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Greenleaf stares down monster

Windham star outplays Hossler in U.S. Junior opener

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STRATHAM, N.H. – At 17, Beau Hossler is a golf monster.

The Californian, a senior in high school, will play at the University of Texas. And for one Friday afternoon in back in June at the U.S. Open in San Francisco, he stood the world of golf on its head by rising to the top of the second-round leaderboard.

When Windham's Connor Greenleaf found out that he was paired with Hossler for rounds 1 and 2 of this week's U.S. Junior Amateur, he understood the challenge. Greenleaf, the "second-best" Granite Stater in the field to last year's runner-up Chelso Barrett of Keene, was supposed to melt in Hossler's presence.

Someone forgot to inform him, though.

Greenleaf opened the day with back-to-back birdies, knocking in five on the round, as he posted a rock-solid 74, three shots better than Hossler.

"When I found out I'd be playing with him, I just was pretty happy," said Greenleaf, the Windham High junior. "I knew gallery with him would be big. I mean Beau is a celebrity."

Hossler stepped to the tee wearing a U.S. Open cap, just to remind the folks about last month's performance.

"I think everyone knows where he's been lately," said Greenleaf. "But I went lower than him, though, so I wasn't exactly intimidated by him."

Neither Greenleaf nor the third man in, 14-year-old Texan Brad Dalke were showed an inkling of being intimidated by Hossler or the moment, and that made for an entertaining 18-hole stroll in the steamy late afternoon heat here on the Seacoast.

As they tee it up this morning in Round 2, looking to secure a top-64 placing and the accompanying match-play spot, each has the chance and the game to forge forward.

Hossler delivered exactly what you might have expected: Missiles off the tee finding home in fairway after fairway with pin-point iron shots dotting these speedy Golf Club of New England greens.

The putter let him down mightily, though, on the way to a birdie-less 77.

“You could talk to him out there. He’s a cool guy, a regular kid, but he knows who he is,” said Greenleaf. “He’s a kid who played in the U.S. Open and was leading. You can see that confidence-slash ...”

Simply put, he hit it like a man who shot 67 from tee to green, and he just might need that number today to advance.

Greenleaf fought his driver a bit all afternoon with the wildest of his tee balls often finding the thick New England rough.

“The driver is the only thing I was really disappointed in,” said Greenleaf. “Put it in the fairway more, and the score’s going to get lower. But I thought I handled the rough pretty well, too. I know for sure, I enjoy this rough more than any other player out here.”

Greenleaf if focused on finding more of the same out there this morning. Another 74 or 75 should lock up a match-play spot.

“I can improve on a lot of things from today, and I still shot a 74,” he said. “I’d be happy with a 74 tomorrow, too. That would be nice.”

And as you watch this event unfold this week up here in Stratham, remember Dalke, who is entering his sophomore season but has already committed to a full ride to play at Oklahoma University.

His 73 yesterday sits him tied for 20th in perfect position to move on.

Of course, the hype and reputations take a back seat today to the pressure of moving on in the world’s biggest junior amateur event on the calendar.

“I knew it would be fun, to play with someone (Hossler) who has a chance to go pro,” said Greenleaf. “Maybe someday, if I’m not on the tour, I’ll be able to see that guy and say I played him and beat him.”

Sorry Connor, but you don’t have to wait. Thanks to yesterday’s performance, you can say it right now.

Follow Eagle-Tribune Sports Reporter Hector Longo on Twitter under the screen name @MVcreature.

TALENTED TRIO The USGA made a good move with its final Round 1 pairing of the day. Beau Hossler - A Californian, who is 17, has already played in two U.S. Opens, making the cut and finishing 29th overall after leading in the second round this year. He'll play his college golf at Texas. He shot 77 yesterday. Brad Dalke - A 14-year-old Texan, he's already committed to play at NCAA power Oklahoma. He was low man in the threesome at 73. Connor Greenleaf - The Windham High junior, only 16, was our Eagle-Tribune Golfer of the Year as a freshman. He is right in the thick of things, tied for 31st overall with his 74 yesterday in Round 1. If you're up early and have an interest, this threesome tees it up together at 9 a.m. in Round 2 today at the Golf Club of New England in Stratham, N.H.

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