

MARK ALLEN

To win a Club Championship is always special. Doubly so when you do it on the 18th, against quality opposition and have to pick up four shots on the back nine. Mark's seventh Championship is one he, and we, should remember.

At the start of the day his three shot advantage evaporated when inexplicably he carded two double-bogeys in the opening holes. Normally a very steady golfer this was unexpected. Nerves perhaps? Or the wind?

Shane Pallant couldn't take advantage of this. However, he would have been well pleased with his win in the Handicap event and his near hole-in-one on the 14th.

That left youthful but seasoned veterans and previous winners, Matt Long and Ryan Hammond to apply the pressure.

And pressure it was. A bunker shot to stay in the game on the seventh was not easy: done. A gettable birdie putt on the tenth slipped pass. A birdie on the 13th was fine except Ryan did it too and maintained a three shot advantage.

However by the 18th the tide had turned. Mark was tied with Matt with Ryan a shot behind. Ryan's approach shot was short when he had to play from under the trees. The needed birdie possible but tough. Matt fared little better. With a similarly restricted backswing he put his second shot in the bunker. Difficult territory to get up and down.

50 metres out in the middle of the fairway it must have looked all over. After all, three times in the previous four holes, Mark had made difficult chips look easy. On both the 14th and the 15th from the back of the green he had to get the ball just to the top of the ridge but without the momentum to rocket off the green. On the 17th his ball was lodged in long grass. Not a problem. Each chip resulted in a "gimmee" putt.

So with a chip from 50 metres and probably a par enough to win, this should have been a formality. Golf is a funny game though. He left the easy chip short. Game on.

Danny must have closed the bar because there was quite a crowd gathered to witness history. The chip needed just to clear the ridge and cope with the pronounced turn both ways down the hill. Piece of cake. It didn't go in but it was close.

When Ryan and Matt couldn't reply it was all over. Win number seven for Mark Allen.

This now moves him to outright second place but still well short of Shane Dwyer's eleven. Bridging the gap will be tough because Ryan Hammond, Matt Long and Leon Cook will want to add to their tallies. Shane Pallant and Michael Santo will want to open their account. And of course who could discount Shane or David Fergusson or or anyone else. The next few years could produce a bonanza of classic finals.

Of course these are not his only achievements. He was a regular member of the West Gippsland Country Week team from 1991 to 202 including 5 years as Captain. He added to this in 2004 and then after a break returned in 2011-13. He was part of the winning 1992, 1993 and 1998 teams. In 1994 he was crowned Victorian Country Champion.

He was a member of the very first Division 1 Pennant team in 1991. With Anthony, he went through the season undefeated. 14 wins in total. For anyone to go through the season undefeated at

this level is remarkable; for two to do it almost unheard of. In a nice piece of symmetry he captained our second Division 1 Pennant team to victory last year.

In 1994 he made the cut of the Victorian Open as an amateur. He was West Gippsland Champion in 1992 and 2013. He won a Club Championship at Moe and of course has won too many Club competitions to mention.

He didn't start playing the game until after leaving school. He was one of that generation inspired by watching Greg Norman on TV. His start may have been late but the talent was always there. Two years after he began he won the first of his Club Championships.

Anthony knows Mark better than most. He remembers oh so clearly their first meeting when this young kid rocked up in a car and proceeded to hit plenty of practice balls. For those of you who knew Mark then you will understand exactly what Anthony saw. A friendship was formed despite the intense rivalry that developed as the two young guns went head to head because Mark was best man at Anthony's wedding.

He described Mark as, "a very deliberate player." There is thought behind every shot. This is especially so on the greens. After sizing up the putt from all angles he invariably sinks the putt. Anthony's only complaint is the time it takes.

Anthony was even more revealing about Mark's chipping which he describes as, "Imaginative. He sees things that can't be taught. He examines the situation closely, chooses the right, not usual club, and lands the ball close to make the putt a formality." Most of us can only dream of playing this way.

He rates this year's win the best given it was against quality opposition on a day when he struggled early. Being crowned Country Champion was nice too but he has fonder memories of the team victories. Golf is a very solitary business. Usually it is just you against the course. Match play makes it more personal. However, knowing you have team mates relying upon you adds an extra dimension. His record shows he doesn't let anyone down.

Anthony's final comments are revealing, "He is always positive and encouraging towards others." A champion in every sense of the word.

Written by George Shand