

Blanton's best at the Legends

Moultrie pro finds win at Atlanta Open

By STAN AWTRY
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Had the Yamaha Atlanta Open been held in July instead of June, Kevin Blanton's exemption would have been expired and he would not even have been in the field.

But Blanton's timing in that regard was as good as his timing on the golf course this week. The professional from Moultrie shot a 4-under 140 and beat James Mason in a two-hole playoff to win the Atlanta Open at the Legends at Chateau Élan.

"I asked about it at the BellSouth qualifier and was told [because of regulations] I had until June 30," Blanton said. "I was glad to hear that because I really wanted to play here."

There's something about the Legends that brings out the best in Blanton. He won there as an amateur in 1994, when he was still in school at Troy State University.

Blanton has some strong credentials. He formerly played on the Nike Tour and is currently a regular on the Hooters Tour, where he won the Jacksonville event in 1998 and 1999. He played in the PGA Tour's BellSouth Classic at the TPC at Sugarloaf and made the cut.

But it's never easy to beat James Mason, the Duluth native who now plays out of the Orchard in Clarksville. Mason, the defending tournament champion and last year's Georgia PGA Player of the Year, has been almost unbeatable in section events.

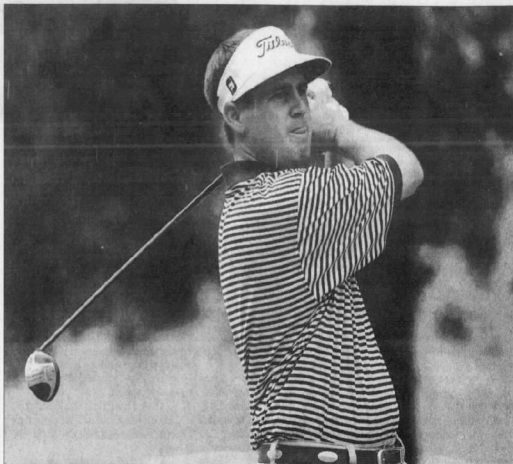
"I'd never played with James before," Blanton said. "I just knew I had to play my game and not worry about it."

Sudden death

Blanton held a one-shot lead coming to the final hole, although he didn't know he was chasing Mason, who was in the group ahead. Blanton hit his tee shot in the fairway bunker at No. 18, left his approach shot short and hit his third to the collar around the green. After putting his approach shot about 6 feet past the hole, Blanton calmly made the putt for a bogey to force sudden death.

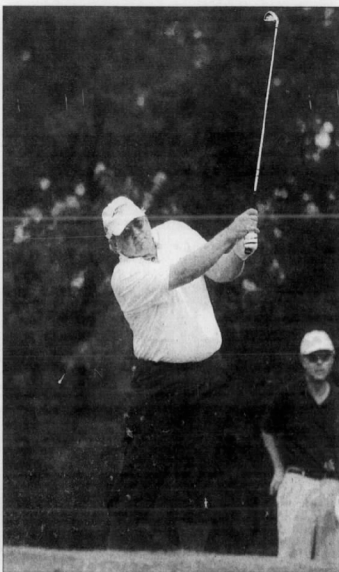
The two men hit nearly identical shots on the first playoff hole. Both were within 5 feet of the hole, so close that officials had to measure to determine that Mason was a quarter of an inch away. Both rolled in birdie putts and retraced their steps to 18 for the second extra hole.

This time Mason faltered ever-so-slightly. His approach shot was in the collar, just over the bunker. He aggressively went for the kill, but his chip went 10 feet by. Blanton lagged his 25-footer to within



Photos by KENT D. JOHNSON / Staff

Kevin Blanton watches his tee shot during play on the final day of the Yamaha Atlanta Open at the Legends at Chateau Élan Tuesday. He beat James Mason in a two-hole playoff to win the Open.



James Mason hits his tee shot on the 10th hole during the final day of the Yamaha Atlanta Open on Tuesday.

a foot and tapped in for a par. Mason barely missed his par putt, giving Blanton the championship. It's

18, but I had no idea what James had shot," Blanton said. "I really thought I'd need to birdie the last hole."

Blanton thought he was trying to beat playing partner Tim Conley of Braselton, who finished third at 141.

Putting paid off

Blanton had little preparation time for the Atlanta Open. Between his daughter having tubes put in her ears and his home course having its greens reworked, Blanton said he hit balls for about an hour last week. But he was able to come to Chateau Élan a day early and work on his putting. "All that putting really paid off," he said. "If I had been hitting my iron shots, I could have been 11 or 12 under."

Four players tied at 143: Greg Lee of Jennings Mill, 1995 champion Mike Gill of Maple Ridge (who had the day's best score of 67), Matt Russell of Alpharetta, and 1998 champion Louis Brown. Tied at 144 were John Godwin of Columbus, Jeff Jordan of Draid Hills, and former Summit Chase professional Stephen Keppler, now at Marietta Country Club. Keppler had a 33 on his last nine, including a one-putt eagle at No. 14.

Finishing at 145 were Russell Davis of Cherokee Town and Club, Ed Everett of Albany, Jason Brown of Harbor Club and Bill McDonald of City Club Golf Academy.

The event may be one of the last on the Georgia PGA Tour for Mason, who plans to play the Georgia Open, but will concentrate on trying to qualify for the Senior PGA Tour.

the first time Mason could remember losing a playoff. "I should have hit a 3-wood on

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**GEORGIA PGA
YAMAHA ATLANTA OPEN**

at Chateau Elan

Final-round leaders

a-amateur

x-won on a playoff

x-Kevin Blanton, Sunset CC	70-70-140
James Mason, The Orchard G & CC	71-69-140
Tim Conley, Braselton, Ga.	69-72-141
Greg Lee, Jennings Mill CC	72-71-143
Matt Russell, Alpharetta, Ga.	72-71-143
Mike Gill, Maple Ridge CC	76-67-143
Louis Brown, Smyrna, Ga.	70-73-143
John Godwin, Godwin Creek Golf Co.	73-71-144
Jeff Jordan, Druid Hills GC	73-71-144
Stephen Keppler, Marietta CC	72-72-144
Russell Davis, Cherokee T & CC	75-70-145
Ed Everett, Doublegate CC	73-72-145
Jason Brown, Harbor Club	72-73-145
Bill McDonald, City Club Golf Academy	72-73-145
Brad Mycum, Classic Golf Manager	73-73-145
Gregg Wolff, Willow Lake GC	76-70-146
Clark Sprattin, Atlanta National GC	70-76-146
Charlie King, College Park	73-74-147
Michael Butler, Southbridge GC	76-71-147
Don Q. Williams, Jr. Chattahoochee GC	72-75-147
Jeff Hull, Port Armor Club	77-70-147
David Bahr, Cherokee T & CC	78-70-148
Chan Reeves, Atlanta athletic	75-73-148
Craig Stevens, Brookstone CC	75-73-148
Bill Robinson, Highland CC	76-72-148
(a) Mark Strickland, Towne Lake Hills	76-72-148
Richard Crawford, Druid Hills GC	72-76-148
(a) Greg Garde, Flat Creek	72-76-148
Dave Ingram, Atlanta CC	79-70-149
Mike Cook, Sea Island GC	74-75-149
(a) David Robinson, Sandersville, Ga.	74-75-149
(a) Gregg Johnson, Cartersville, Ga.	74-75-149
Chris Aspl, River Pines GC	76-73-149
(a) Allen Peake, Idle Hour CC	73-76-149
Jeff Gotham, Hamilton Mill GC	72-77-149
Dan Korytoski, Orchard Hills GC	75-75-150
Jon Kough, Marietta CC	75-75-150
Kevin C. Jester, Ansley G.C.	74-76-150
Danny Elkins, Georgia Golf Center	72-78-150
Donn D. Ferno, Summit Chase CC	77-73-150
(a)Chris Hall, Lanier GC	75-76-151
(a)Erik Martin, Crooked Creek GC	76-75-151
(a)Brad Clark, Dunwoody CC	74-77-151
(a)Adam Grodhaus, St. Ives	76-75-151
Jeffery Cowell, East Lake GC	76-75-151
Wyatt Deltmer, Orchard Hills GC	76-75-151
Rob Allen Jr., Stonebridge G&CC	76-75-151
(a)Bill Kendall, Troby Club/Kippalache	75-75-151
Chris Miller, Cherokee Town&CC	77-74-151
(a)Scott Pitts, The Orchard	77-74-151
(a)John Garde, Flat Creek	80-72-152
Drew Pittman Jr., Twin City CC	80-72-152
Brian Dixon, Douglass Golf&CC	78-74-152
(a)Brian Davidson, Bladwin, Ga.	78-74-152
Toby Swartz, The Swing Factory	78-74-152
(a)Adam Britt, Summit Chase	78-74-152
Bobby Baughn, Country Club Net	74-78-152
(a)Bubba Gwyn, Berkely Hills CC	74-78-152
(a)John Tillery, Creek & Hard Lab	74-78-152
King Simmons, Browns Mill GC	76-76-152
Randy Brooks, Lanier GC	76-76-152
Edward Gibson, Lanier GC	77-75-152
Mark R. Hall, Griffin City GC	77-75-152
(a)Walker Jamison, Capital City	81-72-153
John Fesperman Jr., Dugeshee GC	80-73-153
Alan Segars, River Pines GC	79-74-153
Roger Keller, Horseshoe Bend CC	79-74-153
Rodger Hogan, Royal Lakes CC	78-75-153
Kelly Holliday, Chateau Elan GC	78-75-153
(a)Joseph Grady, St. Ives	78-75-152
Matthew L. Uhl, Lake Sovay GC	75-78-153
Mike Schlueter, Bentwater GC	75-78-153
Sam Stern, Smoke Rise G&C	76-77-153
(a)Lee Dennis, Athens, Ga.	73-80-153
(a)Matt Henson, Orchard G&CC	72-81-153
Jimmy Masston, Cherokee GC	77-76-153