McGraw wins state Publinx championship

By CLAY LATIMER
Rocky Mountain News Staff Writer

Twenty years ago, Tom McGraw spent his spare time learning to play golf on a public course near the Adams County Fairgrounds.

Yesterday, at the same recreation complex, he won the Colorado Golf Association Public Links Championship.

Playing with finesse and power at Riverdale Dunes, McGraw finished with a final 1, under 71. That gave the 37-year-old commercial banker a 54-hole, 1-over 217 and an easy win over Jim Brooks (224), Ken Sady (226) and Bill Boyd (226).

The last two rounds of the state championship served as qualifying for the USGA National Public Links Championship, which is set for July 13-18 in Cincinnati. McGraw (142), Guy Mertz (150), Sady (151) and Brett McDaniel (152) earned berths in the national tournament. McDaniel beat Steve Murphy on the second hole of a sudden-death playoff for the final spot.

After pars on Nos. 4 and 5, McGraw sensed he would prevail in both events.

"I played steadily, I hit a lot of greens and I didn't get in the bushes," said McGraw, an 11-time member of the Colorado Cup team. "I've been more confident.

"Since I grew up playing at Riverdale Knolls, this was sort of like being home. I felt good."

Riverdale Dunes, designed by Pete Dye, is one of the most distinctive courses in the region. It is the only public course Dye has designed west of the Mississippi River, and features bent-grass fairways.

Rolling hills, strategically placed water hazards and an unforgiving rough permit few sub-par rounds on the 3-year-old course.

But during one critical stretch of the final round, McGraw mastered Riverdale Dunes.

On No. 11, a 544-yard par 5 with a narrow undulating fairway that is bordered by water, the Westminster resident used 4-wood to reach the green in two. He two-putted for birdie to go 2-over for the tournament and gain a two-stroke lead on Boyd.

On No. 12, a 180-yard par 3, McGraw hit past the green to the edge of a bunker. His ball was nearly obscured by tangled grass. But McGraw overcame the bad lie and a difficult pin placement to chip to within six feet of the hole. He sank the par putt. Boyd bogeyed the hole and McGraw was on his way.

"It got fast and furious on those two holes," said McGraw. "The key was on Nos. 4 and 5. I made two pars, it was like stealing. But on No. 12, well, I hit that shot as good as I could."

On No. 13, a 476-yard, par 4, McGraw drove into rough bordering the left side of a narrow fairway, but still reached the green from 225 yards out.

McGraw ended up with bogey, but rebounded with a well-placed drive, an excellent sand wedge shot and five-foot putt for a birdie on the par-4 14th.

"The trick was not to give it away," said McGraw. "After I got it going, I was determined to play steady golf."

In recent years, McGraw has had to juggle his career with his passion for golf.

"I've been around a long time. I've been a runner-up, an also-ran, a lot of times in the state amateur and other tournaments. This feels really good."

Tom McGraw saved par on 13th hole at Riverdale Dunes with this chip out of bunker to within three feet of cup.

Scores

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Colo. Public Links</th>
<th>Results from the Colorado Public Links Championship played on the par-72 Riverdale Dunes Golf Course.</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>McGraw</td>
<td>73-71-71-07 - 215</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brooks</td>
<td>71-76-73-220</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sady</td>
<td>75-78-75-774</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boyd</td>
<td>70-73-70-726</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mertz</td>
<td>77-75-77-239</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Murphy</td>
<td>75-76-70-221</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gartner</td>
<td>73-76-70-230</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smith</td>
<td>74-73-71-238</td>
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<tr>
<td>Leitcher</td>
<td>70-76-74-230</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total: 285</td>
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</tbody>
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Ray Markowski 78-78-78 - 242
Andrew McFarlane 79-76-71 - 226
Matt Eberhardt 78-76-71 - 226
Mike Eberhardt 78-76-71 - 226
Qualifiers for the USGA National Public Links Championship

McGraw 77-71 - 148
Mertz 77-71 - 148
Sady 77-71 - 148
McDaniel 77-71 - 148