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Windham's Greenleaf off to a good start in U.S. Junior Amateur Golf Championship

By ROGER BROWN
New Hampshire Union Leader



Connor Greenleaf of Windham follows his shot from the 11th tee during the U.S. Junior Amateur Championship at The Golf Club of New England in Stratham on Monday. (DAVID LANE/UNION LEADER)

STRATHAM — Connor Greenleaf's Monday morning couldn't have started much better.

Greenleaf, a 16-year-old Windham resident, birdied the first two holes in the opening round of the U.S. Junior Amateur Championship at The Golf Club of New England in Stratham.

Greenleaf finished with a 2-over-par 74, which left him six strokes off the lead. His 74 was four shots better than the score turned in by Keene's Chelso Barrett, who is the only other New Hampshire resident in the field.

"No complaints," Greenleaf said. "Starting off with two birdies — I guess that takes a lot of the pressure off."

Max McGreevy, a 17-year-old from Oklahoma, City, Okla., holds the lead entering the tournament's second day. McGreevy opened the tournament with a 4-under-par 68 and has a two-stroke lead over Joshua Lee of Ocean Park, Fla., Jim Liu of Smithtown, N.Y., Andrew Bonner of Ripon, Calif., and Nicholas Echavarria of Columbia.

McGreevy, who will be a senior at Edmond Santa Fe High School in the fall, won the Oklahoma 6A individual championship earlier this year. His round included six birdies.

"I've never played in a USGA championship, so I didn't know what to expect," McGreevy said. "I got here late, so I only played one practice round. I knew I had to be calm and stay in the moment. Since this is my first USGA championship experience, I just want to enjoy it."

McGreevy has committed to play college golf at the University of Oklahoma.

North Hampton resident Neil Kelly caddied for Liu, who won the 2010 U.S. Junior Amateur and is the only past champion in the field.

Greenleaf, who will be a junior at Windham High School in the fall, said he's looking for improvement in today's round.

"I think we can take it even lower," he said. "I can improve on a lot of things, and I still pulled out a 74. If I shot another 74 ... I'd take the exact same round."

Greenleaf's threesome included Beau Hossler, who tied for 29th in the U.S. Open earlier this year. Hossler finished with a 5-over-par 77.

Barrett, the runner-up in last year's U.S. Junior Amateur, was nearing the end of what he called a mediocre round when things took a turn for the worse on the par-4 7th hole (Barrett teed off on No. 10). After hitting his tee shot into the fescue near a sand trap, Barrett's second shot ended up in the woods. He ended up with a triple-bogey and finished with a 6-over-par 78.

"I had a pretty good lie so I figured I'd try to hit it onto the green," Barrett said. "I had about 170 yards, but the fescue grabbed the hozzle of my club and I hooked it into the woods.

"I didn't hit the ball solidly, so it was tough to give myself an opportunity for birdies. I was pretty flat the whole day. You can't really dwell on it, otherwise you'll play bad again. I just have to pick it up a notch. I definitely have to play really well tomorrow to make the cut."

The field of 156 will be reduced to the low 64 plus ties following today's second round. The tournament will shift to a match-play format Wednesday.

The Golf Channel will begin providing coverage of the event on Thursday.

rbrown@unionleader.com

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