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Shim rallies for title

By GARY FITZ

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STRATHAM – There are two ways to consider the final 15 holes of Saturday's U.S. Junior Amateur championship, won in unbelievable fashion by a 17-year-old South Korean who moved to Georgia three years ago to concentrate on a golfing career.

The positive spin would be the incredible comeback of Andy Hyeon Bo Shim, who overcame blister problems on both feet to win nine of the first 12 holes of the afternoon round of the 36-hole final, turning a five-hole deficit into a four-hole lead.

According to United States Golf Association officials, it was largest comeback in the 65-year history of the event.

Or we could talk about the historic collapse of Jim Liu, who looked unbeatable all week at the Golf Club of New England, and seemed on course for his second Junior Am title, before falling 4 and 3.

"At lunch my dad just told me to relax," Shim said, "I made the finals and my parents weren't expecting that, they just told me to have fun and play my best, but don't do anything stupid. Don't lose too bad."

The afternoon got off to a rocky start for Liu, who hit his tee shot on the first hole into the woods and eventually lost the hole to a par. Two holes later Liu got lost in the fescue beside the green on the par-5 third and lost to a Shim birdie.

He barely had a chance on the next hole.

With the tees up on the par-4 fourth, Shim crushed his tee shot onto the green, rolled it nine-feet past the cup and sank an eagle putt to pull within two of the lead.

Liu hit his tee shot out of bounds on the next hole and lost another hole to a Shim par. Two holes later, Shim won the seventh with a par to draw even. He took the lead with a par on eight and rolled home a 35-foot birdie putt on the ninth to take a two-shot lead.

He would win the 10th with a par for his eighth victory in 10 holes and make it nine wins in 12 holes with a par on 12.

"In the past half year I've been making swing changes and things fell apart on the second 18," Liu said. "I just have to keep working on it."

Liu looked untouchable on Saturday morning, going four under to take a five-hole lead. When Shim tried to get things going by reaching the green on the par-5 10th, Liu drilled an 18-foot birdie putt, cancelling Shim's two putt birdie.

Over the next seven holes Liu's two-hole advantage escalated to five as the players came in for lunch. Liu was attempting to become just the third multiple title winner in tournament history.

Tiger Woods won three straight between 1991 and 1993. Jordan Spieth won his second title last year after winning in 2009.

"Nothing is decided until everything is over," Liu said. "Andy played well in the afternoon and he won."

Liu, of course, was the youngest player in tournament history when he captured the title as a 14-year-old two years ago. He has a well-known swing coach, a top ranking and a scholarship to Stanford.

Shim, until Saturday at least, has a much thinner resume. His father Jaefio has been his only coach since he started playing at nine. He's home schooled and says he needs to build up his academic credits to be ready to play college golf.

"To win this tournament I had to practice a lot of golf," Shim said. "I like golf more than school. I really want to play in college, but my grades are really low. I don't know what college would like me."

He might be surprised. In the meantime he's gone from a relative unknown to a player who is now on the guest list of next month's U.S. Amateur Championship in Colorado. And the invitation list will keep expanding.

<http://www.nashuatelegraph.com/sports/localsports/968786-457/shim-rallies-for-title.html>