Welz gets best of birdie barrage

By Todd Phipps
Denver Post Sports Writer

Ever seen a seniors slam-dunk contest?

Bert Welz and Larry Eaton put on golfing’s equivalent of one in the title match of the Colorado Seniors Match-Play Championship at The Ranch Country Club yesterday, banging home birdies from long range on the final four holes as Welz prevailed 1-up.

The match was decided by the last of those four, a 50-foot, downhill breaker on the 18th hole that staved off a gallant comeback bid by Eaton.

It was the second straight victory in the tournament for the 53-year-old Welz, of Columbine Country Club, making him the first back-to-back winner in senior match play since Ed Nosewicz in 1977-78. And it deprived the 58-year-old Eaton, of Greeley Country Club, a fifth title in the event he last won in 1987.

“Larry’s one of the greatest competitors,” Welz said, “and just to be in the same league playing with him, I really enjoyed it. He’s a player.”

Both finalists cruised through their morning semifinals, Welz downing Tom Reed 3 and 2 while Eaton was eliminating John Kaiser 4 and 3. Early in the deciding match, it appeared that Welz might enjoy more of the same.

He jumped in front with a 15-foot birdie putt on the first hole, went 2-up with a par on No. 3 and extended his lead to 3-up when Eaton’s attempt to backhand a chip from under a tree on the following hole hit him in the leg, an automatic loss of hole.

“I didn’t play very well for the beginning of the round,” Eaton said. “I don’t know why, I just didn’t hit it as crisply as I like.”

But the long-time state amateur standout battled back, twice narrowing the margin to 1-up, and that’s the way it stood going to the par-3 15th.

It was there that the fireworks began, with Welz draining a downhill 30-footer for birdie to go 2-up with just three holes to play. “I thought, definitely, the tide was going my way,” he admitted.

“Two down and three to play is tough,” Eaton agreed, “and I figured I had to make a putt and maybe I could get back in it. I knew he wasn’t going to let me in so I knew I had to get birdies.”

No sooner said than done. After a 20-footer at No. 16 got him back within 1-down, Eaton left his tee shot on the par-3 17th about 20 feet right of the flagstick. “I guess I’ll just drain it,” he said, then did to draw even for the first time in the match.

“I was happy to be even on the 16th tee,” said Eaton, and no doubt even happier when he boomed a drive right down the middle and Welz hooked his into the left rough, behind some trees and in the general firing line of the course’s practice range.

With practice balls bouncing all around him, Welz drilled a 8-iron shot about 170 yards up the hill to the green, some 30 feet above the flag, and Eaton hit a poor approach shot that left him below the hole, a little farther away.

Believe it or not, that’s the way Welz preferred it. “I’d rather have a downhill putt than an uphill putt. On these grainy greens, it’s a lot easier putting downhill. The ball stays on track a little longer,” he said.

That unorthodox strategy proved sound when Eaton left his first putt well short and Welz followed it with the winner. “Larry’s uphill putt was quite a bit short and I figured, ‘I’m just going to lag this and let the grain take it.’”

BIRDIE TIME: Bert Welz plants a kiss on his ball after sinking a birdie putt on the 15th hole as runner-up Larry Eaton looks on.

MATCH PLAY

Results yesterday in the Colorado Seniors Match-Play Championship at the Ranch Country Club:

SEMFINALS
Bert Welz def. Tom Reed 3 and 2; Larry Eaton def. John Kaiser 4 and 3.

FINALS
Welz def. Eaton 1-up

Please see CGA on 55

18th-hole putt proves decisive

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CGA WINNERS

Championship: Bert Welz def. Larry Eaton 1-up.
Championship consolation: Jack Bradbury def. Dick Green 4 and 3.
Scratch first flight: Leo Davis beat Homer Dunn 1-up.
Net first flight: Dick Coffenbough defeated Richard Kern 7 and 6.
Third flight: Paul Maschindel defeated Bob Betz 2-up.
Fourth flight: Robert Hollahan defeated Don Van Schooneveld 3 and 2.
Fifth flight: Jerry Russell defeated Ed Tanguay 2 and 1.
Sixth flight: Oliver Padilla defeated Charlie Austin 2 and 1.

CGA Senior Match Play

Bert Welz defends title

Greeley Country Club was the site of the 10th annual CGA Senior Match Play Championship last month at The Ranch Country Club.

Welz won the match on the first hole, taking a three-hole lead from the start.


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