



# Bobcat®

NORTH DAKOTA OPEN



WELCOME TO THE 54<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL BOBCAT NORTH DAKOTA OPEN | FARGO COUNTRY CLUB



## 2017 WIN GAVE PRO TOM HOGE A BOOST TO START THE PGA TOUR

**Fargo native Tom Hoge** grew up playing round after round of golf at the Fargo Country Club and imagined one day winning the Bobcat North Dakota Open on the course. He made that dream a reality with his 2017 championship.

"I spent an unbelievable amount of hours out there on the golf course growing up. I think I was 12 the first time I played in the Open," he says. "To come back and win it is obviously something I always looked forward to, and to pull that off was a pretty cool moment."

For years, Hoge played in the Bobcat Open in the amateur division — winning that division in 2006 before his senior year of high school. His win in 2017 was his third time playing the event as a professional, after finishing in second place in 2015 and 2016.

He took the 2017 championship in style — tying the course record with a 63 and beating the overall Bobcat Open tournament record by

two strokes. Hoge finished 20 under par with a 196 during three days of play.

"I played kind of so-so in the first round on Friday. Then I started to play pretty good golf on Saturday, and on Sunday I was playing really well and making a lot of putts," he says. "To go out and play well under some pressure — it's never easy to win on any level in professional golf and to do it on your home course made it really fun."

It was even more enjoyable because he played his first round on Friday with his dad, Chuck Hoge, and family friend Clint Nelson. He grew up playing in the Open with his dad and Nelson but hadn't been able to get back for the event during his college years at TCU or his early days as a professional.

Another favorite memory from last year was sinking a 30-foot putt for eagle during the second hole on Sunday to keep his momentum going.

Hoge and 2017 runner-up Andrew McCain were within a stroke or two for several holes during Sunday play.

"I just tried to keep making some birdies so I could stay in front," Hoge says. "It really was kind of back and forth. Then I made a birdie on 16 and hit a great second shot on 17 to leave about 10 feet for eagle, so I knew at that point that things were pretty well in my control."

Having the hometown crowd in his corner helped him finish strong, Hoge says. Playing well on the tournament's final two days also provided Hoge momentum going into the PGA Tour season last fall.

"It really gave me a boost. That played a role in my confidence going forward," he says. "I was able to use the experience from the Open to play better golf on the Tour."

One memorable Tour event from 2018 was the Sony Open in Hawaii, where Hoge earned a third-place finish after leading for much of the tournament. Due to his strong play this season, Hoge has already qualified for the FedEx Cup Playoffs for the first time as a pro.

While his PGA Tour schedule won't allow him to return to the Bobcat Open this year, the event will always hold a special place for Hoge.

"To raise money for The Village is a great thing," he says. "And for me growing up, to see the pros come in and see how they prepared for tournaments and how they played, it was an event I looked forward to every year."

## MORE THAN A GOLF TOURNAMENT: RETIREE NAMED VOLUNTEER OF THE YEAR



**A hobby golfer, Ken Gartzke** started volunteering at the Bobcat North Dakota Open in 2008 because he wanted the opportunity to play the Fargo Country Club course. The retiree has returned to volunteer at the event every year since because he discovered it was something special. To recognize his decade of service, Gartzke has been named the 2018 Volunteer of the Year.

"The first year I volunteered, I stayed a bit late the first night. That is when I saw some of the golf pros out on the driving range interacting with some young children, showing and helping them with their golfing techniques. That's when I knew this event was more than just a golf outing," he says. "If these pros are willing to volunteer their time, this event is well worth me taking my time to do so also."

Gartzke, 72, has lived in Fargo for 35 years and retired from a career in commercial printing in 2010. He's a member of the Red River Valley Senior Men's Golf Association, a Fargo-based group of 400 members who travel the region playing different courses two or three times a week. He has convinced several members of that group to also volunteer at the Open.

"I like to promote the volunteering because it's so much fun and such a big event," he says. "One of the reasons I keep going back is that the people who run the show are some of the best people you would ever want to work with."

As a volunteer, Gartzke has been a spotter on holes, driven a golf cart and monitored the driving range.

"I've done just about everything as a volunteer," he says. "I'm out there as much as they can fit me in. I plan to keep doing it as long as possible."



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## LONGTIME BOBCAT OPEN PLAYER NAMED 2018 HONORARY CHAIRMAN

**Chuck Sjostrom moved to Fargo** in 1968 and first played in the Bobcat North Dakota Open in 1971 or 1972. He's only missed playing in the event a handful of years in the decades since.

"I've missed a few years here and there. I had back surgery one year and couldn't play. I had business trips interfere a few times," Sjostrom says. "But I've probably played in 30 or 35 years of the event."

That longevity has been recognized. Sjostrom is honorary chairman of the 2018 Bobcat Open. Now retired after 35 years as a financial planner and stock broker, Sjostrom was surprised and humbled by the honor.

"I suppose just because I've been there so long they couldn't find anybody who had played more times than me," he says with a chuckle.

Sjostrom, 71, also served on the board of the Fargo Country Club in the 1980s and during that three-year term helped with planning for the Open.

He recalls playing some pretty good tournament rounds over the years, including shooting a 66 — a few strokes better than the golf pro he was playing

with. The Open previously had a senior division, which Sjostrom won several times, and he also won the event's net division in 2017.

Sjostrom also remembers playing at the Open in the 1970s with golf pro Eddie Langert, who won the first Bobcat Open in 1964 and went on to work for TaylorMade Golf and start his own company, Langert Golf. Langert handed Sjostrom one of the game's first metal wood clubs.

"He tried to get me to play with this little metal driver. It was pretty primitive compared to what they have nowadays," Sjostrom says. "I did hit a few shots with it."

Sjostrom and his wife spend the winter months in Arizona — where he gets to play more golf. He intends to play in this year's Open, but he's not quite sure it will be his last.

"Now that I can play in the wintertime and stay in better shape, we'll see what happens," he says. "It's been a fun tournament, and I've met some great people during all these years. It's a homecoming for a lot of people who come back to play in it."

## 2017 RUNNER-UP FINISH FOR MCCAIN LEADS TO WEB.COM TOUR QUALIFYING SCHOOL EXPERIENCE



**The 2017 Bobcat North Dakota Open** was golfer Andrew McCain's first tournament as a professional. He came ready to play, finishing second to Fargo native Tom Hoge by just four strokes after a tight battle.

That runner-up finish last year earned McCain a \$4,500 award from Bobcat for the Web.com Tour Qualifying School (Q-School). Because Hoge was on the PGA Tour and couldn't attend Q-School, the award went to McCain.

"I got that bonus, so that made finishing second a little bit easier," McCain says.

The high-pressure Q-School experience has four stages — pre-qualifying, first stage, second stage and final stage — with a four-round tournament at each one. Only a certain percentage of participating players move on to the next stage. Making it to the final stage ensures Web.com Tour status and provides a chance at guaranteed starts on the Web.com Tour.

McCain made it through his pre-qualifying round in St. Augustine, Florida, and into the first round at Lakeland, Florida, during Q-School in September 2017. Though he didn't advance past the first round, he says it was a learning experience that gave him a better understanding of what a player must do to prepare and be ready for Q-School.

"The thing about Q-School is you have one chance a year and that's all you get. It's probably the most stressful thing that any golfer will do," he says. "Hopefully, this coming year will be a different result since I know what to expect now. You have to play solid golf at every stage because there are good players at every stage."

After having good success as an amateur golfer, McCain competed in several mini-tour tournaments and Web.com Tour events around the country in the 2017-18 season.

He has fond memories of the 2017 Bobcat North Dakota Open and looks forward to returning for this year's event, as well as playing a few events in the Dakotas during the summer.

"I remember that I had a good week last year and being a little disappointed that I didn't win, but Tom played awesome," McCain says of the 2017 Open results. "The last two days were pretty good golf."

He praised the nice greens and fun layout at the Fargo Country Club, adding that the wind can be an X-factor that makes the course tougher.

"You have chances to make birdies and shoot a good score," he says. "It's fun how the people in Fargo definitely get behind it. I enjoy the support we get. For us as players, it's fun to have people coming out and watching and appreciating what we do."