

# ILLINOIS GOLFER

## THE OPENING 9

Sunday,  
July 11, 2021

## Munoz, Hagy and a cast of dozens

REPORTING FROM SILVIS, ILLINOIS  
(A.K.A. BIRDIEVILLE)

**1** Come Sunday evening, somebody is going to win the 50th John Deere Classic. At this point, there's absolutely no way to tell who.

Usually after 54 holes, there's not only a small group of contenders, but they would have separated themselves from the field a bit.

Not this year. With soft conditions, little wind, cool temperatures and a day where precipitation varied between drizzle and light rain, TPC Deere Run was more than conducive to low scoring, and everybody took advantage.

**Juan Sebastian Munoz**, the Colombian from North Texas University who won the Sanderson Farms Championship two years ago, is the leader by a stroke entering the final round at 16-under 197. **Brandon Hagy**, who has bounced between the PGA Tour and Korn Ferry Tour for a half-dozen years, is in solo second. But right behind at 14-under 199 is a fivesome of contenders, including **Ryan Moore**, who won this turkey shoot in 2016. Another quartet of players is at 200. That makes 11 players within three strokes of the lead with 18 holes to play.

As the horserace caller goes with field at the eighth pole, "Who do you like?"

It's likely Hagy, **Scott Brown** and **Adam Long** – the latter pair are ensconced at 14-under at the nonce – would be difficult to pick out of a lineup, but all three, indeed everyone among the leaders, have the skills to come through on Sunday, when the distinctive Deere trophy and the \$1.116 million first prize is on offer.



John Deere Classic

**TEE IT UP** The distinctive John Deere Classic tee markers are used for fund raising.

Brown's 8-under 63 was the round of the day, posted two hours before the final group finished. That was the sledgehammer-over-the-head hint that the leaderboard was more like a dartboard. Throw a dart, hit a potential winner. More about him shortly.

Munoz's 4-under 67 was good enough to pass the rest of the field. He survived a pair of bogeys on the front nine and scattered six birdies across his card, three on each side. The trio on the back came from 11 feet on No. 14, six feet on No. 16 and 17 inches on No. 17, the yielding par-5. That allowed him to mosey into the lead by two strokes, Hagy subsequently trimming the advantage to a stroke.

"You didn't want to kind of fade into the leaderboard," Munoz said. "I was thinking today about (leaderboards) on the course and how different would it be if no one knew what anyone was doing. But I saw I was doing all right, that I was a couple birdies up, and once I got to the lead, I just tried to stay there."

This is the third time Munoz will take a lead into the final round on the PGA Tour. He's one-for-two converting in such a situation.

"The way I see it, you're going to go to the course anyway, so it might as well

be with a good attitude and try to keep yourself in the present, in the moment and not go in the past or the future," Munoz said. "That's been working."

As for the other contenders:

**2** Brandon Hagy also posted a 67, closing within a stroke with a 7 foot, 7 inch birdie on the 17th. He only hit eight of 14 fairways, but he was on 17 greens in regulation, missing only the ninth, where he saved par with a 20-foot putt.

"I feel my short game and putting has been really solid for a while," Hagy said. "That three-quarter shot is something that at times I've struggled with, but this last month or so I feel like it's really been an asset. That's really big if you can kind of transition something that you think is a little bit average and make it a strength."

Hagy's second-place finish in this year's Honda Classic is his career best, and he started that week with alternate status, a testament to how deep the talent pool is in modern pro golf. Any of these guys can win, even if you haven't

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heard of him or confuse him with someone else. In Hagy's case, defending champion Dylan Frittelli, who missed the cut and thus wasn't playing on Saturday. But a few fans in the gallery of 8,500 or so thought he was.

**3** Scott Brown is a 38-year-old native of Augusta, Ga., who has never played in the Masters. He's a PGA Tour winner, but the victory was in the Puerto Rico Open in 2013, played opposite the match-play tournament on the circuit and so considered not worthy of the automatic invitation to the Masters that winners of standard Tour carnivals, including the John Deere Classic, receive.

Brown said his closing 66 in last week's tournament in Detroit was the springboard to his good play this week.

"I started to see some putts go in, and just carried it over to this week a little bit," Brown said. "I've been working with my putting coach, **Tim Yelverton**, really hard on reading greens a little better. I've always kind of been a 'just use my imagination and kind of feel out the putt' guy, and I've been using a line on the ball the last few weeks. Just seeing the line well right now."

He knows what winning would mean. The two-year exemption, the spot in the playoffs and a guaranteed bonus, and, of course, the chance for a home game in Augusta – though he calls Aiken, S.C., just across the state line, home these days. All that comes if he's handed the trophy.

"That's what we play got, but at this point my FedEx Cup position (means) I kind of need to win, so it kind of frees me up in a way," Brown said. "I have one goal, and it's to come in here and win."

**4** Adam Long would have been tied with Hagy but for a bogey at the 18th hole. Still, his 7-under 64 lifted him into a tie for third. A nine-birdie round (he also bogeyed the par-3 seventh) will do that.

"I'm usually pretty comfortable making a lot of birdies," Long said. "It's hard, but it's in a way a little less stressful. When you're grinding for pars and bogeys and stuff it can be a little bit more of a grind."

"This is a little bit more relaxing. Make a lot of birdies and free it up and

just keep shooting and grinding. It'll be a fun day tomorrow."

Long won in Palm Springs, the old Bob Hope Desert Classic, in 2019, so victory on Sunday wouldn't be life-changing as much as it would be status-confirming. For him, just being in contention means he's on the right track.

"It just proves I'm doing the right things," Long said. "Part of it's mental and part of it's physical, and it's all coming together. It's nice to see."

**5** The Birdies for Charity operation the tournament runs raises money via pledges from individuals and companies throughout the Quad Cities.

So far this year, there have been 1,070 birdies recorded, including during the rain-shortened pro-am.

Unknown at the moment is how many pledges have been made and at what rate. In 2019, a record \$13,819,154 was raised for charities across the region. Last year, \$12,218,813 was raised without a shot being hit.

**6** The second hole-on-one of the week was scored by **David Hearn**. His 132-yard pitching wedge on the third hole hopped once, then spun back and rabbited its way into the cup.

**7** **Doug Ghim** update: On a day ripe for low scoring, the Arlington Heights favorite made only four birdies and double-bogeyed No. 9 en route to a 1-under 70. He's tied for 22nd at 10-under 203 entering the final round. At least his name was spelled correctly on his caddie bib. In his group, **Patrick Rodgers'** last name was spelled ROGERS on the caddie bib.

**8** Stats corner: Deere Run averaged 69.472 strokes for the day, even with the ninth hole yielding only one birdie – congrats, Scott Brown – and only six birdies on the 18th. For the week, the course scoring average is 69.445.

**9** Sunday television: Golf Channel from noon-1:45 p.m.; CBS from 2 p.m. to conclusion (or shifting to Golf Channel at or after 6 p.m. at the whim of CBS if there's a weather delay or a long playoff).

## Deere Numbers

### Leaders

1 Sebastian Munoz	197 -16
2 Brandon Hagy	198 -15
T3 Scott Brown	199 -14
T3 Adam Long	199 -14
T3 Cameron Champ	199 -14
T3 Kevin Na	199 -14
T3 Ryan Moore	199 -14
T8 Maverick McNealy	200 -13
T8 Jhonattan Vegas	200 -13
T8 Chez Reavie	200 -13
T8 Luke List	200 -13

### Notables

T12 Jason Dufner	201 -12
T12 Lucas Glover	201 -12
T15 Camilo Villegas	202 -11
T22 Zach Johnson	203 -10
T22 Doug Ghim	203 -10
T28 Steve Stricker	204 -9

## Key Tee Times

### 11:35 a.m. CT

Brian Stuard	202 -11
Camilo Villagas	202 -11

### 11:45 a.m. CT

Lucas Glover	201 -12
Adam Schenk	201 -12

### 11:55 a.m. CT

Luke List	200 -13
Jason Dufner	201 -12

### 12:05 p.m. CT

Jhonattan Vegas	200 -13
Chez Reavie	200 -13

### 12:15 p.m. CT

Ryan Moore	199 -14
Maverick McNealy	200 -13

### 12:25 p.m. CT

Cameron Champ	199 -14
Kevin Na	199 -14

### 12:35 p.m. CT

Scott Brown	199 -14
Adam Long	199 -14

### 12:45 p.m. CT

Sebastian Munoz	197 -16
Brandon Hagy	198 -15