

Shim stuns Liu in U.S. Junior Amateur final

Korean-born teen recovers from 5-hole deficit



Andy Hyeon Bo Shim, of Duluth, Ga., smiles as he holds the winner's trophy following his 4-and-3 victory over Jim Liu in the match play final of the U.S. Junior Amateur Championship in Stratham on Saturday. At right is Craig Benson, former governor of New Hampshire and one of the owners of the host Golf Club of New England.



Jim Liu, of Smithtown, N.Y., reacts as his chip shot just misses the cup during the U.S. Junior Amateur match play final at the Golf Club of New England on Saturday. Liu lost a five-hole lead to Andy Hyeon Bo Shim.



Jim Liu, of Smithtown, N.Y., tries to shoot out of the deep rough during the match play final at the U.S. Junior Amateur Championship in Stratham on Saturday. Liu lost to Andy Hyeon Bo Shim, 4 and 3.



U.S. Junior Amateur champion Andy Hyeon Bo Shim lines up a putt at the Golf Club of New England during Saturday's match play final.



Andy Hyeon Bo Shim, of Duluth, Ga., watches his shot on the 23rd hole during the match play

final of the U.S. Junior Amateur Championship at the Golf Club of New England on Saturday in Stratham. Shim defeated Jim Liu in the final, 4 and 3.

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STRATHAM — For the first half of Saturday's championship match, it was looking less like a competition than a coronation.

Andy Hyeon Bo Shim changed that outlook in a hurry.

Down five holes at the break in the 36-hole final of the U.S. Junior Amateur, the Korean-born 17-year-old from Duluth, Ga., caught and then passed favorite Jim Liu, and pulled away for a 4-and-3 win at the Golf Club of New England — and the biggest title of his golfing life.

"It's just a dream come true," said Shim.

It was the biggest comeback victory in a U.S. Junior Amateur final, surpassing a four-hole deficit that had been overcome a few times. He is the third Korean to win this championship and the first one since 2004.

Shim, who is home-schooled, earned a spot in the U.S. Amateur championship later this summer. He hopes to play college golf but admittedly needs to put more focus on his academics.

"I like golf," he said, "more than school."

The 16-year-old Liu, who tied for medalist honors and was the No. 1 seed, was trying to join Tiger Woods (1991-93) and Jordan Spieth (2009, 2011) as the only multiple winners of the U.S. Junior Amateur, which is open to all players with a handicap of 6.4 or lower who have not yet turned 18.

But his morning steadiness was replaced by erratic tee shots in the afternoon, and he missed a series of key putts that would have saved par halves.

"The past half year I've been making swing changes," said Liu. "Things just fell apart the second 18."

The final match couldn't have started much better for him.

Down two holes early, Liu built a 5-up lead after the morning's 18 holes with a solid tee-to-green game and some timely putts, while Shim was admittedly not at his best after making a pair of early birdies. But they swapped roles after lunch to make things interesting.

"I didn't really think about it a lot," said Shim. "I just thought about getting it going. The first 18 I hit it great but he played real good.

"My dad just told me to relax. I'd made it to the finals. My parents didn't know I was going to make it to the finals."

Shim, even while battling blisters on both feet and being attended to at times by the medical staff, won five of the first seven afternoon holes to square the match. His signature shot in that stretch was his tee shot on the 287-yard, par-4 4th hole, where he drove the green, his ball stopping 12 feet past the hole. He then drained the eagle putt.

"I'd just won two holes and I felt real comfortable," he said. "I played (Friday) with the same tee box, the same pin placement. I just trusted myself."

Liu, so steady all week long in making short work of his opponents, began driving erratically, missing fairways to the left. His wildness culminated on the long par-5 5th, when he drove out of bounds and ended up losing the hole with a double-bogey.

All square after making a 10-putt to save par on the par-4 7th, Shim kept his foot on the pedal. He won the par-3 8th by making a 5-foot par putt, and then rolled in a 35-foot birdie to go 2-up with nine holes to play.

From there, he could smell the finish line. He rolled in a left-to-right 12-footer for birdie on the par-5 10th to go 3-up — punctuating it with a fist pump — and went ahead by four after getting up and down for par from behind the green on the par-4 12th, his ninth win in a 12-hole stretch.

"The (putt) on 10 definitely shifted the momentum," said Liu.

The match ended on the 15th hole when both players made bogey.

Liu, who lives on Long Island, seemed to take the loss in stride. He made a verbal commitment two months ago to play his college golf at Stanford and will be among the favorites in other national junior tournaments the rest of the summer. His golfing future seems limitless.

"Now I know what I need to keep working on," he said. "I'll do that the rest of the summer. With any loss you can keep working on things and this was no different."

But it was Shim who walked off with the title in the first-ever USGA championship held in New Hampshire. And it was a victory that not many saw coming.

"I couldn't believe myself," said Shim of his comeback. "Jim Liu's the champion in 2010 and one of the top five (ranked junior players) in the country. ...; It was great."

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