

JESSICA NELMS | THE JOURNAL

Drew Ernst, of Seneca, works on his putting stroke on the practice green at Cross Creek Plantation prior to his round at the NGA Tour's Mountain Lakes Classic.

Ernst closes strong at Mountain Lakes event

BY ERIC SPROTT
THE JOURNAL

NGA PRO GOLF TOUR

SENECA — It's Drew Ernst's hope that rounds like the one he turned in to open the Mountain Lakes Classic at Cross Creek Plantation are on their way to being far and few between.

And though he didn't make the cut during his inaugural pro series event on the National Golf Association Tour, the former Seneca High School and Coastal Carolina standout went out on a high note Friday as he closed the tournament with consecutive birdies to finish with a 2-over-par round of 73 on his home course.

That's a far cry from the 11-over-par round of 82 — which included a quintuple bogey on the seventh hole — he fired Thursday, as he closed the tournament with some positive momentum.

"In the first round, I was basically just getting in my own way, putting a little too much pressure on myself, kind of pressing out there and not really relaxing, playing and trusting my game," Ernst said.

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ERNST: Finishes tourney with flourish

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"(The second round) gives me a little confidence, and I know I'm heading in the right direction.

"It's just part of the process, and I've just got to keep plugging."

Ernst finished with a two-day total score 155 — good for 13-over-par — to finish in a tie for 133rd place, short of the top-50 finish that it takes to advance to play through the weekend.

The leader heading into today is Auburn alum Nick Rousey, who fired a second-round 66 to put him at 9-under-par through two days.

The leader after day one, Rick Cochran, is just one shot off the lead and alone in second place at 8-under-par.

Ernst, the son of Cross Creek PGA professional and Director of Golf Operations Mark Ernst and the brother of 2011 NCAA individual women's champion Austin Ernst, graduated from Coastal Carolina in December and has played in a NGA Tour Winter Series event along with a pair of Nationwide Tour qualifiers.

He'll take part in another Nationwide qualifier next week in Valdosta, Ga., as he looks to make a career out of the sport.

And in getting himself ready to make an impact on the NGA Tour and beyond, Ernst has devoted much of his time training with his father, along with renowned instructor Ricky Sullivan, which he feels has paid major dividends as he chases his dream.

"I went down to see Ricky Sullivan to kind of straighten me out and get rid of everything that was in my head, and me and my dad have been working hard on it together and just going after it, and I'm starting to hit the ball a lot better."

The third round of the Mountain Lakes Classic will get under way this morning at 8 a.m., and admission is free.

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