



Mike Cullity's NH Golf: Leavitt, Fairweather taking aim on collegiate careers

By MIKE CULLITY
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A year after meeting in the State Junior final, Joe Leavitt and Nick Fairweather are polishing their games for college play.

Good friends and longtime playing partners at Atkinson Resort & Country Club, the teens duelled in the 18-hole final last June at Campbell's Scottish Highlands, with Leavitt's birdie on the first playoff hole earning him the State Junior crown.

Although both have turned 18 and are no longer eligible for the State Junior, which returns to the Salem course for the 16th consecutive year starting tomorrow, Leavitt and Fairweather are primed to compete next fall for Florida Southern and the University of Rhode Island, respectively.

An Atkinson resident who recently graduated from Central Catholic High School in Lawrence, Mass., Leavitt accepted a partial athletic scholarship from Florida Southern after considering several schools, including St. John's, Seton Hall, Rhode Island, Boston College and Maryland, he said.

"Florida Southern gave me the best package, and I liked their facilities the best," he said. "I want to go south too, so that was the best choice for me."

Located in Lakeland, Florida Southern has won 10 NCAA Division II men's golf titles over the last three decades, and its players have included two-time U.S. Open champion Lee Janzen and six-time PGA Tour winner Rocco Mediate.

A recent Windham High School graduate, Fairweather accepted a partial ride from Rhode Island, which joined the University of Hartford and St. John's as his top choices, he said.

"I just fell in love with the campus, the people and the players," he said. "Everything kind of fell into place."

Rhode Island is one of New England's leading Division I programs and the alma mater of Concord pro Mark Stevens, a former State Amateur champion who won last year's Rhode Island Open.

Leavitt, who credits his State Junior victory for building his confidence, will play the State Amateur, New Hampshire Open and U.S. Challenge Cup World Series of Junior Golf in Rhode Island before heading to Florida in early August, he said. He'll also seek next month to earn a berth in the U.S. Amateur, a tournament for which he qualified as a 16-year-old in 2010, he added.

Citing his competition with Leavitt for raising his game, Fairweather will play the International Junior Masters outside Buffalo starting Tuesday, he said. Next month, he'll defend his title at the Stan

Trojanowski Northern Junior in Connecticut, and he also plans to play the State Amateur and NHGA Stroke Play Championship before leaving for Rhode Island in late August, he added.

Moving on: As Leavitt prepares to enroll at Florida Southern, Bedford's Jake Nutter is leaving Lakeland. A former State Junior and Manchester city champion, Nutter plans to transfer from Florida Southern to the University of South Carolina-Aiken, he said last week.

Nutter posted a 74.7 stroke average in four fall tournaments as a freshman but didn't play in any spring events. After deciding that Florida Southern was not the best fit for him, Nutter spoke with Matt Giftos, the former State Junior champ who played at Aiken. Giftos recommended Nutter to Aiken coach Mike Carlisle, who offered the Bedford player a partial scholarship, Nutter said.

"I was really hoping that I'd be able to get into a good groove (at Florida Southern), start to like the place and make a name for myself down there, but things just didn't work out," he said. "I have an opportunity to do something better for myself next year, and I'm hoping things will go a little more smoothly."

Nutter shot 66 in last Monday's New Hampshire PGA chapter pro-am at Keene, pairing with Concord assistant pro Matt Arvanitis (67) to lead their foursome to victory. He plans to play in the State Amateur, New Hampshire Open, New England Amateur and NHGA Stroke Play Championship this summer, he said.

Young sensations: Fans at next month's U.S. Junior Amateur in Stratham will have a chance to watch two teens who gained worldwide attention at the recent U.S. Open. Beau Hossler, the 17-year-old Californian who briefly led the Open during the second round, and Andy Zhang, the 14-year-old Chinese player who became the youngest Open qualifier ever, are both expected to play in the U.S. Junior, scheduled for June 16-21 at the Golf Club of New England.

Through the green: Hooper's Ryan Kohler (74-68) and The Shattuck's Damon Salo (72-71) qualified at Bretwood last Wednesday for the U.S. Amateur Public Links Championship. The national championship for public course players is July 9-14 in Midway, Utah. ... Canterbury Woods' Rich Reeves and Concord's James Sokul (72) were low qualifiers for the State Amateur at Canterbury Woods last Tuesday. Thirty-six players shot 79 or better to qualify for the State Am, scheduled for July 9-14 at Concord. ... Mascenic Regional High School's Jocelyn Ojala (76) was the low New Hampshire finisher in the New England Interscholastic Girls' Golf Championship, tying for fifth at Bretwood last Monday. In the concurrent boys' event, Windham High's Fairweather (72) led the Granite State finishers, tying for sixth. ... Plaistow's Courtney Tilley (84-82) failed to qualify for match play at the U.S. Women's Amateur Public Links Championship in Neshanic Station, N.J., last week. ... Hanover's Peter Williamson (72-71-69-69) finished tied for 15th at the Sunnehanna Amateur in Johnstown, Pa., last Sunday. ... Vermont won the Women's Tri-State Golf Championship at Mount Washington Resort last Wednesday, defeating New Hampshire by 4½ points in the two-day, match-play event.

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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