Lower wins Mountain Lakes Classic

THE JOURNAL STAFF

SENECA — Over the course of the last 25 years, nearly 200 golfers have earned at least one win on the NGA Tour, but less than half have been able to grab a second victory.

Justin Lower is now a member of the latter group.

He used a birdie-birdie-birdie finish on Saturday to grab the lead in the Mountain Lakes Classic at Cross Creek Plantation. Then when heavy rain washed away Sunday's final round, Lower became a two-time winner on the top-rated developmental tour.

"It feels great to get another win. It's almost sweeter than my first one," said Lower, who has earned nearly $67,000 in eight NGA starts this season. "This course was in great shape, but it was tough. I kept the ball in front of me for the most part and just grinded my way around the course."

Despite earning his first victory less than two months ago, Lower played like a veteran at Cross Creek, becoming the only player to record three par-or-better rounds on the demanding layout.

He finished with a 4-under 209 total and claimed the $22,000 top prize.

Lower's tenacity was never more evident than late in the third round, when he bounced back from a bogey with a barrage of birdies.

"I kind of got mad when I made a bogey from the fairway on No. 14 in the third round," said Lower, who carded rounds of 71, 69 and 69. "I told myself to buckle down and get ready for the last holes.

"I felt like I could birdie them, and I did."

Lower finished with a two-stroke cushion, with Peter Malnati, Tony Finau and Joseph Harrison finishing in a three-way tie for second place, with each recording a three-day total of 211.

Other notable finishes included Matt Hendrix, a member of Clemson's 2003 national championship team, who finished in a tie for 27th at 218 after shooting rounds of 74, 73 and 71.

Seneca High School and Coastal Carolina alum Drew Ernst, meanwhile, shot rounds of 74, 73 and 71 for a three-day total of 218, good for a share of 50th place.



COURTESY OF THE NGA TOUR

Justin Lower watches his birdie putt on the 10th hole during action Friday at the NGA Tour's Mountain Lakes Classic at Cross Creek Plantation in Seneca.