



NHGA Junior Am Notebook: Caddie advantage, Liu

By ROGER BROWN
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Jim Liu of Smithtown, N.Y., follows his shot from the first tee during the 65th U.S. Junior Amateur Championship at The Golf Club of New England in Stratham on Tuesday. (DAVID LANE/UNION LEADER)

STRATHAM — It's not that Jim Liu has anything against his sister, Jing, but after Tuesday's round in the U.S. Junior Amateur Championship he didn't sound all that disappointed that Jing couldn't make it to the tournament this week.

Jing planned to caddie for her brother, but ended up not making the trip to New Hampshire because of a work conflict. North Hampton resident Neil Kelly was assigned to caddie for Liu instead.

Kelly has won the Seacoast Amateur four times and is among the top amateur golfers in the state. He also has plenty of experience as a caddie at The Golf Club of New England.

"When I first got on site everyone told me that I got the best caddie here, so that was kind of a plus," Liu said. "He's been a great supporter. It's knowing what to say at the right time, and he does that perfectly. He knows exactly what to do out there, and I'm gonna rely on him for the rest of the week."

Liu, 16, will be a senior at The Knox School in St. James, N.Y., this fall. He has committed to play college golf at Stanford.

"There aren't any weaknesses in his game, I can tell you that," Kelly said. "He's a great iron player."

Liu, who is playing in his fourth U.S. Junior Amateur, is the only past champion in this year's field. He'll be attempting to become the third player to win the U.S. Junior Amateur more than once, joining Tiger Woods (three victories) and James Spieth (two).

"My game is there," he said. "I just have to put all the pieces of the puzzle together. Hopefully I can do that this week."

The U.S. Junior Amateur provides one of the best recruiting opportunities for college coaches, some of whom can be found at nearly every hole. Division I golf programs have a maximum of four-and-a-half scholarships.

"Most of the 2013 kids are committed, but the younger kids are still being recruited — and that's about half the field," Auburn head coach Nick Clinard said. "I think it would be accurate to say that most of the Division I schools have someone here, and that includes the mid-majors.

"This is one of the better tournaments (for recruiting). I'll be here for four days, but some coaches are here the whole week."

Beau Hossler elected to use a longer putter Tuesday, after he shot a 5-over-par 77 on Monday. He failed to make a birdie during Monday's round.

Hossler, who at one point had sole possession of the lead in last month's U.S. Open, rebounded with a 71 on Tuesday.

"This is the worst putting tournament I've had in my junior golf career," Hossler said. "I haven't sniffed reading a green so far."

The New Hampshire State Amateur will be held at The Golf Club of New England next summer. The State Am was originally scheduled to be played in Stratham this year, but was moved when The Golf Club of New England was awarded the U.S. Junior Amateur.

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