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## KENNY PIGMAN IS FIRST-ROUND LEADER IN THE 42ND NATIONAL CAR RENTAL ASSISTANT PGA PROFESSIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP

By John Dever  
PGA of America

PORT ST. LUCIE, Fla. (Nov. 15, 2018) - Kenny Pigman appears to do well with a bit of adversity.

The 30-year old Pigman fired a 6-under 66 and leads the 42nd National Car Rental Assistant PGA Professional Championship by two strokes - over six players - after first-round play Thursday at PGA Golf Club in Port St. Lucie, Florida.

An Assistant PGA Professional at Goose Creek Golf Club in Mira Loma, California, Pigman's afternoon started slowly, as he found himself in double jeopardy on his initial hole, No. 10.

"First hole, I hit it in the bunker and I had about an eight-foot palm tree in the bunker with me, then I discovered that my ball is *in* the same palm tree," said Pigman, a Southern Californian who arrived in South Florida on Monday. "That's how my day started. So, I whacked it out of the tree and my ball remained in the bunker. Fortunately, I got up and down to salvage bogey and from there, I had three straight birdies. In a strange way, the first hole made me play better."

Pigman's no stranger to the Wanamaker Course, nor this Championship. In 2014, during his days as a PGA Associate, he finished runner-up as Grant Sturgeon blitzed the field by seven shots.

Pigman was not to be deterred, however. Two years later, he won nine times on the Southern California PGA Section circuit, including the 2016 Southern California PGA Section Professional Championship. That title sent him to the 2017 PGA Professional Championship,

where he ultimately earned an exemption into the 2017 PGA Championship at Quail Hollow Club in Charlotte, North Carolina.

Playing in his fourth career National Car Rental Assistant PGA Professional Championship, Pigman acknowledged he's, "played decent here (at PGA Golf Club). A second (place) and a few top-20s, but no trophy yet. Hopefully this weekend, ... that's the goal."

Six players trail Pigman by two after carding four-under 68s on Florida's docile-for-a-day Treasure Coast: Matthew Belizze, Assistant PGA Professional at Southward Ho Country Club in Bay Shore, New York; Anthony Casalino, Assistant PGA Professional at Scarsdale Golf Club in Hartsdale, New York; Steven Delmar, Assistant PGA Professional at Columbia Country Club in Chevy Chase, Maryland; Joshua Rackley, Assistant PGA Professional at Tam O'Shanter Golf Club in Glen Head, New York; Colin Van Es, Assistant PGA Professional at Providence Golf Club in Davenport, Florida; and Frank Bensel, the Assistant PGA Professional at Century Country Club in Jupiter, Florida.

Bensel has played in more National Car Rental Assistant PGA Professional Championships than anyone and for good reason: he's won three times (2010, '11 and '13). His three titles are tied with Kyle Flinton (2002, '03 and '05) for the most in the Championship's four-plus decade history.

Van Es, on the other hand, is making his debut this week on the Wanamaker and in the Championship. His only blemish on Thursday, a bogey on No. 8, came during a powerful, yet brief, rain shower that bowled through the Treasure Coast, affecting those with morning tee times.

"As the weather got better, so did I. I made some putts on the back 9 and just stayed steady all day," said Van Es, who made some memories by connecting on a 60-foot birdie putt on the 11th. "I had a lot of really nice two-putts out there today. I left myself some long looks and made a couple. But, I was not playing as close to the hole as I'd like."

Delmar's 68 included six birdies and a pair of bogeys, one on each side. Rackley posted identical birdie-bogey numbers, but most of his damage came on the Wanamaker's front side (Rackley's back 9) thanks to four birdies (Nos. 1-3, 8).

Casalino's 11:39 a.m. tee time began with an eagle-3 on the par-5 first hole and improved from there. Consecutive birdies on the 4th, 5th and 6th holes put him in the lead. Another birdie on No. 10 provided a cushion before bogeys on 14 and 17 relegated him into the second-place pack at 68.

Belizze, who was two groups behind Van Es, limited himself to a single bogey Thursday. He too weathered the storm. After removing his rain gear, he dried himself off with four birdies in a five-hole stretch, Nos. 9-11 and 13.

"I stuck to my game plan, which was hit some solid shots into the middle of the greens on the par 3s," said Belizze. "I was fortunate to hit it close on No. 11 and made it. To play those (par-3s) in 1-under today was a victory."

Defending champion, Ryan Zylstra of Naples, Florida, began his title defense with a 2-over-par 74.

This week's champion, if eligible, will earn a berth in the 2019 PGA Professional Championship, which is slated for April 28-May 1 at Belfair in Bluffton, South Carolina. The winner will also receive \$12,000 of the \$150,000 purse.

The top-four finishers, if eligible, will earn a berth in next year's National Car Rental Assistant PGA Professional Championship, to be held November 14-17 at PGA Golf Club.

The National Car Rental Assistant PGA Professional Championship is supported by Srixon | Cleveland Golf | XXIO, GolfAdvisor.com and John Deere.

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