

Chip-in bird helps Crabtree to third match-play crown

By Todd Phipers

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Mark Crabtree was upset that he didn't qualify for last week's U.S. Public Links Championship, but he found a way to turn disappointment into satisfaction.

The 36-year-old Fort Collins golfer finished off a solid week at Bear Creek Golf Club yesterday by defeating Ken Sady of Vail 4 and 3 for the 1992 Colorado Match Play Championship.

It was the third state match-play title for Crabtree, but the other two came so long ago that he wasn't even sure after closing out Sady with a gimme par on their 33rd hole in what years (1975-76) he previously had triumphed.

What the two-year Colorado State golf coach was certain of, however, was that the 1992 crown was more gratifying than his two wins as a University of Colorado undergraduate in the '70s.

"When you're a young college player, you step up on the tee and you believe you're going to hit good shots and you're going to make putts and you're going to win," he said.

"When you get older, you see a lot more of the other stuff and your mind seems to wander. You have to just keep grinding, so I think this is more satisfying than the others."

As he had done most of the week in winning five matches to reach the final, Crabtree got ahead early, shaking off an opening-hole birdie by Sady to go 3 up after nine holes and holding that edge through the rest of the morning 18.

"I played pretty well, but I didn't make any putts and he made some good saves coming in to make it a match," the winner said of the first half of the finale. "Then

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he played better on the third nine than I did."

Down 4 through three holes in the afternoon, Sady parlayed two pars and a birdie into wins on three straight holes to climb back to 1 down after seven.

"The only concern I had was that I hadn't done what I needed to do," Crabtree said of the stretch in which his cushion rapidly slipped away. "My concern was that I start playing a little better."

He did that at No. 8, where he blunted Sady's comeback bid by chipping in for a birdie 3 before the runnerup had a chance to finish his par from short range.

"I think the chip in on eight was a real key, because I was only 1 up, and who knows what's going to happen there?" the champion said.

Sady couldn't have agreed more. "I was making a damn good move on him and he hits that shot off the hill there," the 35-year-old Vail

bartender said of Crabtree's delicate 35-footer over a knoll. "I ran into a solid, solid player today."

Crabtree climbed back to 3 up with a par at No. 9, saw his lead drop a notch when Sady birdied the next hole, then all but decided the outcome with a brilliant 7-iron tee shot to within a foot en route to a birdie at the 193-yard 13th hole.

"That was the same club as I hit in the morning, but the first time I turned it right to left, which is the wrong way to do it. The second time was left to right, which is my normal shot, and it happened to go close at the right time," he said.

Two holes later, Sady was unable to save par after losing his second shot in a hazard at the par-4 15th and Crabtree had nailed down the victory.

"I think when you've won it before and it's been such a long time, it makes it extra special to win it again," he said. "You never know if you're going to win it again."



MARK CRABTREE