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Jeff Fought

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## Golf pros at national PGA tournament

### Jeff Fought, Chris van der Velde at Senior Professional National Championship

By Zack Hall / The Bulletin / @cogolfguy

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Jeff Fought is hoping there is some actual truth to the charm of a third try.

The 54-year-old director of golf at Black Butte Ranch, along with Chris van der Velde, the 50-year-old managing partner of Tetherow Golf Club in Bend, will tee off Thursday at PGA Golf Club in Port St. Lucie, Florida, for the 2014 Senior PGA Professional National Championship.

This year's tournament marks the third time in four years that Fought has teed it up in the Senior PNC, which features a field of 264 of the top club professionals age 50 and older from around the U.S.

This time, though, he wants a better result, and he hopes his experience in the tournament will be a key ingredient to a successful four-day run.

"Anybody who plays golf and plays in tournaments, once you start playing enough at that level, then you start to get comfortable with it," Fought says. "You know what to expect. It's not like you're turning the lights on for the first time."

The two Central Oregon pros have plenty to play for this week.

Fought and van der Velde will be vying for a share of the nearly \$300,000 purse and the right to be called the top club professional in the nation for their age group.

In addition, the lowest 35 golfers at the Senior PNC earn berths in the 2015 Senior PGA Championship, set for May at French Lick Resort in French Lick, Indiana.

"It's attainable," Fought says of the possibility of playing in one of senior professional golf's major championships.

Still, Fought cautions, he will not be getting ahead of himself this time around.

"When you get to those events you just want to go and enjoy them somehow, even though you're trying to be in the top 35 so you can play in the major," he says.

Van der Velde, a former European Tour player, has his eyes trained on the same major-championship goal.

Last month he played in the Dutch Senior Open, an event on Europe's version of the Champions Tour, and found himself in third place after the first round.

He faded down the stretch, landing in a tie for 52nd place. But he took away some valuable lessons for what he considers a much larger prize.

"It was a great experience and I will use what I learned to be better prepared," van der Velde says.

Fought does not have van der Velde's experience of playing against the best European senior golfers. But he does know EXACTLY what to expect this week.

He actually played at PGA Golf Club already this year. In a quirk of the schedule, the 2013 Senior PNC was actually played in April 2014. That tournament was originally scheduled for October 2013 in Virginia. But heavy rain forced the PGA to postpone and relocate the event to Florida.

When the tournament was played, Fought did make the 36-hole cut but finished in 86th place, well short of qualifying for the Senior PGA Championship.

"I still feel like I could have done much better," Fought reflects.

He does have reason for optimism.

Unlike in April, his 22-year-old son Jeffrey will be caddying for his dad this time around. And his son should help ease the pressure of the event. As Fought jokes: "He always enjoys his dad's guts getting ripped out."

Of course, Fought would just as soon skip any heartbreak. And his experience in the event gives him the shot of confidence that he could do just that this time around.

"I think I'm more prepared this time," Fought says. "But you know what? I'm not going to get too far ahead of myself. I'm just going to go down, practice and play, and hope good things happen."

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#### Senior PGA Professional National Championship

What: Top tournament for club professionals, age 50 and older, in the United States

Where: Wanamaker and Ryder courses at PGA Golf Club in Port St. Lucie, Florida

When: Thursday through Sunday

Format: 72-hole stroke play. Starting field of 264 players is cut to 70 lowest scores and ties after two rounds of stroke play.

On the web: [www.pga.com](http://www.pga.com)