

# ILLINOIS GOLFER THE OPENING 9

Monday,  
July 4, 2022

## The Postman always wins twice

REPORTING FROM SILVIS, ILLINOIS

**1** Winning is hard, even when you've led for three days.

You think about it. Even when you're not thinking about it, the idea of all the good things that come with a victory – the two-year exemption, a Masters berth, a British Open berth, the million bucks – is swirling about in the back of your head, disturbing your unconscious, if not knocking on your skull like a migraine headache.

**James Tyree Poston** fought off those thoughts and the rest of the field on Sunday to win the 51st John Deere Classic. He had been at the front since Thursday morning, leading by as many as five strokes on Saturday, and as little as one single shot at a point on Sunday's back nine, but nobody could catch him.

"There were definitely some nerves," Poston said. "I told the media all week I was just trying to stick to my game plan but it was hard not to think of winning. It was tough, especially today. I was trying to play solid golf and build the lead."

Poston scored 2-under-par 69 for 21-under 263 and won by three strokes over **Christian Bezuidenhout** and **Emiliano Grillo**. He opened by making birdies on the first three holes, but bogeys on the fifth and sixth holes via a three-putt and failure to get up and down changed the equation.

It was then that caddie **Aaron Flener** spoke up.

"Stick with the game plan," Flener told him as they went to the seventh tee.

"He's good about knowing when the step in and when to let me go," Poston said.

"He's really even-keeled, so I don't have to say much," Flener said.

Poston took Flener's advice to heart, and went on a most unDeere-like binge of 10 straight pars at TPC Deere Run, where birdies usually flourish. His 9-foot, 10-inch



John Deere Classic

**SILVIS' CHAMPION GOLFER OF THE YEAR** Wire-to-wire winner J.T. Poston with the one of the many rewards for winning the John Deere Classic.

par save on the par-4 13th after dumping his approach in the front bunker proved critical to keeping the lead.

"That putt got me some momentum going," Poston said. "Key putt."

The cast of contenders included Grillo for the longest time, **Denny McCarthy** for a while, **Christopher Gotterup** and **Scott Stallings** occasionally, and finally Bezuidenhout, who like Gotterup closed with a 5-under 66 by making birdies on three of the last five holes.

But when the final putt dropped, it was Poston hugging his fiancé on the 18th green.

"I wanted to get a second (PGA Tour) win to validate the win at Wyndham (in 2019)," Poston said.

The man nicknamed "The Postman" can consider that resume page stamped.

The consolation prize for Bezuidenhout and Grillo, which Poston also receives as previously not qualified, is

a berth in the 150th Open, a fortnight hence.

"I've always wanted to play in that, and to play in one at St. Andrews is special," Poston said.

Bezuidenhout needed putts to drop on the 12th, 16th and 18th to tie Poston. That was asking too much.

"Pity about the last hole," he said. "I was hitting a lot of good putts and it just didn't go my way at the end."

He and Grillo made \$631,900 for finishing second. Not the \$1.278 million Poston made, but it allows the luxury of a week off.

"I'm just happy to go home tonight or tomorrow and not play next week," Grillo said.

**2** Patrick Flavin was kicking himself for a bogey at the last. Playing exceptional golf and 6-under on the day, he had been tied for seventh on the 18th tee. Finishing in the top 10 would guarantee him a start in next week's Barbasol Championship in Kentucky. Finishing under that, and it was back to the Monday qualifying battle, where only four players advance.

Flavin has done so an astonishing five times this year, but that is a battle to be avoided.

Then he ripped his tee shot on the 18th into the copse of trees that impinge on the dogleg-right fairway. Now he had to figure out how to get from there to the promised land, the green some 170 yards distant and guarded by the Gator-infested pond to the left.

Bailing out was not an option. He thought he saw a window in the trees, took a 7-iron and swung.

The ball sailed into the air and –

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Bang! – dropped down into the rough. But with a clear spot to the green. He hit his third shot to about 18 feet, but missed the cup to the left.

“I have no regrets about how I played,” Flavin said. “I kind of kept my head down all day. Like even when my family and friends, I recognize their voices yelling at me, I was just trying to keep my head down and stay in my zone.”

It looked like the bogey would cost him until **Bo Hoag** finished bogey-bogey-bogey-double bogey, dropping to 12-under 272 and 16th place.

Flavin’s 14-under 270 aggregate, constructed on rounds of 70-66-68-66, earned him a career-best \$179,275. More of those finishes and he can say goodbye to the Monday grind. More rounds with 22 putts – only nine on the back nine – and he can say hellp to the winners’ circle.

Flavin, incidentally, is just like us. After hitting his approach on the 18th, he said, “Get lucky!” and after hearing the ball connect with the limb of the tee, asked the golfer’s eternal question: “Where is it?”

**3** Northbrook’s **Nick Hardy** is scrapping to make sure he has a PGA Tour card, but the way he’s playing, he’s going to win on the circuit sooner rather than later. A day after a ho-hum 71 on less than eight hours sleep, he rebounded with a 7-under 64, the round of the day, with two eagles on the back nine. It jumped him to 30th place and earned him a bit over \$39,000.

“I felt energized and ready,” Hardy said after his rounds, which included six birdies and a pair of bogeys along with the eagles. “There’s no doubt I shouldn’t be one of the most confident players in the world right now. I’m playing great golf and definitely feel I can do better, too, which is a good thing.”

Twice on Sunday, Hardy hit driver off the deck, and they were tee shots – on the drivable par-4 14th, which set up an eagle putt, and at the last, where he pounded it into the middle of the fairway.

“I do that a lot,” Hardy said. “Those two shots felt like it called for it, and I executed the shot perfectly.”

He was undecided on whether to play next week at Barbasol, but he’s played four straight weeks and admits he needs a break.

## Leading Finishers

Sunday, July 3

J.T. Poston	62-65-67-69-263	-21	\$1,278,000
Christian Bezuidenhout	69-65-66-66-266	-18	631,900
Emiliano Grillo	68-64-65-69-266	-18	631,900
Christopher Gotterup	65-67-69-66-267	-17	319,500
Scott Stallings	67-66-64-70-267	-17	319,500
Callum Tarren	68-65-65-70-268	-16	248,500
Denny McCarthy	66-65-66-71-268	-16	248,500
Maverick McNealy	70-63-68-68-269	-15	214,775
Cameron Davis	68-68-65-68-269	-15	214,775
Patrick Flavin	70-66-68-66-270	-14	179,275
Chesson Hadley	67-69-67-67-270	-14	179,275
Michael Gligic	64-69-68-69-270	-14	179,275



Tim Cronin / Illinois Golfer

**HARDY OUTLOOK** Nick Hardy hits his approach to the final green after hitting driver off the deck on the 18th tee.

**4** Kevin Strelman wasn’t making a lot of noise on Sunday until he made a lot. He aced the 189-yard 12th hole, using a 6-iron. His shot landed directly in front of the cup, hopped a couple of times and rolled in.

“I think it was No. 14 for me, second on Tour,” Strelman said. “It’s fun when it comes off exactly the way you want it to.” didn’t play my best.”

**5** Cedar Rapids legend **Zach Johnson** finished tied for 60th at 5-under 279 in his 20th straight Deere start.

**6** Poston is the season’s second wire-to-wire winner, following **Joaquin Niemann** at Riviera.

**7** Beyond Flavin, the sponsor-exempt and qualifying categories had a good year. Best of all was **Christopher Gotterup**, the sponsor exemption who tied for fourth, the best finish for an exempt player since **David Gossett**’s 2001 victory. Gotterup won \$319,500. **Morgan Hoffman**, who got the last exemption when **Steve Stricker** pulled out, earned \$16,880.25 in tying for 51st.

Of the two qualifiers making the cut, **Chris Naegel** tied for 16th, while **Preston Stanley** tied for 51st.

**8** One more Flavin story, first noted by **Ryan French**, the Monday qualifying expert known as @acaseofthegolf on Twitter: **Jack Sparling** wrote Sunday on Facebook, “Flavin was supposed to be a groomsman in my wedding yesterday. He called me when he got a sponsors exemption and asked me, ‘if it was ok to go play’ in John Deere and miss the wedding. I told him his invite has been revoked,” followed by a smiley face.

Asking if it’s all right to skip a wedding is the kind of guy Patrick Flavin is.

**9** **Stats Corner:** The field averaged 69.638 strokes on Sunday and 69.883 for the week, the highest overall total since 2008. ... There were 291 birdies on Sunday for a total of 2,041. That’s 136 more than last year. The total should add up to around \$13 million in Birdies for Charity awards. – **Tim Cronin**