

Golf

Walker manages fatigue, builds 2-shot lead at Firestone

By DOUG FERGUSON
AP Golf Writer

AKRON, Ohio — The sun finally came out, and Jimmy Walker saw a glimpse of what he hopes are brighter days ahead.

In a year marked by coping with Lyme disease and bouts of fatigue, Walker endured rain delays of nearly five hours Friday and posted a 5-under 65 for a two-shot lead going into the weekend at the Bridgestone Invitational.

The timing couldn't be better for Walker, who goes to Quail Hollow next week to defend his title in the PGA Championship.

"It hadn't been a lot of fun this year," Walker said. "But it's nice to see some putts go in and make some solid swings and keep rounds going, make par putts, just the stuff I haven't been doing."

He was at 7-under 133, two shots ahead of Thomas Pieters of Belgium, who had a 70.

Walker didn't have a lot going last year until he finished well in the Canadian Open, and then went wire-to-wire at Baltusrol the next week to win the PGA Championship. So maybe there's another spark he can find at Firestone Country Club.

"There's still a lot of golf on a hard course, but I know it's there," he said.

He also has a slew of players not far behind him in this World



AP Photo/Tony Dejak

Jimmy Walker acknowledges the gallery after finishing the second round of the Bridgestone Invitational golf tournament at Firestone Country Club, Friday, Aug. 4, 2017, in Akron, Ohio.

Golf Championship. Rory McIlroy put together a steady round of 69 and was three shots back, along with Zach Johnson and Hideki Matsuyama, who each shot 67.

The large group at 3-under 137 included Jordan Spieth, going after his third straight victory. Spieth missed a short par putt on the 15th and was slipping behind when he faced an awkward lie from the edge of a bunker. Stumbling out of the sand backward, he nearly holed the shot and made birdie, and then he

stuffed his approach to 3 feet for birdie on the 18th hole to salvage a 70.

Jason Day, winless in nearly 15 months, also got back into the picture despite some mild back pain. He opened with three straight birdies and shot 30 on the front nine to get back near the leaders, though two bogeys on the back nine slowed him and he shot 66. He was in the group at 137.

"The front side definitely felt like 2015, 2016," Day said, alluding

Bridgestone Invitational Leaderboard

Jimmy Walker	68-65—133	-7
Thomas Pieters	65-70—135	-5
Zach Johnson	69-67—136	-4
Rory McIlroy	67-69—136	-4
Hideki Matsuyama	69-67—136	-4
Charley Hoffman	68-69—137	-3
Adam Hadwin	68-69—137	-3
Russell Knox	66-71—137	-3
Jordan Spieth	67-70—137	-3
Jason Day	71-66—137	-3

to his best stretch of golf when he rose to No. 1 in the world. "I was just pouring in everything. I know that it's still in there. I've just got to keep practicing hard. I know it will eventually happen."

Day felt he was slowed by the last — and longest — of the rain delays. He returned to three-putt the 10th for a bogey and never got back any momentum.

It was like that for everyone who slogged through a 10-hour day.

The second round was delayed 45 minutes at the start, and then another 45 minutes when a small band of storms rolled through. A delayed of some 3 1/2 hours followed, making it feel like two separate rounds and one long day.

Walker still isn't out of the woods just yet. He first thought he had mononucleosis around the Masters, and it eventually was diagnosed as Lyme's disease. He has tried to

muddle through the year when his energy allowed, though there hasn't been a lot of practice.

And even a 65, which matched his low score of the year, wasn't smooth sailing.

"It's day to day," he said. "I felt pretty good all week physically, and I wake up this morning and I've just got his overall flu feeling in my body. So I take some Advil, it goes away. And then during the last break, it came back, so I took some more. Now it's gone. You just never know when it's going to spike up."

But he felt good enough to make birdie on both par 3s on the back nine, and drop only one shot on the round.

The scoring has been good with the rain and softer greens, and a South course that was in pristine condition to start the tournament. A strong wind arrived after the storm cleared, which kept everyone's attention.

Only two dozen players from the 76-man field remained under par.

Among those who fell back was Dustin Johnson, the world's No. 1 player still trying to find his form from a back injury that knocked him out of the Masters. He hit only one green in regulation on the front nine — 60 feet from the hole — and shot 40. Johnson didn't make a single birdie in his round of 75 that knocked him 10 shots out of the lead heading into the final major of the year.

Soccer

MLS gaining global respectability, league 'on a good path'

By ANDY BUHLER
Associated Press

ATLANTA — There was a time when Major League Soccer depended on a shortlist of marquee names to generate excitement about a match.

A David Beckham, Frank Lampard or Steven Gerrard.

Times are changing. Since its inaugural season in 1996, the league has gained respect around the world and MLS continues to expand its footprint on the global soccer stage. Sure, the English Premier League, La Liga, Bundesliga, Serie A and French Ligue 1 still have the talent, market dominance and history to be considered by many the best in the world, but MLS is trending upward.

"It's brilliant seeing the growth of this league," said Colorado Rapids goalie Tim Howard, who left the then-New York MetroStars in 2003 and played 13 years in the EPL before returning to MLS last year. "When I left, Don Garber was the commissioner and he had promised new teams, new stadiums, expansion, growth, better players, bigger fan bases, and he's delivered."

The league started with 10 clubs in 1996, but now consists of 22 and its goal is to have 28. Atlanta United and Minnesota United are in their first seasons, Los Angeles FC is set to join in 2018 and a

Beckham-owned Miami franchise is nearing a deal and could start play in 2020.

Twelve locations are competing for four expansion bids, two of which are expected to be announced later this year.

The value of clubs also is soaring. The average MLS club was valued at \$185 million in 2016 by Forbes, a 400 percent increase since 2008. MLS is in year three of its eight-year deals with ESPN, FOX Sports and Univision Deportes. World-class facilities are being built, the talent on the field is better and the world is taking notice.

First-year San Jose president Tom Fox said ownership groups "have built slowly, brick by brick."

"They didn't step up to the plate and try to hit home runs," Fox said. "They've been trying to hit a series of singles to move the runners around the bags, and I think they've done an excellent job of that in a market that's much more competitive."

When it comes to attendance, MLS is in the same conversation as some of the top leagues.

Average MLS attendance has increased by more than 5,000 fans since 2008. The league's average home attendance this season is currently 21,552, which is only behind the 2016-17 season average in the Bundesliga (41,511), English Premier League (35,822),

La Liga (27,700), Mexico's Liga MX (25,050), China's Super League (23,780) and Italy's Serie A (22,164), according to world-football.net. It's ahead of France's Ligue 1 (21,029), Japan's J1 League (19,107) and Brazil's Serie A (16,286).

In a market where American football is king, stadiums can be the key to the sport's growth — and to receiving an expansion bid.

United Soccer League's Sacramento Republic FC is vying for an expansion bid. Officials from the team broke ground on a \$245 million privately financed stadium in Sacramento last week. Atlanta United's new home is the Mercedes-Benz Stadium, a multi-purpose facility the team will share with the Atlanta Falcons (both franchises are owned by Home Depot co-founder Arthur Blank). Minnesota United's Allianz Field, a soccer-specific stadium, will open in 2018.

Despite MLS' growth, the league still has much work to do on the international stage.

It is losing the TV battle on its home pitch. Mexico's top league, Liga MX, dominates ratings in the U.S.

Last year's final game netted 3.3 million viewers in the U.S., and more than 6 million viewers overall on Univision and Univision Deportes, according to worldsoc-

certalk.com. The MLS Cup Final, meanwhile, had the highest title-game viewership in league history with just more than 2 million people in the U.S. and 3.5 million people worldwide.

But MLS clubs are not shying away from the challenge of closing the gap with their North American counterparts.

Atlanta United President Darren Eales believes American clubs winning the CONCACAF Champions League would be a good start. The league pits top North and Central American clubs against one another, and a U.S. club has never won the title.

Still, there's no question the league is in a better place than it was when a 31-year-old Beckham signed with the LA Galaxy from Real Madrid. Teams no longer necessarily look for quick fixes that a big name can provide. They are signing young designated players and focusing on development academies, which have produced young stars like Seattle's Jordan Morris, FC Dallas' Kellyn Acosta and the LA Galaxy's Gyasi Zardes.

Eales didn't reach for a star when he assembled Atlanta's roster, having been on the other end of players joining MLS teams from Europe (he previously held front office positions with English Tottenham Hotspur and West Bromwich Albion).

Oregon State Football

Arnold hopes to help lead Beavers to major bowl game in final season

By STEVE GRESS
Albany Democrat-Herald

BEND — Brandon Arnold isn't shy about the lofty goals he has for the Oregon State football team this coming season.

The 5-foot-11, 205-pound senior, who is slated to be one of the Beavers' starting safeties when they open the season Aug. 26 at Colorado State, put it simply: "Just to win."

And a lot. "I want that Rose Bowl or something better," Arnold said Thursday afternoon after the Beavers wrapped up their final practice at Summit High.

"That's my main goal. Everything else that happens is what happens, but, man, the main goal is to improve on last year and go to a bowl."

Arnold and the Beavers will wrap up their six days in Bend with a 7:30 p.m. scrimmage Friday. There will be a Fan Fest prior to the scrimmage at 6:30 p.m.

Arnold, who started 11 games last season for the Beavers and finished with 68 tackles and one interception, has become one of the team leaders since Oregon State's 34-24 win over Oregon in the Civil War to end last season on a two-game win streak.

"He's kind of taken some of the young guys under his wings and has spent some of his extra time getting them ready and taking some ownership in those

young guys knowing what to do," safeties coach John Rushing said.

Rushing said Arnold has played the "big brother" role with the younger players and they are buying in.

"They all respect him and they respect his knowledge for the game and they respect what he brings to the table and how he works every day," Rushing said.

Rushing has appreciated having Arnold around.

"He's a great guy to have in the back end for a coach like me, coming into my first year at Oregon State," he said. "He's able to lead by example so I've got kind of a lead dog that brings everybody along with him."

Arnold said he just tries to encourage others who are fighting for an open spot.

"If your get your number called, go out there and get your money," Arnold said of his advice. "Go out there and make your play, make a name, go make a statement out there — something that shows that you are improving."

Arnold has also made some improvement in his own game, Rushing said, and the coach expects that to pay off this season.

"He already knew the scheme but his technique is getting better and he's able to play multiple positions for us," Rushing said. "He's a guy you can move around ... so I think it's going to

create more opportunities during the season."

Arnold said the biggest improvement he has made is with his vision.

"Just training my eyes better to look at certain things and tendencies of the offense," he said.

Arnold is happy with the way the Beavers have steadily improved so far during fall camp. "Not only are we coming together, but we're growing in the right direction," he said. "We're going in a positive way, getting better each day, in film, after team meetings are over with, late-night film sessions — it just shows that we care about getting better and that's what I love so much about this team. We're not only determined to do better than last year, but to make noise around the country."

And if Arnold's goal of a Rose Bowl appearance or other major bowl comes true, that would certainly "make noise."

Some may scoff at that idea, but Arnold believes the more he talks about it, the more it becomes a possibility.

"You speak it into existence, you believe in it then something's going to happen," Arnold said. "... They might be ranked higher than us. Who cares? Just go out there and play. Prepare yourself for that battle, for that four quarters. Just believe in yourself. If you believe in yourself you can achieve so much."

Oregon Football

Ducks move ex-safety Schooler to help fill gaps at receiver

By JESSE SOWA
Albany Democrat-Herald

EUGENE — Oregon brought out a new wide receiver on Thursday.

Brenden Schooler, who led the Ducks with four interceptions as a true freshman last year, switched to offense for a short period of Wednesday's practice and then opened the following day back at receiver.

"We are going to put Schooler over there and see what he can do," Oregon coach Willie Taggart said before practice. "Yesterday, we let him run a couple routes and he looked pretty good. We figured we would bring him over there and see what he can do."

Schooler spent a few minutes watching the offense in 11-on-11 drills while standing next to wide receivers coach Michael Johnson before taking the field wearing No. 26 instead of the No. 43 he wore last season. He lined up outside on the right, but did not catch a pass during a series the media was allowed to watch.

"I told coach Johnson 'Make sure you don't overcoach him,'" Taggart said. "Just let him play football."

The 6-foot-2, 197-pound Schooler started 10 games at safety last season and ranked third on the team with 74 tackles. Taggart said he would evaluate Schooler on offense before deciding where he will play this season.

"We are going to find out the best position for all of our players," Taggart said.

Oregon lacks experience beyond

Charles Nelson at wide receiver with Dillon Mitchell and Alex Ofodile the only others at that position who have caught a pass in a game. Quarterback Justin Herbert welcomed the addition of Schooler for as long as it lasts.

"He is super athletic and really good on both sides of the ball," Herbert said. "I'm glad to have him on our side of the ball."

Schooler was not available for an interview Thursday, but his UO bio lists the Dana Point, Calif. native as having 25 catches for 478 yards as a junior in high school.

"I was impressed with his route for a guy that hasn't been taught to just get out there and run it," Taggart said.

Ofodile missed a practice this week due to injury and Mitchell was not practicing on Thursday, likely due to an injury. Freshman Johnny Johnson III drew raves from Herbert and opened practice with the first unit along with Malik Lovette.

Lovette could be an example for Schooler because he arrived at Oregon as a receiver and moved to defensive back before switching back to receiver. Jeff Maehl, whose 178 career receptions are tied for the most in school history, also arrived at UO as a defensive back.

Oregon has enough depth at safety to replace Schooler including senior Tyree Robinson, who is expected to return to that position after playing cornerback last year. Senior Juwaan Williams and junior Khalil Oliver both started games last season.



Schooler