

A Hole In One brings out the best in Seton Hall Prep and Montclair golfers



A Hole In One is an extreme rarity in high school golf. In any given year, only a handful of aces are recorded in NJSIAA competition.

One of those rare moments occurred in early May at Essex County Country Club in West Orange, when Seton Hall Prep junior Connor McGahan scored a hole in one on the 147-yard ninth hole during an important and competitive match against rival Montclair.



Everything from the shot, from McGahan's swing to the ball rolling into the cup, happened to be captured by Rich Morris, Seton Hall Prep's outstanding school photographer. His photo montage also included the joyful reaction of McGahan, playing partner Brody O'Connor, and two others - their opponents in the match, the Montclair duo of brothers Henry and Will McDermott, who put aside the competitiveness and tension of the match to celebrate the achievement with their rivals.



It was a scene that showcased the best elements of high school sports competition, and is worthy of recognition during NJSIAA Sportsmanship Appreciation Week, sponsored by JAG-ONE Physical Therapy.

The buildup through the first eight holes and the result on the ninth is still fresh in McGahan's mind.

"My round up to the ninth hole was complicated," he said. "I was striking the ball well and only missed two greens entering the ninth tee box, but not scoring well. On the reachable par 5 eighth, I had an eagle putt on the back edge of the green and proceeded to walk off the hole with a four-putt bogey.

"I was pretty upset with my putting performance so I wanted to put one close on nine to end the round," McGahan said. "My teammate, Brody, went first, and his shot went on the green, but twenty yards short of the pin. Seeing how strong the wind was, I grabbed my eight iron instead of my nine. The pin was back center, so I knew I had room short of the pin and a hill long to spin the ball off of."

What followed was a moment that Connor will never forget.

“My first reaction to the shot was it was going long into the bunker,” he said. “However, I knew I hit it perfectly. My playing partners said it was a great shot but could not see where it went. A couple of seconds later I heard a roar and people around the green throw their hands up letting me know it went in. After hearing the roar, I dropped my club, sprinted five yards in excitement, and celebrated with a chest bump with Brody.”

The Montclair players, whose team ultimately lost the match, 171-185, were equally happy for their rival.

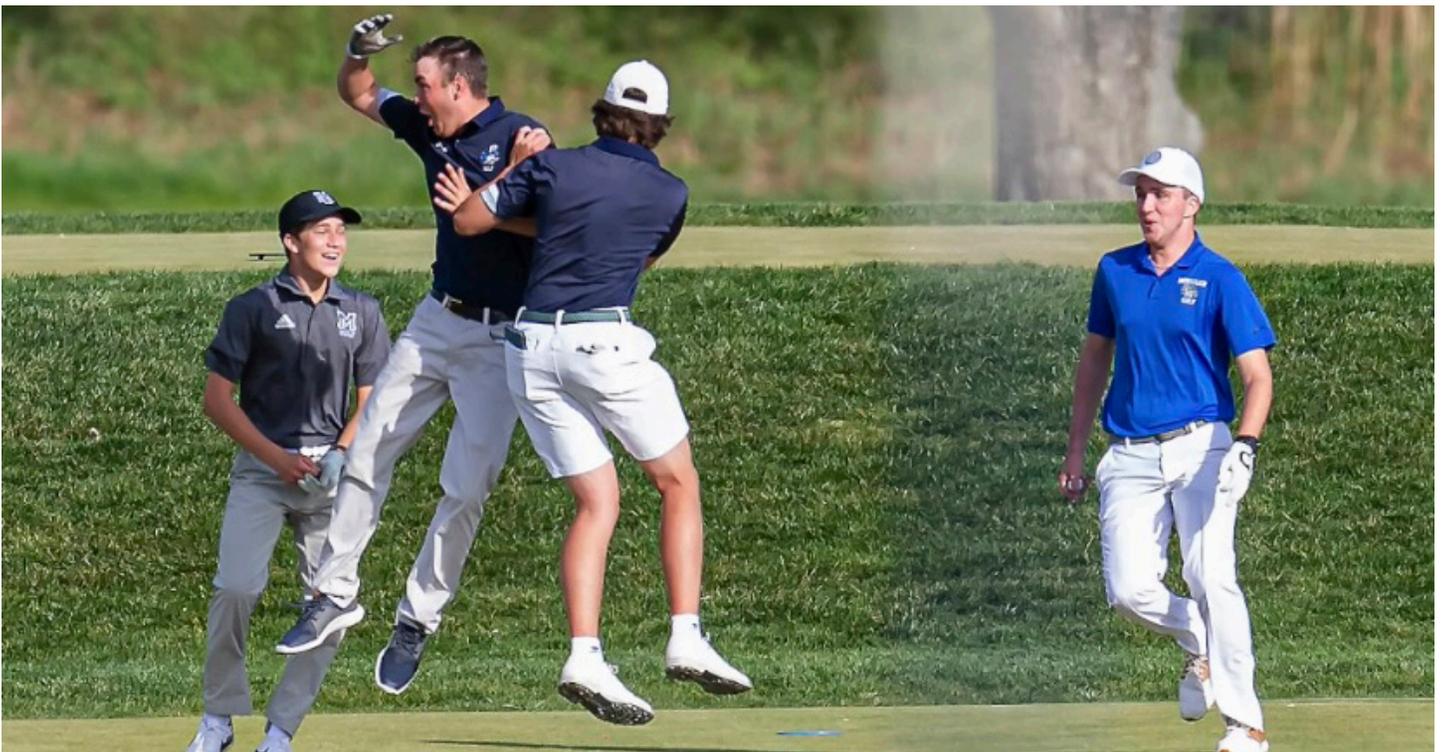
“It was a super tight match with sort of big implications, too, because we knew going into it we had to win it to go to sectionals,” Will McDermott said. “So it was intense, and we were playing well. We play Seton Hall a lot, so I knew the guys we were playing with, and they knew me and they knew my brother. We got onto the ninth hole, and we watched Connor hit it, and he hit it just past the flag. And we saw it roll back off the hill. Because the pin was above us, we couldn’t actually see it go in. But we

saw a couple of guys around the green who were screaming. Then we were like ‘No way!’ Connor started jumping and screaming, then we ran and jumped, he jumped into his teammate, and we were high-fiving and all that.

“At the end of the day, we’re just high school golfers, and watching a hole in one happen in front of you, it was cool,” Will said. “Connor is also a really awesome dude. So to see him get the hole in one, and get it on camera and in a big match, too, it was all really cool.”

Larry Baggitt, the Seton Hall Prep athletic director, was excited to hear about the ace, and to also learn that Morris had captured the hole in one scene with his camera. And upon first glance at the photos, he thought the four players were all from Seton Hall Prep. But then he quickly realized two of the smiling, celebrating golfers were from Montclair.

“The play itself is a golf shot you don’t see too much,” Baggitt said. “But to catch it all on film is even more rare at the interscholastic level. That golf shot was perhaps the last one Rich Morris would take in his 50 years with Seton Hall Prep, as he is retiring. As I watched it, as an athletic director, the celebration struck me as the more important portion of the



From left to right: Henry McDermott of Montclair, Connor McGahan of Seton Hall Prep, Brody O’Connor of Seton Hall Prep and Will McDermott of Montclair.



event. At first I thought all were Seton Hall Prep student-athletes, but then realized the Montclair student-athlete shared the same excitement for his opponent as if he was a part of the same team.

“One shot created a moment to foster all we share and teach our kids to be,” Baggitt said. “Great citizens, and to show great sportsmanship. The NJSIAA’s ‘Sportsmanship is Contagious’ campaign, to respect the game and respect your opponent, certainly was played out on the golf course that day.”

That view was shared by the coaches of the two teams, Kevin Williams of Seton Hall Prep and Taryn Schnell of Montclair.

“The picture conveys the sportsmanship that not only exists in high school golf, but the game of golf in general,” Williams said. “Despite competing in matches and tournaments throughout the year, the guys develop a friendship where they can appreciate a good round or shot even when they themselves aren’t playing well. The only thing more exciting than witnessing a hole in one is getting one yourself.”

“With high school golf, you’re not walking around with the kids,” Schnell said. “So to actually be told that, and then to see a picture of the four of those guys getting together like that...it was a great moment for Connor, but then to see my two guys also pumped up about it, it shows what the game is all about. Golf is a life-long activity, so we want them

to be social together. That moment proved we still have it. It was really special for the kids.”

The reaction of his opponents also left a major impression with McGahan.

“The importance and value of sportsmanship are essential to enjoying sports,” he said. “Henry and Will celebrating with me is a true testament to what sportsmanship is all about. As I was congratulated by various people, the one thing that they always mention is how cool it was to see the Montclair players celebrate with me.”

“You’ve got to be able to see the big picture,” said Will McDermott, who will be attending Vanderbilt in the fall. “It’s really fun to play in a competitive match, but there are some things that you have to celebrate, especially when it is someone who you get to know through competition. It couldn’t have happened to a better dude. He’s a very down to earth, very cool guy. It was great to see it happen.”

The postscript to it all was the photography of Morris, whose long tenure at the school is about to conclude. He’s served as a teacher and in various other capacities while also shooting all sorts of Seton Hall Prep events with his camera.

“Mr. Morris and (videographer) Mr. Candido do an excellent job capturing Seton Hall Prep Athletics,” McGahan said. “Having Mr. Morris behind the pin and being able to capture my tee shot to it rolling in to my celebration was amazing. This is his final year being our photographer, so I am very grateful for his dedication to our athletics and his amazing skill of capturing unforgettable moments. I will have those pictures for the rest of my life thanks to him.”

