



Mike Cullity's NH Golf: Windham's Greenleaf earns berth in U.S. Juniors

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At last Tuesday's U.S. Junior Amateur sectional qualifier in Atkinson, Connor Greenleaf made the most of his local knowledge.

A 16-year-old Windham golfer who has honed his game over the exacting Atkinson Resort & Country Club layout, Greenleaf shot 68-73 to win medalist honors and earn a berth in the first U.S. Golf Association national championship to be contested in New Hampshire. With his performance, Greenleaf will join Keene's Chelso Barrett in carrying the home-state torch at the U.S. Junior, slated for July 16-21 at the Golf Club of New England in Stratham.

With his 3-under par total, Greenleaf won by three strokes over Brian Butler (71-73) of West Hartford, Conn. Butler and Art Griffin (74-74) of Lake Placid, N.Y., also qualified for the U.S. Junior, which will feature 156 of the world's top 17-and-under players.

Unsuccessful in his first attempt to qualify for the U.S. Junior last year, Greenleaf birdied the first hole of his morning round and made the turn in 3 under. A steady even-par back nine gave him a two-stroke cushion after 18 holes.

After a bogey-free morning, Greenleaf finally gave a stroke back at his second hole in the afternoon, Atkinson's par-3 11th. But he played par golf the rest of the way, notching two birdies and two bogeys, and qualified with ease.

"I was pretty comfortable," Greenleaf said. "I knew the course more than probably anyone who played there, and I knew kids who hadn't played there probably weren't going to get along with it very well. ... It's a really tough course."

Although he's playing out of Windham Country Club this year, Greenleaf nurtured his game at Atkinson the last few seasons, playing frequently with other talented juniors such as Joe Leavitt, Nick Fairweather and Nick Pandelena. In 2011, Leavitt won the State Junior title, Fairweather captured the New England Interscholastic boys' championship and Pandelena won the U.S. Challenge Cup World Series of Golf in Rhode Island.

“Seeing them hit the ball so far and straight and how good they are motivated me to play better myself,” Greenleaf said.

Introduced to the game by his father, Brad, and grandfather, Edward Carls, Greenleaf has compiled his own impressive golf resume. He qualified for the Callaway Junior World Golf Championships at 14 and last season posted two U.S. Challenge Cup victories, including his age group title at the World Series of Golf.

Earlier this season, Greenleaf finished third in his first American Junior Golf Association start and again qualified for the Callaway Junior World, a 44-year-old tournament that draws more than 1,000 junior golfers from around the globe. Contested outside San Diego, the tournament has a past champions list that includes Tiger Woods, Phil Mickelson, Ernie Els and Lorena Ochoa.

Greenleaf will compete in the tournament's 15-17 age division on the South Course at Torrey Pines, a longtime PGA Tour stop and site of the 2008 U.S. Open. A 72-hole stroke-play event with a 54-hole cut, the tournament starts July 10 and will provide Greenleaf a formidable warm-up for the U.S. Junior the next week.

Proud to be representing New Hampshire in the national championship, Greenleaf has drawn inspiration from fellow Granite Stater Barrett's runner-up finish at last year's U.S. Junior, he said. And although he hasn't played the Golf Club of New England before, he's aiming for a couple of practice rounds there over the next month.

According to his teacher, Greenleaf has the tools to be a factor in the U.S. Junior, which will feature two rounds of stroke-play qualifying followed by match play among the low 64 scorers.

“He doesn't have the flashiest swing and he doesn't drive it as long as some of the kids he plays against, but he knows where he can miss and where he can't,” said Marc Spencer, a Windham Country Club teaching pro. “He has a great short game, and he's not going to make many mistakes.”

Among the elite: Three New Hampshire players are slated to compete this week at the Northeast Amateur, one of the country's leading amateur invitationals. Hanover's Peter Williamson is expected to join Keene's Barrett and Atkinson's Pandelena in the field at Rhode Island's Wannamoisett Country Club starting Wednesday. Past Northeast Amateur champions include Ben Crenshaw, Hal Sutton, David Duval and Luke Donald.

Through the green: Recent Windham High graduate Fairweather will defend his New England Interscholastic boys' title tomorrow at Bretwood, which also hosts a U.S. Amateur Public Links qualifier on Wednesday. ... Rochester's Scott Rowell and Steve Rowell (68-69) won low gross at the NHGA Four-Ball Championship at Ridgewood and Canterbury Woods last weekend. Loudon's Dennis Chagnon and Gary Volpe (65-59) took low net. ... Laconia's Houston (73) was the low State Amateur qualifier at Stonebridge last Wednesday. Twenty-eight players shot 85 or better to qualify for the State Am, scheduled for July 9-14 at Concord. ... The NHWGA staged two Division A&B combined tournament last Tuesday. Division A winners at Ponemah Green were Derryfield's Louise Billy and Rochester's Joan Cyr (72 gross) and Nashua's Lisa Heaps (62 net); Division B winners were Cochecho's Virginia Petrie (79 gross) and Amherst's Cookie Gray and Rochester's Nancy Lewis (59 net). Division A winners at Hooper were Hanover's Betsy Knights (85 gross) and Concord's Nancy Calder and Duston's Diana Spring (72 net); Division B winners were Nippo Lake's Irene Schultz (89 gross) and Londonderry's Pat Cutler and Concord's Gretchen Knapton (70 net).

Mike Cullity's column on New Hampshire golf appears weekly during the golf season in the New Hampshire Sunday News. E-mail him at mcullity@unionleader.com.

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