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West/South Xtra: District amateur garners top state honor

GOLF

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Matt Freed/Post-Gazette

A productive spring, summer and fall helped South Fayette's Paul Schlachter earn his fourth Pennsylvania Senior Player of the Year award.

For golfer Paul Schlachter, success on the links can be attributed in part to his well-placed approach shots.

A South Fayette native, Schlachter has also taken home trophies in large measure to accurate drives off the tee.

No doubt, Schlachter, who captured his fourth Pennsylvania Senior Player of the Year crown, has found laser-straight drives and tight chips useful.

It is his work on the green, however, that cemented his place as the state's premier senior golfer.

In short, the proof is in his putting.

"He is a phenomenal putter," said Tyler Riggin, the Pennsylvania Golf Association's director of competition. "His approach is extraordinary. He really understands greens and stays away from three putts."

Schlachter, a retired history teacher at Upper Saint Clair High School, has become a mainstay on the Pennsylvania amateur senior leaderboard.

So tight is his clutch on the title as the Keystone State's top senior golfer that he has registered player of the year honors in four of the past five years.

"This award really means a lot," Schlachter said. "There are a lot of good players in the state, but this puts you on the map."

Schlachter compiled a point total of 465.7 while competing in the Jay Sigel Invitational, Better Ball Championship, Pennsylvania Senior Amateur and the Art Wall Jr. Memorial events.

His next closest competitors were Pittsburgh's John Rodney, who recorded a total of 350 points, and Gary Van Sickle of Pine with 300 points.

Senior status for the Pennsylvania Golf Association begins at age 55.

For Riggin, watching Schlachter, 62, continue to dominate younger competitors is a testament to his durability.

"At 62 he is still playing in his senior prime," Riggin said. "That is pretty extraordinary. He may not be hitting it as far, but he is still really accurate."

Schlachter has been a member at The Club at Nevillewood since it opened in 1992. Located in the Presto section of Collier Township and designed by Jack Nicklaus, The Club at Nevillewood features deep bunkers around greens, wide fairways and sloping contours.

Schlachter credits some of his success to the formidable Nevillewood layout and design.

"[Playing a lot of rounds at Nevillewood] has been a tremendous help," Schlachter said. "It is a championship course."

In addition to the tests Nevillewood provides, Schlachter credits Kevin Shields, a Mt. Lebanon native and the director of instruction at both Nevillewood and Sewickley Heights Country Club, with helping to fine-tune his play.

Shields said Schlachter has a rare and distinctive ability of consistently repeating a sound swing.

What's more, Schlachter does not crumble, especially on the putting green, when the stakes are at their highest.

"The moment is never bigger than he is," Shields said. "He has a high golf IQ and he is not going to choke."

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