

Open titles on line

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"Sometimes you need an extra pair of eyes, and that's what he was."

Snider and Malinaric both finished the three-round tournament at 6-under 210. Two-time Open champion Elaine Crosby was one stroke back at 5-under 211.

Malinaric, who led after two rounds on the Mountain Ridge course, never trailed until losing the playoff hole.

She lowered her tournament score to 9-under after back-to-back birdies on 10 and 11, but she doubled the 13th and 17th – sandwiched around a birdie putt on No. 15 – to open the door for Snider and Crosby.

Crosby could have made the playoff a three-some, but she lipped a 2-foot par putt on No. 17, then missed a 17-foot birdie attempt on 18 by six inches.

Snider nearly played her way out of it by three-putting for bogeys on the 16th and 17th, but she stepped to the 18th tee still only one shot back. She just didn't realize it at the time.

"Eric (Olson, her caddy) told me I was only one down, and I said, 'No, I'm not,'" Snider said.

Given new life heading into the par-5 final hole, Snider left herself with an 8-foot putt for birdie. Relying on Dean's advice, she calmly rolled in the putt and headed to a playoff on the same hole.

For possibly the first time all day, Malinaric was longer off the tee than Snider, but the perfect drive also proved to be her undoing. With only 205 yards left to the tee, she decided to go for the green in two, but she ripped a 4-iron left into a deep hole, well into the trees and nearly out-of-bounds.

"It was a bad idea," said Malinaric, a 37-year-old mini-tour player from Rancho Mirage, Calif. "My drive was in the perfect spot. It was just what I was looking for.

"I wanted to keep (my second shot) on the left side," she said. "I caught it on the toe and hooked it. It wasn't pretty."

How deep was the hole?

"If I jumped I could see the top of the flag," Malinaric said.

Meanwhile, Snider followed her drive with a 7-iron to within 80 yards, then dropped a lob wedge 10 feet from the pin. She dashed Malinaric's hopes by sinking her putt for birdie.

"I haven't won this event before, but I just felt I had a chance to win," said Snider, the 2000 Michigan Amateur champion who also became the first woman to win the Tournament of Champions, in 2003. "I've been hitting the ball well all summer and I've made some changes in my putting. I knew it would all come together sooner or later."

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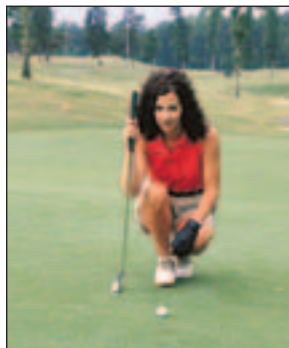
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