

Golfers find life at top 'relaxing'

By Jim Elsleger
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Relax.

The players are.

Two leaders, a challenger, a challenger to the challenger, a couple of players who could do it and a gathering of some pretty competent players waiting for some slippage up front.

That about sums up today's final round in the \$150,000 Tucson Conquistadores LPGA Open at Randolph North Golf Course.

Eight players are four shots apart, 12 six shots apart, 17 seven shots apart, etc.

It seems like something most folks could get pretty excited over, especially players. But such is not the case with most of the leaders, except Debbie Massey.

"I'm real excited," Massey said, "real excited."

After a 68 in yesterday's second round tied her for the lead with Tucson resident Chris Johnson at 10-under-par 206, Massey was excited. She even said so three or four times. Or was it five?

"I do this to win tournaments, that's why I play," Massey said. "To me, this is exciting."

But Johnson, a former University of Arizona All-American, is seeking her second consecutive LPGA title in her home state.

But Johnson said she is much more relaxed going into the final round today than in Phoenix last week, when she won the Samaritan Turquoise Classic by five shots with a closing 72.

"When I sank that putt on 14 (yesterday for a birdie to go 9-under), I was real relaxed," said Johnson, whose 66 tied her low LPGA career round. "I haven't really been very relaxed. But I am now. Very relaxed."

Becky Pearson is fourth at 208 after a 69. In the pack is the LPGA's 1983 Player of the Year, Patty Sheehan, at 7-under, Ayako Okamoto, the winner here in 1982, at 6-under, Sally Little at 6-under and defending champion Jan Stephenson at 5-under.

Of the group, Pearson seems the only player who doesn't belong. For the first time in her career, she shot three consecutive sub-par rounds. She said she's in the best position going into the final round that she's ever been in.

"I'm playing relaxed and having fun," Pearson said. "I'll try to relax tonight and forget about it, but that might be easier said than done."

Janet Coles, tied for fifth with Sheehan after a 69, said she's relaxed, because "all I can do is go out and do the best I can."

"I haven't played well all year, and I'm digging myself out of a golfing hole," Coles said. "I have to get back in the comfortable position of playing in contention. Last year, I came off a good season, and I put pressure on myself to do it again. I realized this week you can't go out there and try to make it happen; you just go out and do the best you can. I'll go home and relax and not worry about it."

Peterson, who eagled the final hole yesterday for a 70 and third place at 9-under 207, said basically the same thing as Coles: "I'll just play my game and go for it."

But if what Sheehan did yesterday is an indication of what relaxing does for you, the "relaxed" players could be in trouble.

"I just couldn't get going, it was just a blah; I couldn't get excited," said Sheehan, who shot 74.