

R.I. Open: Philo pulls away for six-shot win

01:00 AM EDT on Friday, August 4, 2006

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MIDDLETOWN -- Ron Philo Jr. is having a great summer. And it got even better yesterday.

The man who can claim to be the best club pro in America won for the third time in six weeks, this time capturing the Amica Insurance R.I. Open at Newport National.

Philo, who began the final day in a tie for second, took the lead with a 69 in the morning, then pulled away with a sparkling 66 in the afternoon. His 54-hole total of 14-under 202 gave him a six-stroke victory over Newport's Patrick Horgan and amateur David Marino of Kirkbrae.

The day was special for both Horgan and Marino. Horgan was playing for the first time since having eye surgery, and he had more problems after competing in Wednesday's first round, to the point where he had to see a doctor before beginning play yesterday. Despite putting less than his best, the former PGA Tour pro still shot rounds of 71 and 68 for his 208 total.

Marino, playing locally for perhaps the final time before heading back to the University of Mississippi, proved that his runner-up finish in this year's State Amateur was no fluke. Using his power for an eagle and five birdies on the par-5s, Marino had back-to-back 68s. He and Horgan edged Mike Capone (76-68), New Hampshire's Rich Parker (69-70) and Maine's Mike Baker (72-68) for second.

By the middle of the final round, everyone not named Philo was competing for second. Philo had staked his claim to the \$6,500 first-place check.

"I played great, solid golf," Philo said. "I hit a lot of fairways and a lot of greens and I managed to get up and down when I did miss a green. I was just clicking on all cylinders."

When Philo is on, other club pros are in trouble. Six weeks ago, he won the National PGA Club Pro Championship in upstate New York. Last month, he won the Westchester Open in New York, where he now works.

Since he left New England this year (he was at Kittansett in Marion, Mass., last year and in Vermont for seven years before that), Philo ordinarily would not have been eligible for the Rhode Island championship. The event is open only to New England players.

However, like all past champions (he won in 2003), he is eligible for the rest of his life. He used the chance as a mini-vacation.

"We've been coming here since 1998 and we just love the golf and the people here," Philo said. "Like a lot of golf pros, we sometimes use the chance to play in an event like this as a mini-vacation."

He was simply too good for everyone in this field. He led by two after the second round and played almost flawlessly in the afternoon. He had control all the way and killed any hopes his pursuers had with an eagle on the par-5 11th.

Play finished only minutes before a strong thunderstorm hit the course.