the PGA Tour, and any logical person, including him, would say it would make more sense for him to be in the U.S. Senior Open in Omaha this week, some 300 miles west of TPC Deere Run.

He is, after all the current and non-defending champion in the U.S. Senior Open – two years removed because of COVID-19, of course – and he's also a senior major winner this year, that being the Senior Players Championship.

But Stricker, is in Silvis this week because it's the 50th John Deere Clas-

sic, and he wanted to honor the tournament that he won three straight times with his presence in the field.

How good is that?

"It was a very difficult decision," Stricker said. "This is like home for me. I'm three hours down the road (in Madison, Wis.), and being a former champion here, I get so much support and love and when I show up here. And it's the 50th anniversary of the John Deere Classic.

"I just thought it would be the right thing to do to be here. I'm so glad I made that decision to come here. It's a wonderful place."

He was reminded of the U.S. Senior Open's concurrent scheduling when he walked into the scoring trailer after scoring 1-under 70 on Thursday morning.

"It's said," Stricker said of the personal schedule conflict. "I wish these weren't the same exact week. I could have played both, but I made the decision to come here and I'm glad I did."

Stricker, playing the back nine first, bogeyed two of his first four holes and was still 2-over at the turn, but rallied on Deere Run's front side with a 3-under 32 for 70. That places him only xxth in the field.

But Stricker, whose total of 26-under 258 in 2010 set a JDC record that still stands, knows how to get around the D.A. Weibring layout in next to nothing.

"I want to be around for the weekend so I've got to put up a good number tomorrow," Stricker said.

He has only three over-par rounds at the Deere since 2009, so that's the way to bet.

3 Dylan Frittelli heard the magic phrase "defending champion" before his name on the tee Thursday morning.

"I didn't know what they were going to say when they introduced me because I was playing with a three-time champion in Steve Stricker, so I'm just a little miniature version of what he is," Frittelli quipped after his 3-under 68.

4 Local favorite **Zach Johnson** on trying to win at age 36: "Motivation is now a struggle. I mean, I'm hungry. I want to win. I want to win every week. I'm a realist. The way my mindset has always been, I'm trying to prepare this

week for next."

Next week, of course, is the British Open.

5 Like many tournaments, the John Deere Classic doesn't announce attendance, but it couldn't have been more than 5,000 on Thursday. Crowds were sparse in the morning and looked larger in the afternoon, but it was the smallest gallery some old hands could remember, at least for a round at TPC Deere Run. Galleries are expected to increase Friday and on the weekend.

One would have to think fears of COVID-19 kept some away, and the \$50 ticket price had to influence others to stay at home and watch Golf Channel or PGA Tour Live.

There were, however, a number of people in the Courtyard tent to the left of the 18th green. That's a \$250 ticket.

6 Sebastian Munoz stumbled down the stretch in Detroit on Sunday but a 63 is a perfect rebound round.

"I came in here with no expectations, see what happens, and 8-under (happens), so I'll take it," Munoz said.

7 The high of 75 degrees at nearby Quad Cities International Airport made Thursday one of the coolest days for a JDC round not played in September.

8 Mahomet's **Luke Gannon**, the medalist in the four-spot qualifier at Oakwood on Monday, scored 1-under 71 with four birdies and three bogeys, and is tied for 76th. Fellow four-spotter **Alex Smalley** fired a 4-under 67 to lead the Monday marauders and is tied for 12th, while **Eric Cole's** 2-under 69 puts him in a tie for 52nd. **Rodrigo Lee**, the final four-spotter, bogeyed his last hole to finish at 1-under 70.

Grayson Murray (3-over through 13 holes) and **Si Woo Kim** (7 over through eight holes) withdrew.

9 The Friday schedule: Play begins at 6:45 a.m. (weather permitting, and it's supposed to rain); TV coverage is from 3-6 p.m. on Golf Channel, while the online subscription PGA Tour Live is on all day with feature group coverage.