

Miracle shot at 16th hole helped

By BRAD EMONS

Donned in his Sunday best — the usual all-black attire — popular South African golfer Gary Player went into the fourth and final round of the 1972 PGA Championship leading the field.

His 18-hole total of 67 on Saturday, in third-round play, put him four shots ahead of the competition.

But in the fourth round of that match — the last PGA tourney held at Oakland Hills Country Club — Player began to lose his comfortable four-shot lead.

On the 14th green, Player bogeyed the hole after missing a seven-foot putt. He ran into similar problems on the 15th green, bogeying this time when he faltered on a 15-inch putt.

His lead quickly dwindled to two strokes as Tommy Aaron and youngster

Jim Jamieson drew quickly into contention.

Teeling off on the 16th hole — considered one of the toughest in country — Player ran into further difficulty when he sliced his drive on the dog-legged hole to the right, bouncing straight into the rough.

The crowd buzzed as Player appeared to be in deep trouble. His second shot to the 16th green seemed almost unfair. Among the obstacles were a pond and an assortment of trees . . . right in the path to the green.

Using a stool to line up his second shot, Player pulled out a No. 9 iron, and the gallery suddenly became silent.

SIGHTING THE FLAG, Player lofted the ball over the pond and trees to within four feet of the cup.

Doing his customary run-toward-the-

hole routine immediately after stroking the shot, Player found the ball in perfect birdie range — to his own amazement and that of the swarm of onlookers.

Player sank the birdie putt, putting Aaron and Jamieson out of reach.

The then-36-year-old Player went on to post a 72-hole total of 281, earning \$45,000 for his first-place finish. He carded a 72 for the final round.

The victory for Player broke a long dry spell. He had not won a PGA-sanctioned tournament since 1968.

On the day of the final round, early on an August morning, Player's father telephoned him with the message: "Just win this tournament for me."

Player's father had worked for 31 years in a gold mine, never earning more than \$500 a month. He had overdrawn

his bank account to send his son on his first golf trip.

Player has been one golf's legends ever since.

AARON AND JAMIESON, both totaling 283, each won \$20,850, tying for second place. Billy Casper, Ray Floyd and Sam Snead all tied for third place at 284. Jack Nicklaus, shooting a 68 in the third round, totaled 287.

Hale Irwin, this year's U.S. Open winner at the Inverness Country Club in Toledo, Ohio, tied with Lee Trevino for fifth place in the with a 286 total.

The first round leaders in the tourney were Stan Thirsk and Bud Allin. Both shot 68s.

Jerry Heard was the leader after the second round of play with a 139 total. He ended up in a fourth place tie at 285.

Player won 3 in row last year

When Gary Player returned to the winner's circle in 1978, he did so with a vengeance. It had been nearly four years since Player's last PGA victory, that one in the '74 Danny Thomas Memphis Classic.

In three weeks in April '78, his PGA win total leaped from 18 to 21.

The South African, who will turn 44 in November, stunned the golf world first at the Masters, where he fired a record-equaling 64 on the Augusta

National course in the final round. His eight-under-par tally also brought him from seven strokes back to garner a third green jacket.

Player's 277 total — rounds of 72, 72 and 69 preceded the 64 — was one stroke better than the trio of Tom Watson, Hubert Green and Rod Funseth.

Lightning struck a second time the following week at La Costa. Player,

the last man to qualify for the Tournament of Champions, opened with 70-68-76 and started the final round seven strokes off the pace once again. He shot 67 for a seven-under 281 to take his second win in a row.

The coup de grace came in the Houston Open the next week — a victory that came with relative ease. Player only trailed by three strokes entering the last round after starting 64-67-70. His closing 69 overtook

Andy Bean by a shot and made him only the 11th man ever to win three straight events on the PGA Tour.

But Player's year — his best of 22 on the tour — wasn't over. He nearly made it four in a row at the first NBC-New Orleans Open. After a 69-67-69 start, he shared the lead with four others. But a fourth-round 72 dropped him to a tie for fifth.

Player won 1972's PGA Championship held at Oakland Hills.

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