ACT SENIOR AMATEUR CHAMPIONSHIPS 2022

Report from DGA Captain and event organiser – Jim Jackson

After a 2-year Covid-19 enforced absence, the best senior golfers (i.e., those over 55 years of age) mainly from the eastern states, returned to Canberra this past week (14th—17th November) to play in the four-day ACT Senior Championships. In sequence, the courses used were Federal, Gungahlin Lakes, Gold Creek, and Royal Canberra. All previous championships have been 3-day's duration. This year we a trialled a longer 4-day format, which seemed to be well-received, but the total of around 80 was down significantly on the 120 that played in 2019. Approximately 60 men and 20 women started the competition. Only 10 of these were not on single figure handicaps. Several Australian Representative Players, who had originally entered, pulled-out prior to the event, due to impending representative duties in SE Asia.

The weather for the week was "ordinary". There were strong winds and squally showers on Monday, cool breezes and freezing sleet on Tuesday and cold winds on Wednesday. Luckily, Thursday at Royal was a calmer, sunnier and warmer day for the final round and presentation. All courses were presented in remarkably good condition considering the persistent rain experienced in Canberra over the past few months. Preferred lies (due mainly to damp fairways) were played on two of the courses.

DAY 1 - FEDERAL: Cold and blustery with several rain showers during the day. The course was a little damp under foot, so preferred lies were played. At the end of the day, the best gross score for the men was a 1-under par from Dunheved's John Fearnley, with ex-Federal Golf Club Captain, Wally Gregory, only one-shot behind, with a par round of 72. The rest of the men's field were a few shots adrift. Looking at the nett scores, there were 7 players on par or better with Maitland's Wayne Cambourn, (off a 9 h/c) on a score of 68, equal with Wally (h/c 4) also on nett 68.
Based on the scores, it appears the women found the course and conditions a little harder than the men. At the end of the day, Newcastle's Jane MacDonald (gross 76) held a commanding 4-shot lead over Buninyong golfer, Helen Pascoe (gross 80).

DAY 2 – GUNGAHLIN LAKES: Again, another cold and blustery day, with an early 7:30 start. The fairways were dry, so preferred lies were not used. Many players struggled to master the course and conditions. Gungahlin is undoubtably the most unforgiving course in the district with water hazards on many holes, so that less-than perfect shots can be severely punished. Also, due to the recent wet weather, the second cut was fairly narrow and the grass in the rough was --- well, rough and thick! Although an 'average' blue course was set (the format I play each Wednesday in the Comp.) the scores indicated many players struggled. Best gross score on the day was a 74 (2-over) from Kingston Heath golfer Gordon Claney. Next best was Pacific Dunes golfer Peter Beard with a 77. There were only 8 scores in the 70's. Many scores were in the 80's, mostly caused by 8's and 9's on the pond-bordered, par-5 13th and 16th holes. Comparing nett scores, Danny Acret (Penrith) took out the daily prize with a par 72 round, just one shot in front of Gordon.
Like the men, the women struggled. Helen turned the tables on Jane, from day 1, and took out the daily Gross Prize with a score of 79, to Jane's 80. Several scores in the low 100's indicated that the higher teen-handicapped ladies found the going particularly tough.

DAY 3 – GOLD CREEK: For the past few weeks this course has been playing three of its holes (the par-5 3rd, the par-4 6th, and the long par-4 10th) as temporary par 3's, due to extensive flooding on the fairways. The green staff are commended for bringing the course back to something like its full complement of holes for this championship. However, the dog-leg par-5 14th hole was taken out-ofplay for the day for urgent drainage works around the green. We played a shorter white-course and returned to preferred lies for this day. Although the weather on the day started off reasonably pleasant, there were several short, sharp showers during the day, but at the end of the day, sleet and hail tested the metal of all competitors.

Despite the weather, average scores were about 4 shots lower than the day before. With only 2 bogies on his card, but 3 birdies to cancel these out, David McClelland (Wyong Golf Club) took the day's Gross prize with a 1-under par score of 69. He was closely followed by Stefen Albinski (Mona Vale) with a 71. Gordon Claney, John Osborn (Mudgee), Darren Payne (Highlands), Bruce Edwards (Mona Vale), and Mathew Doughty (Royal Sydney) were closely behind with rounds of 73.

The women in comparison found the course (and/or the weather conditions) pretty tough. The best gross score on the day was from Newcastle's Jill Blenkey (a previous winner of this event) with an 83. Helen Pascoe, Shirley Dean and Pauline Jeffery all shared 2nd place on a score of 84.

DAY 4 -ROYAL CANBERRA: As mentioned earlier, nicer weather prevailed on this final day, which was an 8:00am Shotgun start on the Westbourne Woods Course. The entire field was seeded, with the men and women playing in their seperate seeded groups. The leading seeded group for the men comprised Gordon Claney on 223, David McClellend on 225, Wally Gregory on 227, and John Fearnly on 228.

The leading seeded group for the women comprised Jane McDonald (Newcastle) on 241, Helen Pascoe (Buninyong) on 243, Jill Blenkey (Newcastle) on 250 and Shirley Dean (Sanctuary Cove) on 255.

Steady golf from Gordon, with a 1-over par 37 on the front-9, followed by a 2-over par 37 on the back-9 was enough for him to pull-away slightly from the others in the group and finish as the 2022 ACT SENIOR Champion on a total of 297, 4 shots ahead of David. The lowest round for the day was a gross score of 73 from Darryl Whitehead, who is a RCGC member, so knows the course well.

In the women's competition Jane played by far the best golf to record a gross score of 78, the lowest of the day (by 10 shots) and thereby take out the 2022 ACT SENIOR Women's Championship with a total of 319, 12-shots ahead of Helen on 331. Former Champion (2017) Jill Blenkey came 3rd, 1-shot in front of Shirley Dean.

My thanks to the four clubs for hosting these rounds and also to my fellow committee members for their help and assistance during the week -- Geoff Hine (Treasurer), Les Wallace (Vice President), Garry Heald (President), Gail Goiser (Junior Manager) and Stewart Jones (Match).