



NEWS PHOTOS BY JOHN GORDON

Kent Moore (left) was in the woods several times on the final round. However, things went better for Rick Cramer (right), pitching on No. 10.

Cramer rolls to match play title

By Dave Nelson
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COLORADO SPRINGS — It had been a roller-coaster ride with the usual number of ups and downs.

And Kent Moore felt good. After 24 grinding holes of golf, he was still rolling along, wheel-to-wheel with the big wheel of the Colorado Golf Association's combined stroke and match play championships.

Then, the wheels came off!

Suddenly, without so much as a hint of warning, the compact, grooved swing came off its hinges. The smooth putting stroke developed some rough edges. The engine choked and finally stalled out and Rick Cramer — the big blond machine of this grueling week-long test of endurance and skill — crunched onward to another smashing victory.

"I'm glad it's over with," Cramer sighed Sunday after posting a 3 and 2 victory in the 36-hole finals of the State Match Play tournament and completing a sweep of the state's two premier championships.

"I was getting tired toward the end," Cramer admitted. "If you're just a hair tired, it shows up in putting first. That's where you have to be mentally strongest."

Cramer not only had the inner strength, he also had the brute power and willpower to endure seven straight days which embraced nine rounds and 156 holes of competitive golf.

The former University of Colorado star claimed the state stroke play championship earlier this week. Sunday, he became only the fourth player in the last quarter of a century to sweep both the stroke and match play titles in the same year.

Jim English Sr. claimed both championships in 1960, Gary Longfellow duplicated the feat in 1974 and Chris Nordling completed a similar sweep in 1979.

"I'd just as soon have had more players in the match play tournament," Cramer said, while stopping short of

discrediting his awesome performance. "The new format really cut out a lot of players that would have had a chance of winning."

In past years, the stroke tournament has been held in June and the match play in August.

This year, the tournaments were crowded into the same week and only the low 16 shooters from the stroke event advanced to the first round of match play. In past years, the low 64 shooters following a preliminary qualifying round were paired in the first round of match play.

Regardless of the format, Cramer proved he could beat both the system and the field here this week.

Cramer held a 2-up lead following the morning 18 holes Sunday, although he had carded a one-over 73 compared to Moore's round of 78.

Cramer padded his lead to 3-up on the second hole of the afternoon round when he reached the par-5 second hole in two and two-putted for a birdie.

Moore, as he had done all week, refused to fold.

He won the third hole when Cramer caught a trap with his approach and blew it out 40 feet long for a bogey.

He halved the next hole when both three-putted.

And he won the sixth hole when he salvaged par out of a bunker to trim the deficit to a single hole.

Moments later, the magic disappeared.

Moore and Cramer both pitched their approach irons long on the seventh hole, but Cramer chipped to within a foot of the pin while Moore squirted his chip seven feet long.

Cramer won the hole to go 2-up and then won the next two as well as Moore suddenly came completely apart at the seams.

Moore took a 6 on the eighth hole when his tee shot strayed into the trees and he lost the par-3 ninth when he found the water with his tee shot.

Only a miraculous par kept Moore from going 5-down on the 10th hole, where he pounded his second shot into the woods. Cramer was in the bunker facing the green in two but blew it out long and wound up making a 6.

Still, it was only a matter of protecting his imposing lead down the stretch. Cramer finally closed it out with a seven-foot birdie putt which won the 16th hole and a two-putt par which halved the 17th.

Although he struggled with his putting the last couple of days, Cramer's only real source of trouble came on those rare occasions when he caught the sand bunkers.

"The sand was only a half-inch deep a couple of times and I bounced off the bottom. There was no sand at all on the 10th hole. It was like trying to blast off concrete.

"I practice hard on sand shots. All the good courses have bunkers and you're going to be in them like I was today. My sand iron doesn't have anything written on the bottom of it any more. I've practiced so much I've rubbed everything off."

Cramer plans to play in the Colorado Open next week and will play in both the Western Amateur and National Amateur later this summer.

"Yeah, I suppose I will," Cramer said when asked if he would celebrate his latest conquest. "But I probably do it different ways than most people. I'll probably just go home and watch TV."

Moore called the seventh hole which triggered his collapse the turning point of the match.

"The ball was sitting down tight," he said of his lie in the fairway. "It didn't look like it would be a flier. But it took off like a rocket. The green was hard and it jumped off the back side. I then hit what I thought was a good chip but it went long. Then, I hit what I thought was a great putt and didn't make it."

Although he was satisfied with his performance this week, Moore admitted he isn't overly impressed with the new format.

"I've enjoyed myself immensely and yet I really think the tournament is a little bit impractical," he said. "There are so many of us that have to work and it's tough to get that much time off."

"I'm not trying to get down on anybody's ideas, but there were a lot of guys who should have played in the match play that didn't have a chance. If you're playing in a state tournament, you want the people in it who are going to win it."

From the very beginning, though, there was very little doubt that the tournament had the one player in it who was going to win.

There was only one Rick Cramer playing. And he was almost invincible.