

Welz is home on The Ranch

By Todd Phipers

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WESTMINSTER — Bert Welz plays out of Columbine Country Club but he treats The Ranch like his own personal spread.

The 56-year-old custom home-builder from Littleton captured the Colorado Senior Match Play Championship yesterday, defeating John Kaiser of Lakewood 5 and 4 in the final match.

It was Welz's fourth victory in five years in the tournament and his second at The Ranch, where he defeated Greeley's Larry Eaton for the second of three consecutive titles in 1991.

"I feel like I'm playing the best golf I've ever played," the champion said. "I finally feel like I understand the game after all these years."

It didn't take the best golf of his life to defeat the 56-year-old Kaiser, who said he was exhausted after going four extra holes to win one of his two matches the previous day and whose 1-up semifinal victory over Bill Schuler lasted until minutes before the start of the finale.

CGA SENIOR MATCH PLAY CHAMPIONSHIP

At The Ranch Country Club
Semifinals

John Kaiser def. Bill Schuler 1-up; Bert Welz def. Jim Cribbs 3 and 2.

Final

Welz def. Kaiser 6 and 4.

Other flight winners

Championship Consolation:
Jim Brown def. Jim Rodgers 1-up

on 19

Championship Flight A: Roger Gunderson def. Willie Kellum 1-up

Championship Flight B: Jack Ruhs def. Dick Schmaltz 4 and 3

Championship Flight C: Glen Blevins def. Ron Tudor 1-up on 19

Flight 1: Jim Palmer def. Jay

Bechtel 3 and 2

Flight 2: Ron Scholes def. Jim Maness 3 and 2

Flight 3: Robert Sorensen def. Joe Beckner 6 and 4

Flight 4: John Dernovich def. Robert Payne 5 and 4

Flight 5: Frank Kustas def. Stan Harper 5 and 3

Welz had some time to eat and take a breather after dispatching Jim Cribbs 4 and 3 in the other semifinal, but Kaiser was so rushed he had to wolf down a hamburger on the No. 1 teebox before hitting his first drive of the afternoon.

"I was too tired coming into this afternoon's match," said Kaiser, who plays out of Fox Hollow Golf Course. "I never really got it going."

That was evident almost immediately, as Frazier went 4 down in as many holes with bogeys and Welz salvaged pars.

How things might go in the championship might have been hinted at on the par-4 first hole, where Welz wound up with a

gimme par after hitting his drive within 6 feet of the left out-of-bounds stakes while Kaiser's drive down the middle was negated by a poor approach shot en route to his bogey.

After three-putting at No. 2, the Lakewood contractor got a bad break when his second shot wound up under a pine tree and he made the third of his four straight bogeys on the par-5 No. 3.

Kaiser rallied to cut Welz's lead in half on the fifth and sixth holes, rolling in a downhill 15-footer for the first of his consecutive birdies and draining one from about 40 feet for the second.

But Welz got it back to 3 up with a tap-in par at No. 9, and closed out his weary foe by winning four

of the first five holes on the back side with pars to end the match after 14.

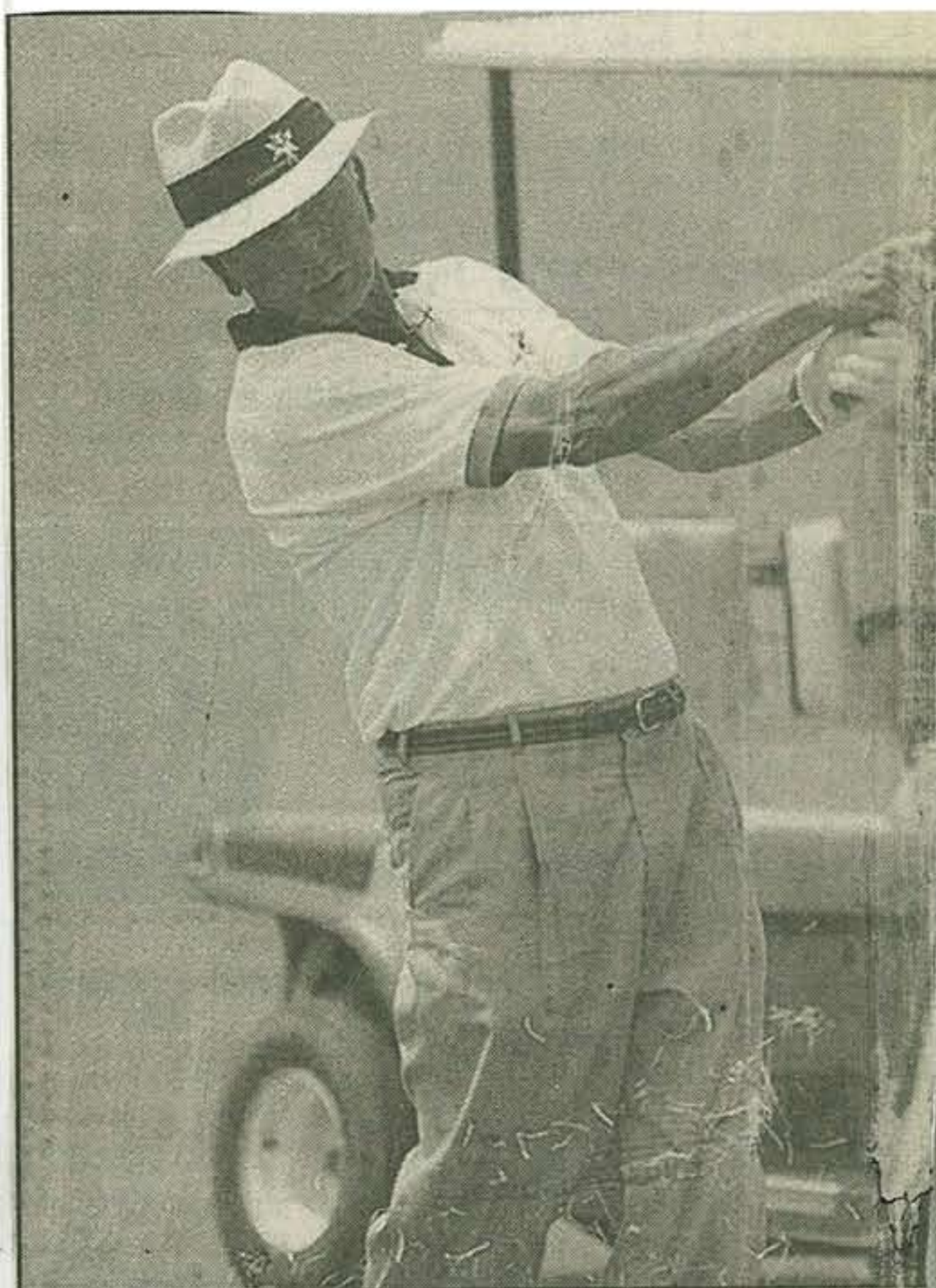
The killer may have been the par-4 11th, where both golfers missed the green in regulation and chipped on in 3 — Kaiser only 4 feet from the pin and Welz about 15 feet away.

Welz saved his par, Kaiser missed his short putt and three holes later the champion had added to his unparalleled mastery in the event. Along with his titles in 1990, '91, '92 and '94, the German-born golfer finished as runnerup in '89 and again last year.

"In match play, I'm much more relaxed," he said. "That's why I think I've been so successful in this tournament."

"You can get up there and just bust it," said the long-hitting Welz. "If you make a big number, you just move on — 3 or 7, it doesn't make any difference."

Five makes a difference, though — the number of senior match-play trophies now crowding his case.



The Denver Post / J

IN THE SWING: Winner Bert Welz hits an approach shot.