

McGreevy sets first-round pace at U.S. Jr. Amateur



Amateur golfers practice at the driving range before the first round of stroke play for the U.S. Junior Amateur championship at the Golf Club of New England in Stratham on Monday. The second round tees off at 7 a.m. this morning. AP photo

By RYAN O'LEARY
roleary@seacoastonline.com
July 17, 2012 2:00 AM

STRATHAM — The local storylines belonged to Keene's Chelso Barrett and recent U.S. Open contender Beau Hossler, but by the end of stroke play Monday at the 65th annual U.S. Junior Amateur golf championship, Windham's Connor Greenleaf was one of the guys making waves.

The 16-year-old Greenleaf made five birdies and finished with a 2-over 74, just six shots back from leader Max McGreevy at the Golf Club of New England.

McGreevy, of Oklahoma City, carded six birdies for a low score of 68. He finished two shots ahead of Joshua Lee, 2010 champion Jim Liu, Nicolas Echavarria and Andrew Bonnor, and was one of only seven golfers to break par on Stratham's near 7,200-yard course.

"I've never been east and I've never played in a USGA championship, so I didn't know what to expect," said the 17-year-old McGreevy, who is the reigning Oklahoma 6A High School individual champion. "I haven't played in a ton of big tournaments so I didn't have any goals, except to make match play."

McGreevy's sparkling round almost ensures that he will get a top seed for match play, which begins Wednesday with the low 64 players. A second round of stroke play tees off Tuesday with all 156 players in action. The first groups tee off at 7 a.m. with the final groups going off at approximately 2 p.m.

Barrett, a finalist in this tournament last year, stumbled late with a triple bogey on the par-4 7th hole and finished with a 78. Hossler, deemed a favorite after taking a second-round lead at the U.S. Open last month, struggled through the back side with three bogeys and a double-bogey and finished at 77.

Liu, who shot a 70 to finish in a three-way tie for second, was regarded as one of the top challengers for the championship. Andrej Bevins and Tom Swanson each carded 1-under 71s.

McGreevy wielded a hot putter and hit his approach shots close to the hole. Teeing off on the second nine, McGreevy birdied the 12th and 16th holes on putts of under 10 feet.

On the first nine, he reeled off four birdies in five holes. At the third, he hit a sand wedge to within 8 feet for birdie. He made a 25-foot birdie putt on the fourth hole and birdied from 5 feet on the sixth and 7 feet on the seventh hole. A bogey on the fifth and another from a bunker on the 18th were his only miscues.

"I knew I had to be calm and stay in the moment," said McGreevy, who'll be a high school junior. "Since this is my first USGA championship experience, I just want to enjoy it."

Benson's big moment

Craig Benson was strolling by the first tee box Monday morning when he was tracked down by one of his members.

"He came over and said, 'I want to see the first drive ever hit of the championship tournament at the Golf Club of New England,'" Benson said. "I thought, 'I should stay and watch this, too.'"

Benson, one of the club's owners and a former governor of New Hampshire, has made that stroll to the clubhouse many times, but never quite like yesterday.

With the first sound of club on ball at 7 a.m. sharp, the first-ever U.S. Golf Association championship that's been held in New Hampshire was off, tucked away in the scenic farmlands of Stratham's private course that was designed by Arnold Palmer.

Benson, the tournament's honorary chairman, couldn't help but get caught up in the spectacle.

"These kids are such spectacular athletes," he said. "Connor Black (from Houston, Texas) is one of the better juniors and his dad was sitting there, and I said to him, 'I'll take any one of their 156 swings. I don't care which one it is. I'll take any one of them. I don't want to be greedy.'"

Roughly 2,000 spectators were on hand to take in the tournament's opening round of stroke play Monday. The 156-player field will be trimmed to the low 64 after a second and final round of stroke play today. The players are then seeded for match play, which opens Wednesday morning and concludes on Saturday with a 36-hole championship match.

Parking and attendance for the tournament is available free of charge for the general public.

"Most of these kids are never going to be pro golfers," Benson said. "This may be the highlight of their golfing careers. I want 156 golfers — and only one can win, 155 are going to lose — but I want them all to walk out of here and think it was the greatest time ever. That's my whole goal. It's about the kids, period. If I could do that, I'd feel really good."

<http://www.seacoastonline.com/articles/20120717-SPORTS-207170399>