



Above: Defending champion Arjun Atwal; Below: Jim Furyk; Opposite: Webb Simpson



2011

Tournament Recap

BY GAIL VADIA

Excitement and anticipation swirled around the 2011 Wyndham Championship, which drew many of the most accomplished golfers in the world to play at Sedgefield Country Club. Among the big-name competitors were three-time major winner and World Golf Hall of Fame member Ernie Els, three-time major winner Padraig Harrington, two-time U.S. Open champion Retief Goosen, 2010 FedExCup champion Jim Furyk, world No. 16 Paul Casey, world No. 17 Ian Poulter, world No. 18 Kyung-Tae Kim, world No. 19 David Toms, 2009 U.S. Open champion Lucas Glover, 2011 FedExCup champion Bill Haas, 2008 Masters winner Trevor Immelman, 2008 champion Carl Pettersson, three-time major winner Vijay Singh, two-time major winner Angel Cabrera, 2007 champion Brandt Snedeker, 1997 British Open winner Justin Leonard, two-time Wyndham winners Rocco Mediate and Davis Love III made up the fantastic field as well as defending champion Arjun Atwal.

"In 2011, the Wyndham Championship had the best field we've seen in 20 years," tournament director Mark Brazil said.

But despite all those major championship winners, Wyndham Championship spectators—both locals and visitors alike—found themselves pulling for a member of the home team when Webb Simpson took the lead for good during the third round with a late five-hole stretch of four birdies and an eagle. The 27-year-old Raleigh native has been familiar with the Wyndham Championship for almost half of his life, ever since his father took him to the event's former home at Forest Oaks Country Club at age 16 to caddy for Neal Lancaster during the Wednesday pro-am.

"That was probably the most fun 18 holes I've ever been a part of," Simpson said.

It was—until 2011, when Simpson—who graduated from Wake Forest University and

was crowned the Atlantic Coast Conference player of the year for the Demon Deacons in 2008—played the final 18 holes at Sedgefield without a bogey and with a memorable finish, marked by consecutive birdies on 15 and 16 and earned his first PGA TOUR victory.

Simpson's steady play kept him near the top of the leaderboard for most of the latter part of the tournament. But the competition was fierce. In addition to Simpson, several other ACC alumni had strong showings during the final round at Sedgefield, the country club where the ACC was founded in 1953. 2008 Wyndham champion and NC State alumnus Carl Pettersson—who grew up in Greensboro and attended Grimsley High School—made one of the most memorable birdies of the tournament on the par-4 first hole. After landing his tee shot in one of the decorative flower baskets alongside the first fairway, he

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PHOTOS BY (HEADSHOT) CARYN LEVY/PGA TOUR; (BUNKER & OPPOSITE PAGE) CHRIS CONDON/PGA

played his second shot to 55 feet from the pin and calmly chipped in for a routine birdie. Pettersson finished at 13-under-par, just five strokes off Simpson's winning mark. George McNeill, who was an all-conference player at Florida State in the 1990s, made a late charge with a birdie on No. 17 and moved to 15 under. However, the rally faded, and the former Seminole could get no closer and finished in sole possession of second place just three strokes behind Simpson.

Tommy "two gloves" Gainey led or shared the lead during the first two rounds. Gainey dropped back midway through the final round with two bogeys and a double bogey. Undeterred, he posted four consecutive birdies on Nos. 12 - 15 to bring him back into contention.

However, Demon Deacon Webb Simpson proved to be the competitor to beat. He opened his final round with eight straight pars before moving to 16 under with a birdie on the par-4 ninth hole. He stayed at 16-under-par for much of the back side until he carded



birdies on the par-5 15th and the par-3 16th taking a three-shot lead with two holes to go. "I knew I had a three-shot lead on 18," Simpson said after the tournament, "and as soon as I hit the ball in play, I knew it was probably over."

Simpson finished at 18-under (262), with a 3-under-par 67, George McNeill (64) was at 15 under, with Tommy Gainey (69) another stroke back in third place. Carl Pettersson (69), Vijay Singh (65), Jerry Kelly (65), Kyung-tae Kim (66) and Charles Howell III (67) finished at 13 under.

Simpson's victory, worth \$936,000, elevated him nine spots to third place in the final, regular-season FedEx Cup point standings. In the final event before the playoffs, competing against some of the most experienced golfers in the world while surrounded by his cheering family and friends, this hometown hero won his first PGA TOUR title after two near misses earlier in the PGA TOUR season. Simpson became the 16th first-time winner in Wyndham Championship history.

"I never thought that winning on the PGA TOUR would be this hard, all the pressure and everything that goes on to win a golf tournament," Simpson said. "I'm extremely pleased, and I really love the way I finished today. I thought my caddy and I did a really good job of coming in, choosing clubs, but I just thank everyone out there who supported me and cheered for me. It was just a fun week, and I really couldn't think of a better place to win than here in Greensboro."

Simpson would go on to win the Deutsche Bank Championship, the second event of the FedExCup Playoffs and finish second in the final 2011 FedExCup point standings—just 15 points behind fellow Demon Deacon, 2011 FedExCup champion Bill Haas. Not a bad way to end his second PGA TOUR season. ■



Left: Tommy Gainey;
Top Center: Paul Casey;
Top Right: Ernie Els

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