

PETOSKEY News-Review

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Harbor wins Harbor Cup



Cris Cavitt of Team Harbor and Birchwood Farms Golf and Country Club drinks from the Harbor Cup after Team Harbor retained their trophy Tuesday at Boyne Highland Resort's Heather course. (Steve Foley/News-Review)

By Steve Foley News-Review Sports Writer

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HARBOR SPRINGS — They figured it would come right down to the wire and true to form, it did.

After playing to a 6-6 tie in Monday's opening rounds, Team Harbor and Team Boyne locked horns in Tuesday's singles matches to decide the 12th annual Harbor Cup on the Heather at Boyne Highlands.

Two down with four holes to go, Team Harbor captain Shaun Bezilla caught fire during his match with Brian O'Neill, and sealed the victory with the most dramatic of finishes on the 18th hole.

Bezilla won on No. 15 and No. 16 to pull even with O'Neill, then won No. 17 with a par to go 1-up — this after being 3-down at the turn.

Then, on 18, the Heather's classic finishing hole, both Bezilla and O'Neill hit their respective approaches to within 40 feet. O'Neill rolled in his putt, setting off a dramatic and boisterous Team Boyne celebration.

Bezilla, also 40 feet away, needed to make his putt to halve the hole and win the match. If he missed, it would have meant that he and O'Neill would have finished all square, giving each team a half point — and Team Boyne a 12 1/2-

11 1/2 edge and the victory.

"I took my time, I walked all around the putt, I got a good look at it," Bezilla said. "My only goal was to make sure that I got it there, I didn't want to leave it short. I had to give it a chance to go in the hole. ... When it got to 5, 6 feet, it was looking good."

Bezilla's putt had plenty of pace, and curled into the cup and ignited another raucous celebration — this time from Team Harbor. Team Harbor's Dave Mocini was finishing off Team Boyne's Mike Chumbler 3-and-2 at almost exactly the same time and the result was a 12-12 tie, meaning Team Harbor retained the Cup after its 17-7 victory in 2007.

Two dramatic long putts just moments apart. Take that. That that.

Touché.

"It feels great to win again," said a smiling and soaked-with-champaign Bezilla amidst his team's celebration adjacent to the 18th green. "We had a good run at it early and the first five matches were good, solid matches for us.

"We had a couple of halves in there, but we got off to a strong start and we used that to kind of catapult us,. The guys just really rallied around each other and the last couple of years, we've really gelled as a team.

"What a finish, what a finish. That's about as good as it gets."

It was indeed a strong finish that catapulted Bezilla, the pro at Harbor Point Golf Club in Harbor Springs, as he trailed O'Neill in the late stages on a course O'Neill has played countless times.

Bezilla rode strong iron play to win the next two holes to take a 1-up lead into No. 18, where he won the match behind a putt that will forever be remembered in Harbor Cup lore.

O'Neill, who entered Tuesday's final round after a self-proclaimed "sluggish" performance on Monday, had his putter working and kept the pressure on Bezilla.

"My confidence was a little low heading into the day," he said. "Some of the other guys just got behind me and they picked me up a little bit."

Playing on his favorite course, O'Neill, the director of golf instruction at Boyne, used his hot putting to take the early lead.

"I just had to believe in myself and although it was tough, I just came out and believed in myself and I was putting really, really well," O'Neill said. "I probably had five or six one-putts (from) over 20 feet. It was fun."

No putt was bigger than his birdie on No. 18. When he drained that, it looked for all the world that the Cup was Team Boyne's.

"I knew I had to make a birdie to get a half point for our team so I decided to give it a run," O'Neill said. "I let out a lot of pent up emotion right there. It was a long, tough day.

"There wasn't a lot of conversasion, but I respect Shaun and his team and Harbor played well. They deserved to win the Cup and they did just that. They all played well and it wasn't as if we gave it to them. It was a pleasure to play in."

Team Harbor earned four crucial points in the early matches as Jerry Roman defeated Larry Mancour, 2-up; John Wilson halved with Casey Powers; Harry Dixon halved with Dan Turcott; Matt Norton defeated Paulo Rocha, 6-and-5; and Mark Buchanan defeated Josh Richter, 5-and-4.

"We had a team meeting (Monday) night and after we posted lineups, we thought it would make for great matches for both teams," Bezilla said. "Everybody played everybody tough and I thought we had some good chances.

"We're a team that doesn't quit and we have a lot of guys on our team that have strong short games. That really helped us today."

For Team Boyne, Steve Niezgoda defeated Keith Grunch, 2-up; Steve Good defeated Bob Wilson, 3-and-2; Dave Trudell defeated Brian Sanderson, 6-and-5; Mike Fay defeated John Gates, 5-and-4; and Bernie Friedrich defeated Cris Cavitt, 3-and-2.

"We felt pretty good entering the day," O'Neill said. "When the pairings came out, we felt good and every match could have gone either way. We knew it would come right down to the wire."

Despite the loss, O'Neill said the Harbor Cup is always a fine way to close out the season.

"The competitive side of this tournament is so intense between everybody," O'Neill said. "Besides the fundrasing, that's what makes this event so special. We really wanted to win this one for (captain) Dan Turcott because this is his last year as captain. We gave it a good go and we left it all out there."

The two teams combined to raise more than \$10,000 for area charities. Team Harbor's portion will go to benefit both the Women's Resource Center and the First Tee program of Boyne Highlands.

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