

Summary: An accurate iron and a birdie putt make a 1-shot victory

Dave DeLong called it the finest clutch shot of his golf career, and it looked that way to everyone who saw it Sunday at Heron Lakes Golf Course.

The shot, a 3-iron from 190 yards that tracked toward the pin as if guided by radar, set DeLong up for a 3 1/2-foot birdie putt at the 413-yard 18th hole.

Moments later, he sank the putt for a harrowing 1-shot victory in the **Northwest Open**, sponsored by G.I. Joe's and Thriftway.

"I admit I was shaking on that last putt," DeLong said.

DeLong, who lives in Clayton, Calif., but spends much time with his family in Portland, closed with a 3-under-par 69 for a 13-under finish of 203 for 54 holes. It was a record low score for the Open in its five stagings at Heron Lakes, but it was barely enough to stave off Mark Rohde of Spokane, who had a 67 for 204.

Mike Nicolette, a PGA Tour pro from Buffalo Grove, Ill., and 1989 champion Brian Mogg of Tacoma shared third place at 207, Nicolette getting there with a 66, the best score of the final round.

Tour pro Bob Gilder of Corvallis, struggling with his iron play for the third day in a row, was alone in fifth place at 208 after a 71.

"Mark played some great golf today, and I commend him for it," said DeLong, 33. "When I slipped just a little, he was right there. This one could have gone either way."

It looked that way after Rohde pulled into a tie with back-to-back birdies from 5 feet at the 390-yard 16th and 511-yard 17th holes. DeLong made his lone bogey of the day and a par on the two holes to lose a 3-shot lead.

"I didn't want it to come down to the last hole like that," DeLong said.

But it did, and the former University of Oregon golfer responded in a big-time manner.

"He had a hard time deciding between a 2-iron and a 3-iron for that last shot," said DeLong's wife and caddy, Cheri. "I told him to go with his first instinct. He did, and the shot looked gorgeous to me."

Approximately 2,500 spectators around the green roared when DeLong curled in the decisive putt that clinched him \$25,000 from a purse of \$134,500.

"The money is important to me, sure, but what I'll always remember is the honor of the **Northwest Open** title," DeLong said. "This tournament has so much tradition, and I've followed it for so long."

There also was the matter of his brother, John, having won the tournament as an amateur in 1986.

"That was an incentive, too," DeLong said with a smile.

DeLong, who attributed hard work and a switch to some new Tommy Armour irons for his improved play in the Open, saw Rohde catch him at 10-under with 11 holes to play. Then he bolted 3 strokes in front with birdies at 8, 12 and 13.

"With three holes to go, I told my caddy, 'I just want to make birdies on two of the last three holes,'" Rohde said. "I did that. When you lose to a birdie on the last hole, that's the way it goes."

The previous low winning total at Heron Lakes was 206 in 1988 when Fred Couples defeated Mac O'Grady in a playoff.

There were bizarre happenings Sunday, too.

Sean Arey of Trysting Tree, using an 8-iron from 153 yards, sank the shot for an eagle at the 16th on his way to a 68 and 212.

Not so fortunate was Gerry Norquist of Portland, last year's runner-up. He was hit with four penalty strokes after having a family member in addition to his caddy ride in his golf car. The penalty pushed him back to a 73 and 219. OPEN NOTES: Jim Gibbons of Portland took the first two prizes in the tournament's Million Dollar Hole in One contest with two shots less than 9 feet from the cup on the 150-yard hole. He earned an airlines trip for two to a place of his choosing and a trip for two to a PGA Tour tournament.