



2026 Season Recap



J.T. Johnson
Bill Rolland Player of the Year
Amateur of the Year
Senior Player of the Year

The 2026 season is at a close, and what a season it has been. It was a season that saw a return of some of the CVGA’s many great past champions, as well as a few newcomers earning their stripes, so to speak.

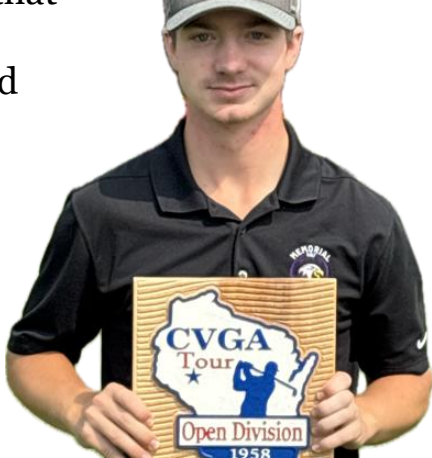
All types of golfers competed including; top level amateurs, PGA and touring professionals, current and past college players, high school players, and many senior players over the age of 50. There were eight events that made up the 2026 CVGA Tour Open Division season.

Our player of the year discussion was made very simple in 2026, thanks to J.T. Johnson’s steady play. He claimed the Bill Rolland Player of the Year, the Amateur of the Year, and Senior Player of the Year. He Played in 7 of 8 events, with his top finishes including a win at the Pheasant Hills Open, and runner up at the 65th Annual Tournament of Champions. His tie for 7th at the Turtleback Open and tie for 17th at the Tour Championship were enough to hold off Ralph Baxley, and impressively, were done on a severely sprained ankle. He persevered and held on for the impressive Player of the Year trifecta of titles. I am not sure that is a feat that can be repeated, but at age 63 it is an incredible demonstration of lifelong golf talent and a testament of the broad range of players capable of wining on the CVGA Tour.



Ralph Baxley
Art Tangen
Runner Up Player of the Year

Ralph Baxley is our Art Tangen Runner Up Player of the Year in a strong season that maybe could be classified as the one that got away. He lost in an epic 4-hole playoff to Andy Rauscher at the Mill Run Open, was alone in fourth at the Tour Championship and Tournament of Champions, sixth at New Richmond and had other solid finishes. Ralph is always a solid player, and he is sure to build on his two previous CVGA tiles over the coming years.



A.J. Diller
High School Player of the Year

AJ Diller broke onto the scene at the 65th Annual Tournament of Champions. After a busy competitive schedule kept him away form the CVGA for a while, he came back strong, earning 24 points over the last three events to claim the 2026 High School Player of the Year title. He tied for a group victory at the Tour Championship but was kept out of the Final Foursome due to tie breaking procedures. He will be a Freshmen at UWEC this fall, continuing the strong connection of Old Abes, Blugolds, and the CVGA.

Will Schlitz of Eau Claire, WI kicked off the 2026 points season with a win at Eau Claire Golf and Country Club at the 65th Annual Tournament of Champions. His 67 was good for a 3-shot win over JT Johnson and George Smith. Will picked up right where left off in 2025 as he was the reigning Player of the Year. The strong runner up finish by JT and George was a foreshadowing of what was to come with some solid play by CVGA past champions in 2026. Future CVGA Hall of Fame legacies were discussed and cemented during the remaining portion of the season. 2024 TOC champion Ralph Baxley and 2024 Player of the Year Travis Meyer were tied for fourth, and we had our first glimpse of AJ Diller who was heading into his senior season at Eau Claire Memorial at the time. He and professionals Nico Maurelli and Brock Winter tied for sixth with one over par 71s.



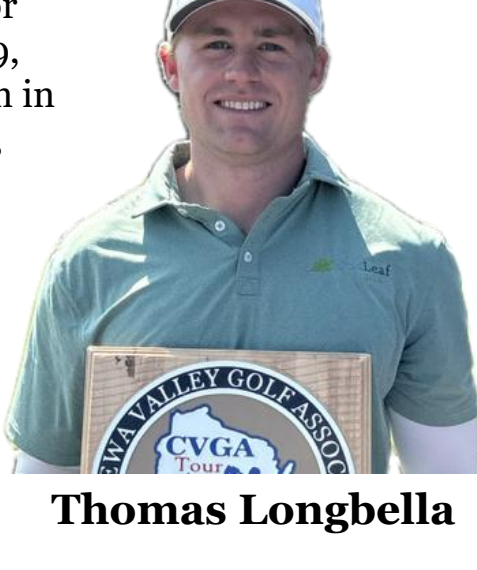
Will Schlitz

After the winter break, the season continued at the 2026 New Richmond Open, where a stacked field of 131 players teed it up at the CVGA’s traditionally largest event. Former NDSU Bison Jack Johnson claimed the title, capturing his first CVGA Open win. His 5 under par 67 was good enough for a two-shot victory over former Stout Blue Devil Dalton Anderson. Tying for third were Nate Adams, Thomas Longbella, and defending champion, Andrew McCain. Ralph Baxley, Brian Hills, Shane Barnes, Don Berry, Dylan Fultz, and Brandon Sperling rounded out the top ten.



Jack Johnson

Thomas Longbella traded places with Jack Johnson and became a 7 –time CVGA Open Champion at the 2026 Wild Ridge Open. The lowest winning score to par (-8) was accomplished through a back nine 31. The future CVGA Hall of Fame Member and PGA Tour Americas past champion dominated once again. Jack Johnson finished runner up , fresh off his win at the New Richmond Open. Jack matched Thomas’ back nine 31, but 66 was not enough for the win this time. Nate Adams had another strong week, and Past Wild Ridge Champion Loren Churness was solid in a two-way tie for third with 68’s. Shane Barnes was alone in fifth with a solid 69, and JT Johnson continued to roll with a solo sixth place finish in 70 strokes. Rounding out the top ten were Tyler DeBruyckere, Thomas Fey, Caden Hebert, Travis Meyer, Ryan Vivoda with -1 under par 71’s. 96 golfers played in this event.



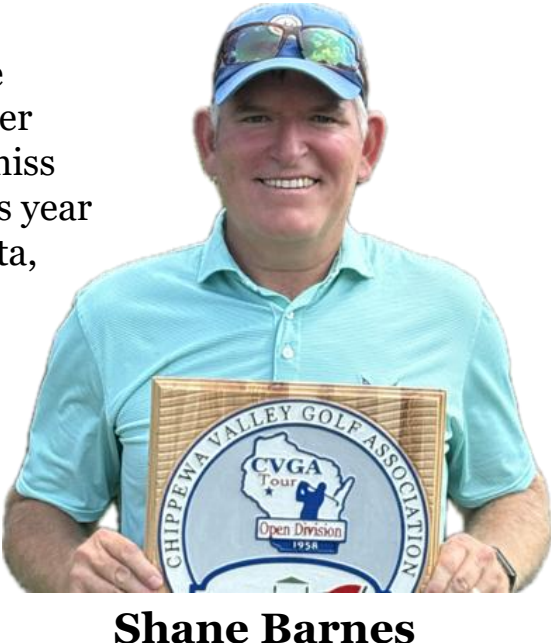
Thomas Longbella

J.T. Johnson claimed his 10th CVGA Open Division title at the 2026 Pheasant Hills Open in a playoff over Peter Maki. It started out rainy and extremely windy, but turned out to be a great test. J.T. hit all 9 greens on the front nine and fired a solid underbird 33. His 37 coming home was also strong, and his 5 birdies were enough for a playoff berth. The future Hall of Fame Member was extremely proud to capture his first title in many years at age 63! Peter was also great in the wind, but his par on the first playoff hole was not enough to claim his first tile. Tying for third with 71’s were Thomas Fey, Caden Hebert, Connor Herman, and Max Jericho. Rounding out the top ten were Shane Barnes, Tony Fitts, Markus Iwerbo, and Sam McDowell with even par rounds of 72.



Andy Rauscher

Another great past champion returned to the winner’s circle when Andy Rauscher captured the 2026 Mill Run Open in and epic four-hole playoff over two-time CVGA Champion Ralph Baxley. Baxley and Rauscher also battled it out over the first 18 holes, playing together. In the playoff, clutch up and downs, combined with clutch putts holed, made for an extremely entertaining playoff. Eventually, Ralph’s tee shot crept into the penalty area and Rauscher’s birdie finished the job! Originally from River Falls, WI. He had collected his previous 6 wins in years past but is back in the winner’s circle after a four-year layoff from competitive golf that ended in 2025. Tying for third were Kole Hallmark and David Walter with 3 under par 68’s. Josh Esterly and Stellan Orvick were tied for fifth with 69’s. Casey Peters was alone in seventh with a 70, and rounding out the top ten were Matthew Chandler, Dom Haskins, Jake Herdine, Ryan Jamieson, Matt Kamish and Will Sibenaller with even par 71’s.



Shane Barnes

Shane Barnes captured his first CVGA title at the 2026 Lake Wissota Open with an eagle on the third playoff hole. A driver and a hybrid earned him the title, rebounding from a near miss after a double bogey on the final hole of the 2025 event. This year brought a different outcome as the attorney from Minnetrista, MN became a CVGA Open Champion! The other playoff participant was soon to be UW-Eau Claire Bluegold Sophomore Cameron Stenzel from Victoria, MN in his first CVGA Open Division event! A score of 66 got into the playoff. Solo third was claimed by 2024 Pheasant Hills Open champion JT Johnson and Andrew Bauer with 67. Matther Chandler, originally from Australia was fourth with a 68. Rounding out the top 5 was Jonathan Hanner with a 69. Derick LaBlonde and Travis Meyer were tied for sixth with a score of 70. Rounding out the top ten was Craig Brischke, Dalton Anderson, and former champion Kelly Kretz, and defending champion, Tyler DeBruyckere.

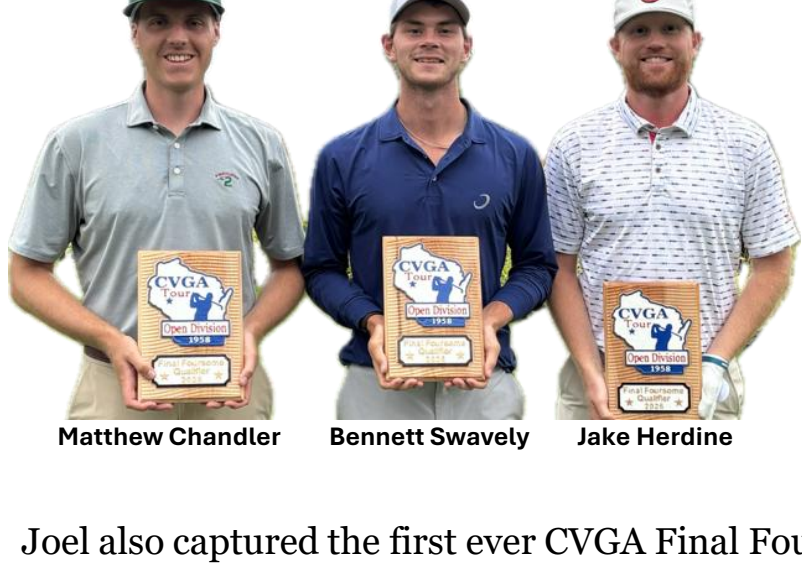
Thomas Longbella was back at it again, capturing his eighth CVGA Open title, and his third Turtleback Open. His 68, featured birdies on the 17th and 18th holes to edge out two-time Runner up Player of the year Andrew Bauer by one shot. The former Golden Gopher and PGA Tour Americas member was solid tee to green with five birdies to offset his two bogies. Andrew Bauer finished runner up after a two under par 69. The 2024 Pheasant Hills Open champion is heading into his senior year at UW-Stout and contended once again, as he always seems to. A four-way tie for third was with amateurs Matt Fladten and Travis Meyer, along with professionals Josh Malnory and Stellan Orvick, with one over par 72. Tied for seventh were professionals Josh Arndt and defending champion Brian Hills, along with season points leader JT Johnson. Rounding out the top ten with 74’s were Ralph Baxley, High School Player of the Year AJ Diller, Kole Hallmark, and Ryan Jamieson.



Joel Johnson

Joel Johnson captured the 2026 CVGA Tour Championship at Stillwater Country Club by a single shot over Bennett Swavely and Nate Adams. Two birdies and an Eagle sent him out in 32, with two additional birdies coming home for an inward 34. The total added up to a wonderful bogey free round of 66. Joel has won many CVGA Open Division events in the past, but followed the trend of past champions returning to the winner circle. Bennett Swavely, a PGA Tour Americas member, and former NDSU Bison Nate Adams both had excellent rounds of 67 that were not quite enough for Bennett to capture his fourth CVGA Open title, or Nate his first. Our 2026 Runner Up Player of the Year, Ralph Baxley finished alone in fourth (68), while another former Golden Gopher, Jack Wetzel of Edina, MN was fifth (69). UWEC Bluegold Ryan Jamieson was sixth with a -2 under par 70.

2026 High School Player of the Year AJ Diller, Brian Hills, Brock Winter, Jake Herdine, Matthew Chandler, Thomas Huettl, and Yarri Bryn rounded out the top ten with -1 under par 71.



2026 Final Foursome Scorecard

Joel Johnson	4	3	3	4
Bennett Swavely	3	3	4	4
Jake Herdine	3	4	3	4
Matthew Chandler	5	3	3	4

Joel also captured the first ever CVGA Final Foursome Title after the four-hole aggregate playoff format on holes 1, 7, 8, and 9. Joel, Bennett Swavely, Jake Herdine, and Matthew Chandler all represented their respective groups and went out for the extra session.

Jake and Bennett birdied the opening hole while Joel had a solid par, and Matthew made an early bogie after an errant drive. Next, birdies were made by Bennett, Matthew, and Joel on the 7th hole, while Jake only managed a par after a pitch shot from short of the green.

With Bennett now leading at -2, the par 3 eighth hole proved pivotal. After pars by the remaining players, a three-putt by Bennett leveled the field with Jake, Joel, and Bennett going into the final hole -1, with Matthew at level par.

On the final hole, an errant drive by Joel left him around 200 yards from the green near the large oak in the left ruff. The remaining players all hit good drives with Jake finding the left rough but much closer to the green. Joel hit a wonderful hybrid to the front of the green, with Bennett and Matthew each finding the putting surface as well. Jake came up a bit short of the green, but pitched to a few feet after a great touch, while Joel’s putt came up about 8 feet short of the cup. With a birdie putt to win, Bennett’s put just missed after a great effort. Matthew, needing a birdie to stay alive, gave it a great roll as well. After tap ins for par by Bennett and Matthew, this set the stage for Jake and Joel to make, or the title would go to Bennett. Joel was first to save his chances with a clutch 8-footer that was center cut. Jake followed, which set the stage for the final tie breaker. With Matthew eliminated in 4th place, Joel, Jake, and Bennett headed back out to 125 yards for a final closest to the pin tiebreaker to settle first, second, and third. With darkness setting in, Joel delivered an opening strike to about 8 feet that was not matched my Bennett (2nd) or Jake (3rd). What a finish in the fading twilight for our first ever Final Foursome!

- A total of 235 players played in at least one event in 2026.
- Of those 235 players, a little less than half (102) played only one event. See chart below.
- 170 of the 235 players earned at least one point throughout the season.
- A total of 586 competitive rounds were played in the CVGA Open Division, an average of 73.25 players per event.

Thanks for a great season and see you In September at the 66th Annual Tournament of Champions.

