

PHILO STORMS TO THE TITLE

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More than halfway through yesterday's final round of the New England Open, the weather matched Ron Philo Jr.'s emotions steamy hot and ready to bubble over. Mother Nature erupted first, perhaps the key reason he won the \$150,000 championship at Lake Winnepesaukee Golf Club in New Durham, N.H.

Returning from a two-hour delay because of dangerous weather, Philo went eagle-birdie to highlight his round of 2-under-par 70 that got him into the winner's circle at 13-under 203, two shots ahead of Brian Lamberti (67205). Sponsored by Sovereign Bank, the 32d New England Open featured the largest purse in NEPGA history and rewarded Philo, the teaching pro at the Kittansett Club in Marion, a record prize of \$40,000. If he knew where to send it, he'd surely offer Mother Nature a cut of it, too.

"Luckily, we had the break, because I was able to take a deep breath," said Philo, who watched a three-shot lead turn into a one-shot deficit in the 12 holes he played before lightning filled the sky above this majestic layout in the wooded hills overlooking Lake Winnepesaukee. Knowing the horn would sound, Philo rushed a short putt at the 12th, missed, and was 1 over for the day, 10 under for the tournament, and looking up at Lamberti. Having started the day tied for fifth, five shots back, Lamberti played 12 holes in 5 under and was 11 under going in to the delay.

"I was on a good run, so I didn't want to stop," said Lamberti, a member of the Cleveland Golf Tour, a New England-based minitour.

He had to, though, because of the weather, though that wasn't nearly as unsettled as Philo's emotions.

"I wasn't happy about anything," he said. "After I missed that putt, I was just gnashing my teeth. I burned a lot of adrenaline being mad."

Lamberti had a shot at the easiest scoring hole on the course, the 13th, but only made par. When Lamberti three-putted for bogey at the 405-yard 14th, he fell into a tie but not for long, because Philo eagled the 13th. When he followed with a birdie at the 14th, Philo had swiftly restored a three-shot lead and four consecutive pars coming home sealed his first New England Open title.

Three other members of the Cleveland Golf Tour Nick Cook (67), Corey Brigham (70), and Drew Mayhew (70) finished tied for third at 10 under. Todd Vernon, the first-round co-leader with Philo, matched his opening score, a 66, to finish sixth, at 9-under 207.

For Philo, it was a nice sendoff because he'll leave for Ireland Sunday to represent Team USA in the PGA Cup, a Ryder Cup-style competition between American club pros and those from Great Britain & Ireland. Chip Johnson of Hatherly CC in Scituate is also on the US team.