SPORTS

Stewart claims Open, Simpson blows lead

CHASKA, Minn. (AP) Payne Stewart, he of the outlandish fashions in clothes. won the 91st U.S. Open Golf Championship in even more outlandish fashion Monday.

It is necessary to go back to the days of hickory sticks, to the days when knickers were even more in vogue, to find scores higher than those compiled by Stewart and Scott Simpson in their playoff for the American national champion-

Stewart won it with a 3-overpar 75 against a 77 by the stricken Simpson, who - once again - blew a two-stroke lead over the last three holes at the Hazeltine National Golf Club. including putting his tee shot on the par-3 17th into the wa-

Those scores are the highest in an 18-hole Open playoff since Tommy Armour beat Lighthorse Harry Cooper 76-79 in 1927

Outlandish? It was so outlandish that:

- · Stewart won despite making only one birdie over his last 33
- · He won the playoff despite making as many bogeys (four) as he had in the four rounds of regulation play combined
- He made only a single birdie in the playoff, but still made up four strokes over the last three holes, wiping out a two-stroke Simpson lead
- There were three two-stroke swings on individual holes. two in Simpson's favor.

And, perhaps most outlandish of all. Stewart bounced a tee shot off a rock and out of the water on the eighth hole.

'When that happened, I thought. 'Maybe it is your day.' 'Stewart said.

It was his day

It was far from an artistic one, however. In fact, from the standpoint of a golfing purist. it was downright ugly at times.

"It wasn't outstanding golf." Stewart admitted, "but the golf course was very difficult today.

'It tested your patience, it tested your ability, it tested your fortitude. I'm fortunate to be the champion.

But the mistake-prone playoff lacked nothing in drama, particularly over the final three holes, the homecoming stretch that proved to be Simpson's

On Saturday, he came to those three holes with a twostroke lead, bogeyed twice and came away in a tie for the lead.

On Sunday, he came to those same holes, again in front by two. Again, he bogeyed twice dropped into a tie and set up the playoff.

The same situation existed on Monday. When the 1987 Open champion stood on the 16th tee, he was two in front.

After the 15th hole, I thought I had a great chance, Simpson said.

But this time he was unable to salvage a tie. He bogeyed in Stewart had his lone birdle of the day on the 16th, a fourstroke swing on three holes and the grandest victory of his ca-

For Simpson, eight bogeys and a playoff loss and the blown lead on the last three holes was something entirely

'It's a little disappointing to lose the U.S. Open two days in a row." Simpson said with his characteristic, wry smile.

"I feel sorry for him." Stewart said, "just as I felt sorry for Mike Reid when I won the PGA Championship" in 1989.

After a variety of adventures by both players in sand and water and trees and trash, they straggled to the 16th tee with Simpson in his customary posi-

tion, two strokes in front Stewart stood there with the desperate need to make something happen and a string of 30 consecutive holes without a birdie behind him.

"I'm thinking, 'Same song, second verse,' "Stewart said.

And that's when it all began to change. Appropriately enough, the par-4, 384-yard 16th, the signature hole at Hazeltine, proved to be the turning point

On each of the two previous days. Simpson had bogeyed the 16th after bitting an iron off the tee into the left rough.

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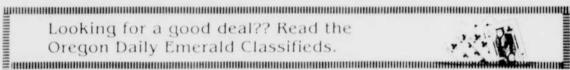
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