

ILLINOIS GOLFER

THE OPENING 9

Friday,
July 1, 2022

Hardy salvages round; nine behind Poston

REPORTING FROM SILVIS, ILLINOIS

1 It's called the grind, and that's what Nick Hardy is in the middle of now.

Hardy, the 26-year-old Northbrook native with the silky swing, is in his first year on the PGA Tour and wants to stay there. He was having a middling year until, of all things, injuring his left wrist, which forced a month off.

Since then, beginning with a warm-up start at the NV5 Invitational on the Korn Ferry Tour at The Glen Club, he's been on a tear. He lost that title in a play-off, squeezed into the U.S. Open as an alternate, held the National Open lead briefly at The Country Club and contended until the back nine on Sunday, finishing tied for 14th, and last week tied for eighth at the Travelers in Hartford.

That's lifted Hardy to 137th in FedEx Cup points coming into the 51st John Deere Classic. He had been 193rd after the Texas Open.

He said Tuesday he'll play every week if necessary. Thursday at TPC Deere Run, he grinded over every shot, especially on the last two holes after an untidy double-bogey on the par-3 16th.

That came about when he bunkered his tee shot and three-putted after extricating his ball from the sand. Instantly, the good early work – birdies on the second and fourth holes had gotten him to 2-under – and fighting to stay at par a bit later, was erased.

It was time to grind. A two-putt birdie from 36 feet on the par-5 17th got him back to 1-over. A 20-foot birdie putt, a bit of a downhill slider, at the last brought him back to level for the day, critical in a tournament where the cut line on Friday night was 4-under last year and has been at least 2-under every year since 2004.

In other words, Hardy has to score 67 or better in the second round to play on the weekend. For Hardy, that's doable. He opened 67-64 in Hartford.

Tim Cronin / Illinois Golfer

ON TARGET

Nick Hardy sends his approach to within birdie range on the par-4 18th on Friday. He sank the 20-footer.

"I told myself, 'Just dig deep,'" Hardy said of his thought on the 17th tee. "I know how big that finish was for tomorrow. That was huge. I'm really proud of my finish

"I'll just carry that momentum into tomorrow, for sure. I've got a lot of time to rest, but I'll be ready tomorrow. I just carried my golf from the NV5 forward. I'm happy to be continuing that."

Hardy, like most pros in this era, is in great shape. The daily walk is really a walk in the park, but the mental grind is what gets to people. He is no exception.

"I probably started feeling the fatigue today," Hardy said. "I've played a lot of golf now in the last month, including the U.S. Open qualifier. But I know



how to prepare and I know how to rest and I know how to eat. You're looking to play but you're also looking for quality finishes. That's what I need right now."

Golf's a numbers game seasonally as well as daily. Hardy needs to finish in the top 125 in the point standings to assure his card for next season. That also would put him in the playoffs, where the PGA Tour showers more money upon its players, up to and including the \$18 million to the winner of the whole shooting match.

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RED NUMBER

With a Gator – John Deere style – lurking in the pond, Patrick Flavin chips close to salvage par and close out his 1-under 70 early Friday evening.

“From the NV5, all those experiences have added up,” Hardy said.

The cut is what will be on his mind on Friday morning, not that he’s nine strokes behind overnight leader **J.T. Poston**, whose bogey-free 9-under 62 featured an eagle and seven birdies, and ties for the fourth-best opening round in Deere history.

Poston, whose bogey-free 9-under 62 featured an eagle and seven birdies, and ties for the fourth-best opening round in Deere history.

2 Hardy wasn’t the only Chicagoan in the field. Winfield native **Kevin Streelman** opened with a 2-under 69, while Highwood’s **Patrick Flavin**, a.k.a. Mr. Monday thanks to his five successful qualifying tries on the Tour this year, scored 1-under 70, scrambling for par several times on the back nine and capping the round with a 2-foot birdie putt on the par-5 17th.

“It wasn’t very quiet,” Flavin said of his inward nine. “I made some nice par saves, and down the stretch I hit some awesome shots. I’m just trying to put my head down and control what I can control.”

Flavin was in the day’s last group. Poston was long gone, but his 9-under 62 on the board for Flavin, who had watched some of the online coverage in the morning – “To soak it all in,” he said – to see. Then **Michael Gligic** of Canada scored 64 alongside him.

“I know my game stacks up,” Flavin said. “And you’ve got to hit it in the right spot to make birdies.”

Flavin didn’t do that as often as he needed to, hitting only eight greens in

regulation. He didn’t have to think much about that, however. His Friday tee time was just 13 hours 23 minutes after he holed out on Thursday.

3 Poston, a 29-year-old North Carolinian whose only PGA Tour victory, in the 2019 Wyndham Championship, is beginning to feel like a distant memory, went about his business with relentless efficiency, converting five of his birdies from nine feet or less. It spoke to the quality of his approach play, and shot-making in general.

“I’m hitting a few more fairways, which allows me to be a little more aggressive with the irons,” Poston said. “So I’ve been able to give myself a lot of those 10-15 footers.”

Or less. Three of his birdies came from within four feet.

“It’s a confidence thing,” Poston said. “If you asked me that a year ago there might have been some hesitancy just because I hadn’t done it in a while.”

Poston’s second straight tournament-opening 62 followed a closing 64 last week in Hartford. He tied for second there and tied for third earlier this year in the Heritage Classic. While he’s not well known, he’s made \$8.78 million in his time on the circuit.

4 Back in 1991, when the tournament was still known as the Hardee’s Golf Classic, **Steve Lowery** was one of the four Monday qualifiers, and made quite the racket across four days. He opened

Leaders

Thursday, June 30

J.T. Poston	30-32-62	-9
Michael Gligic	31-33-64	-7
Vaughn Taylor	32-33-65	-6
Christopher Gotterup		
	32-33-65	-6
Ricky Barnes	32-34-66	-5
Denny McCarthy	32-34-66	-5
Chris Naegel	36-30-66	-5
Dylan Frittelli	33-33-66	-5
Taylor Moore	31-36-67	-4
Chesson Hadley	34-33-67	-4
Scott Stallings	31-36-67	-4
Mark Hubbard	33-34-67	-4
Adam Svensson	33-34-67	-4
Curtis Thompson		
	32-35-67	-4
Matthias Schwab	33-34-67	-4
Martin Trainer	32-35-67	-4
Doc Redman	32-35-67	-4
Bo Hoag	32-35-67	-4
Emilano Grillo	35-33-68	-3
Wesley Bryan	32-36-68	-3
Cam Davis	34-34-68	-3
James Hahn	35-33-68	-3
David Hearn	34-34-68	-3
Seth Reeves	33-35-68	-3
Tommy Gainey	33-35-68	-3
David Lipsky	32-36-68	-3
John Merrick	34-34-68	-3
Chas. Howell III	34-34-68	-3
Grayson Murray	33-35-68	-3
Lee Hodges	31-37-68	-3
Callum Tarren	33-35-68	-3
	15 players at 69	-2
	21 players at 70	-1
	22 players at 71	E
	21 players at 72	+1

Friday Television

6:45 a.m., ESPN+, four channels

2 p.m., Golf Channel

Radio

Noon, PGA Tour Radio

with a 5-under 65 at Oakwood Country Club, a stroke behind leader **Greg Norman**, and rattled around the leaderboard until the final holes, finishing in a tie for seventh, three strokes behind winner **D.A. Weibring**. (Norman tied for fourth.)

No four-spotter has had that kind of success since, but don't tell that to **Chris Naegel**, one of the fortunate four Monday at Pinnacle Golf Club. The 39-year-old St. Louis area resident jump-started his opening round with holing a wedge for eagle on the par-5 10th and rode the momentum to a 5-under 66, four off the pace set by Poston.

"Just a guy just playing golf here and there when I can," Naegel said. "This is my third John Deere. I played both years Spieth won, and then have been playing the Korn Ferry Tour for quite sometime. Haven't played much this year. U.S. Open, couple Mondays here and there, mini-tour event in St. Louis, and the John Deere."

An opening 66 isn't bad for someone who is nearly a part-time golfer. He lost his Korn Ferry status at the end of the year, but still has game, as shown by qualifying for the U.S. Open, then making the cut. He finished tied for 56th, then went home to St. Louis.

"I went home, practiced a little bit, put a couple baseboards in the house. I've been renovating my kitchen over the winter, so that's kind of my project."

Then he drove to the Quad Cities.

"I mean, it's great," he said of Thursday's start. "Obviously playing pretty well, so just try to put one foot in front of the other and see what happens at the end of the week."

"I don't know if there is an end of the trail in golf. You can play it forever. If I can play I'll keep playing."

"I want to play the PGA Tour. I don't think anybody wants to play the rest of their life on the Korn Ferry Tour, even though it's a phenomenal tour. This is where you want to play, so try to get as many opportunities out here as you can."

The best finish by a qualifier since the Deere moved to TPC Deere Run in 2000 is that year's tie for 44th by **Joey Guillion**.

5 Canadians are impressing on the PGA Tour recently, and this week, is

Ortiz leads LIV Portland; Fox in front in Ireland

Carlos Ortiz scored 5-under 67 at Pumpkin Ridge near Portland, Ore., to take the first round lead in LIV Golf Portland, a stroke ahead of **Dustin Johnson**.

Ortiz birdied his first three holes and was among the top three all afternoon, while Johnson had to circumvent trees on the final two holes to preserve his 68.

Pat Perez is in a three-way tie for third at 3-under 69. **Brooks Koepka** is tied for sixth at 2-under 70. **Bryson DeChambeau** and **Patrick Reed** are in a gaggle tied for 14th at even par 72.

Charl Schwartzel, winner of the LIV inaugural at Centurian Club near London, scored 2-over 74. **Phil Mickelson** carded a 73, as did **Kevin Na**.

At Mount Juliet Country Club in Thomastown, Ireland, **Ryan Fox** of New Zealand scored 6-under 64 for a one-stroke lead over the quartet of **Jorge Campillo**, **Frederic Lacroix**, **Marcel Schneider** and **Fabrizio Zanotti** in the Irish Open. U.S. Open champion **Matt Fitzpatrick**, listed as being in the field, did not start.

isn't Corey Connors doing the impressing. It's the aforementioned **Michael Gligic**, who punched up a 7-under 64 as afternoon turned into evening.

Who he? A 32-year-old who didn't earn his Tour card until three years ago. And another guy with tunnel vision, which helps when there are 155 other barracudas in the water.

"I just kind of hit ball where I was looking. Gave myself lots of looks. I think I only missed one green and was able to make a few putts."

"Had a nice two-putt birdie on 17 coming in. Other than that, yeah, it was fairly stress-free. Just need to find a way to do that the next three days."

Gligic played in last year's Deere and missed the cut despite a total of 3-under 141. Another bogey-free round like Thursday's and missing the weekend will be impossible.

"I'll just go out and try and do the same thing," Gligic said. "I'm sure everyone says that, but it's kind of the truth. We all have our game plans, and I'm just going to stick to it and hopefully can keep hitting good shots and giving myself some looks and make some putts."

"You know, every day is different. It's a new challenge. Just wake up tomorrow, see what it's like, and go from there."

6 The last man in the field was **K.J. Choi**, who made the show when **Taylor Pendrith** took ill before his tee time. Choi scored 1-over 72. ... First two out

are **Adam Schenk** and **Roger Sloan**, who withdrew after scoring 77 and 81, respectively.

7 **Stats Corner:** The course played harder than it has for almost two decades in the first round. The average of 71.295 on the 7,199-yard par 71 layout was the first over-par round since the third round in 2003 (71.015), and the first over-par opening round since then (71.865) as well. Strength of field may be a reason, even though pin placements weren't especially pernicious. ... A sneak look at Friday's pin placements indicate a tougher set to contend with. ... **Seth Reeves** uncorked the longest drive of the day, a 394-yard missile on the eighth hole. ... Precisely 530 birdies were recorded, bringing the two-day total to 768, including the 238 from the pro-am.

8 Hardy on his U.S. Open experience: "I wish the weekend went a little better. Still, in that regard, it was a great experience being in that spot headed into the weekend of a major, and I look forward to being in many more of those."

9 Hardy, proud Illinois graduate, on the startling news of the Big Ten adding Southern California and UCLA to the conference, which broke while he was on the course: "What? That's crazy."

It is, but it offers the possibility of a Big Ten golf championship in southern California down the line. Riviera, anyone? — **Tim Cronin**