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Ex-Tour Pro Connelly A Star in Philly Open

By JOE GREENDAY

Jack Connelly spent some time with the "Swing's the Thing" show with Harry Obitz and Dick Farley, toured the world standing on one foot, then the other, hitting golf balls better than some guys with both feet on the ground.

Connelly got to be so good at it, he tried the pro tour because he had to find out how he stacked up against the biggies who hit the ball 300 yards, sign autographs and are anchored in front of the pay window each week.

"I remember being well up in the field during the final round of the Kaiser International in Napa, Calif., and I was paired with Gay Brewer and Lionel Hebert," Connelly was saying yesterday at Philadelphia Country Club.

"Well, Brewer walked through the ropes to the first tee and he got a loud applause. Then Hebert followed and the reception was the same. Then it was my turn and... nothing."

AFTER EIGHT TOUR events in 1972, Connelly sensed he didn't belong. But he had to give it a try because he didn't want to go through life wondering if he could have made it on the tour.

"Made about \$3,000 overall, when I wasn't missing the cut," he said. "I had to get it out of my system and I learned an awful lot."

The 32-year-old Connelly, now pro at Huntingdon Valley CC, also learned to keep both feet on the ground and to win more than his share of Philadelphia PGA events — Lavino Open, Pocono Manor, Westlake-Lexan twice, just to name a few. He was named local PGA Player of the Year in 1976 and '78.

ALL OF THAT now seems obscure for the amiable Connelly, who went out and beat a limited field to win the Philadelphia Open and the \$1,000 top prize yesterday. Connelly had rounds of 74-71 for a 145, 3-over par for the 36 holes, one shot better than Philadelphia Cricket Club pro Bruce MacDonald (76-70) and Lanerch amateur Jim Robertson (73-73), who was runner-up to Buddy Marucci in the recent City Amateur championship. Bob Sheppard (Sandy Run) and Jim Bromley (Waynesborough) tied for third at 148.

The victory for Connelly ranks right up there with the 1975 U.S. Open at Medinah (Chicago), where he played the four rounds and tied for 60th place.

"People think of 60th place as not a very good finish," said Connelly, "but when you figure there were something like 4,238 entries to play in the Open, then 60th place isn't too shabby."

"I GUESS WE'RE all on an ego trip. Everybody sees a local pro and they

think of him as a player. They don't realize the business end of the profession and that we have to cure Mrs. Smith's slice. I always wanted to win this or the Philadelphia PGA championship. The others don't mean as much," Connelly remarked.

Philadelphia Country Club's 71 par and 6,575 hilly yards was more than a challenge for the field of 34 pros and 16 amateurs. MacDonald's 1-under 70 in the afternoon was the only sub-par round of the day while only three others matched par, including Connelly.

"Maybe what Sam Snead told me during the IJB Classic is true," related MacDonald. "He said local pros have a way of turning 70 rounds into 75s while the touring pros turn 75s into 70s. Touring pros have an incredible knack of making pars from just about everywhere. They are great putters and chippers. A 10-foot putt for a par is almost automatic for them."

WHICH SEEMED TO be the opposite for Connelly, who admitted he gets the shakes when he misses the greens with his approach shots.

"I don't practice the short game as much as I should," he said. "I drove the ball super today and right now I'm playing the best I ever have in my life. But I keep coming up empty with the putts. I guess I'm having the same problem as Jack Nicklaus with the putting. And it seemed today every time I missed the green I got a bogey."

And the players wouldn't have missed the Country Club's 15th hole,

a par-3, which turned out to be a real migraine. It measures 221, but Connelly said it was more like 240, with the pin hidden in the left-hand corner.

"I don't think 30 percent of the field could get to the pin with their tee shots," said Connelly. "Even if you hit the green, you didn't have a chance of making par."

Connelly parred the hole in the morning but bogeyed it after lunch, one of his three bogeys in the p.m., which he offset with three birdies.

CONNELLY SAID HIS days of the tour are over... the days of different grasses, different courses, different food.

"I was a rabbit and they don't like rabbits out there. It seems the guys who make it get all the breaks," Connelly commented. "I wanted to play a course in St. Louis and I was told I had to play with a member. Then I asked about the practice range, and they told me I couldn't use the range until the members were done with it. You had to be a name and it was all in who you know."

"But I enjoyed it and I had some fun and I learned some things, just as I did when I was touring with Obitz and Farley. The show was invaluable for experience. You practiced your specialty two hours a day, every day for six weeks and you performed in front of 20,000 people. You soon learn to play in front of people."

And finish in front in the Philadelphia Open.

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