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SENIOR CITY GOLF

Vernasco's 2-putt on 18 seals victory

Edges out Till, claims 1st City title

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The Journal Gazette

When Steve Vernasco was coaching high school golf, he advised his players not to tell a golfer where he stood on the leader board unless he asked.

On the last hole Monday at the Senior City Championship, Vernasco wanted to know what he needed to do on the 18th green, and the gallery told him: a two-putt for par would win it.

A par is what Vernasco got at Coyote Creek Golf Club and the advice paid off; he finished the two-day tournament at 5 under, including a final-round 2-under 70.

"I got up here and I didn't find out until I got on the green that I needed a two-putt to win," said Vernasco, who got his first victory in four appearances at the Senior City, which is run by the Senior Golf Association of Fort Wayne. "I asked somebody, just so I knew. If you've got to make it, then you'll putt differently than if you've just got to two-putt. I wanted to know."

Vernasco won the Fort Wayne Golf Association's City Championship in 1989, 1999 and 2002 but said he'd been in a "14-year drought" at local major tournaments before winning at Coyote Creek, a club he knows well because he's a former member.

"I can't tell you how lucky we are just in Fort Wayne (to have tournaments like this). I think about it all the time," Vernasco said. "I've been at this since 1991 in Fort Wayne golf. It's a neat thing we have going, and you're just humbled because there are so many good golfers in Fort Wayne.

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Defending City Senior champion Sam Till Jr. missed repeating by a stroke.

LEADER BOARD

At Coyote Creek
Par 72

Steve Vernasco	69-70–139	5 under
Sam Till Jr.	72-68–140	4 under
Matt Schmidt	72-68–140	4 under
Mark Rietdorf	72-70–142	2 under
Tom Wood	70-73–143	1 under

Photos by Samuel Hoffman | The Journal Gazette

Steve Vernasco sinks a long putt from the edge of the No. 9 green during the final round of the City Senior Golf Championship on Monday at Coyote Creek.

CITY

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I just can't tell how much it means, just to compete again because it's fun. And then to win, it's just a cherry on top, and it's very special."

Vernasco finished one stroke ahead of Sam Till Jr., the champion in 2003, 2005, 2009, 2014 and 2015, who eagled the 478-yard 18th with a short putt to pull into a tie for second with Matt Schmidt. Both had final-round 68s to finish 4 under.

Mark Rietdorf, who won the Senior City in 2008, the last time it had been at Coyote Creek, shot a 70 to finish at 2 under and in fourth place. Tom Wood, the champion in 2011 and 2013, posted a 73 to finish 1 under and in fifth place. And Dr. Bill Argus, the first-round leader at 4 under, finished in sixth place at even par.

The course played at 6,209 yards, shorter than Vernasco, 58, is accustomed to at Coyote Creek.

"You still hit driver off the tee, but a lot shorter irons. Today, I hit the ball with the irons really bad. They were on the green, but something was wrong," Vernasco said. "I two-putted a lot, though. I was patient. (My knowledge of the greens) helped once I figured out I was standing up too tall and I was pulling every putt. I rubbed Jim Reecer's shoulders – he's the best putter in Fort Wayne – and all of a sudden I made three in a row. So, it's all thanks to Jim Reecer."

After he birdied the par-3 14th, Vernasco had a miraculous save on the par-5 15th. His second shot hit a cart path and a tree, and after hitting out from under trees, he drained a 20-foot birdie putt to go to 5 under.

"Then on 17, I hit probably the best shot of my life, putting a 3-iron to about 4 feet away (on the 200-yard par-3), but then I had to putt right over a giant spike mark," Vernasco said. "It was right in my line and the ball hopped up and hit the lip. I had been hoping for a bigger lead going into the last hole."

But he got his par on 18 and the championship.

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