A runner-up no longer:
Sentimental favorite Dick Stuntz captures long-sought-after GCSAA crown

By Peter Blais
JAMUL, Calif. — Dick Stuntz hates to admit it, but he expects to be a lot more relaxed when he plays in next year's Golf Course Superintendents Association of America Golf Championship. That's because the head superintendent of Lawrence, Kansas' Alvamar Country Club finally won his first GCSAA crown after several near-misses over the past 13 years.

This year's 36-hole tourney was played at Steele Canyon Golf Club near San Diego, Calif.

"I was really tickled," said Stuntz, who had previous finishes of second, third and fourth before taking this year's crown by a single stroke over Paul Jett of Duke University.

"This has been a real goal of mine for a long time. You don't like to talk about things like pressure. But I do feel like a monkey has been lifted off my back."

Stuntz felt he was in good position after "an extremely solid first round" of 75 that saw him hit 17 greens in regulation. "Unfortunately I three-putted four times and ended up with a birdie and five bogeys. I wasn't alone with putting problems. The greens were in good condition, but very hard to read because of the mountains in the background," he said.

About a dozen golfers were in front of Stuntz after the first day, led by three-time champ (1985, '88 and '89) Dave Powell of Myers Park Country Club in Charlotte, N.C., with a 1-under-par round of 70.

Stuntz parred the first nine holes on day two. He was standing on the 10th tee when he heard the news about tourney leaders Powell and playing partner Randy Nichols that opened the door for the rest of the field.

According to Nichols, he and Powell were playing the same brand of ball. Nichols marked his with a black dot and Powell used blue. They inadvertently putted each other's balls on the 3rd green, but didn't realize it until they had both teed off on the 4th. Following the rules, they disqualified themselves. "If we'd noticed it before teeing off on the 4th, we could have taken two-shot penalties," Nichols remembered. "I was doing OK at that point, although I probably wouldn't have won. Dave had a great shot at it, though."

"He was 1-under the first day, had another birdie to go 2-under..."

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Show reflections

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question, the incomparable Patty Berg. Patty spoke twice — at the Golf Course Builders Association of America banquet and at the GCSAA banquet. She brought the house down both times. Some of her one-liners were these questions on the rules of golf asked at her various clinics:

• If the ball falls off the tee on the fairway, are you allowed to rec-te it?
• Are you allowed to play a lost ball?
• Does the 19th hole have to be played in sequence?
• What happens if you whiff the ball and find out it's not yours?

However: Phil Arnold had the best "keeper." When Pete Dye, sans notes, finished a testimonial on Joe Jemsek, Arnold said: "Pete does speeches like he does golf courses — no paperwork."

Best news: Superintendent Greg Williams of King Valley Golf Club in King City, Ontario, received word during the show that his wife had had a baby...at home with two midwives... and the child weighed in at more than 11 pounds! Both mother and child were doing just fine, thank you. Congratulations, Greg, and "Tew-z."!

Greatest smile: Joe Jemsek's. No contest.

Family affair: Dakota Pest owner Michael Pierce brought his entire clan — wife, parents, brother-in-law, sister... Perhaps there was a distant cousin or a nephew or aunt who couldn't make it, Mike?

Best entertainment: I wish they all could be California (Beach) Boys.

Best timing: It rained for two weeks before the conference and started again soon after we all left.

Worst timing: The GCSA show ran right into the PGA Merchandise Show and National Golf Course Owners Association meeting, both on the other side of the country in Orlando, Fla.

Most memorable statement of humility: Dinah Shore said she had no idea why the GCSAA was giving her the Old Tom Morris Award. "Was it because I was good at replacing my divots?" she asked.

Hugest disappointment: The lack of time, even in the span of a week, to spend the time I'd like to with friends in the industry. For everyone I missed, I look forward to seeing you next time. Until then, may God bless you!