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U.S. AMATEUR PUBLIC LINKS CHAMPIONSHIP

# Tourney ends in darkness, but future appears bright

BROWNSSUMMIT— After a stormy day at the end of a long, hot week, the 85th annual Publinx ended in darkness.

On the 31st hole, shrouded in the nightfall, Lion Kim sank an eerie putt to end the strangest of championships. The 21-year-old from Ann Arbor, Mich., outlasted 25-year-old David McDaniel to win the match-play final 6 and 5.

"It was about a six-footer downhill," Kim said. "I couldn't see it."

Everyone took his word for it, as no one else could see it, either. The putt fell into the cup on the 13th green at about 9:05 p.m., and the U.S. Amateur Public Links Championship was finally over.

The question now is, will the USGA come back?

"The week has gone fantastic," tournament director Bill McCarthy said Saturday during a long weather delay that eventually pushed the 36-hole final into the night. The golf course held up. The volunteers showed up. And the Publinx found a place that fit it perfectly, he said. The unique national championship reserved for players not affiliated with a private club will move to Oregon next year and Utah the year after. Then who knows?

The real barometer of success this week will be determined in years to come when the USGA decides to add Bryan Park to its rotation or not.

"This week has gone as well as expected," McCarthy said. "And I expected a lot. How that bodes for the future? Every invitation, even from a repeat facility, is judged anew. But obviously the huge success we've had here helps things."

The USGA is the governing body for all of golf. It holds 13 national championships each year, including the U.S. Open for men and women, and the U.S. Amateurs, considered the biggest prizes among the annual tournaments. North Carolina has become a regular stop for the USGA, which is holding three championships here this year alone.

The U.S. Junior Girls Amateur was in Pinehurst last week, and the U.S. Women's Amateur will be held at Charlotte Country Club in August.

"This is a haven for great golf," McCarthy said. "We've been fortunate to have received many invitations from this area."

The golf here this week has been a typical week of golf in North Carolina. Hot winds cut through the 90-degree days and sapped those on the fairways as well as the freeways. Saturday's storms left the final twosome of the week scrambling for cover along with spectators and the hundreds of staff and volunteers assembled at Bryan Park for the match-play finalists playing for the Publinx title.

Play was suspended at 9:43 a.m. about the same time cars began pulling onto offramps and under bridges on I-85. Kim and McDaniel were in the 13th fairway when the weather arrived. Play resumed at 4:51 p.m. after almost two inches of rain fell. There was every reason to believe the event would be called for darkness and pushed into today. That would've meant another night of work for the volunteers and the course staff, which had a long week here. Their work left an impression on the USGA.

"The grounds crew pulled an all-nighter earlier this week after all the rains," Christie Austin, a USGA executive committee member, said. "That kind of effort we don't take lightly."

Austin, the chairwoman of this event, said she and Mc-Carthy will meet in the coming days, assess everything and

write a report for the Championship Committee. She said she saw no reason why the USGA will not be back.

“It’s up to the host site to write a letter to the USGA inviting us back,” Austin said. “My understanding is that will be forthcoming. Then it’s a matter of trying to fit in dates and the right championship with the right fit to come back. I can tell you from our standpoint, it’s a great golf course. The city’s been incredible. The support of the community is there. It’s got all the right ingredients.

“This is a special site. It’s a public course with a special feel. There are no homes on the course, and then there’s the lake. It’s beautiful. And again, the infrastructure is there. I think we could host a number of championships here very easily. I think we’ll find a fit. I can’t tell you when it will be. But I definitely think we’ll be back.”

For the longest time Saturday, it looked as if they would all come back today to finish. But a putt that fell long after the storms and even after the gloaming over Lake Townsend gave the 85th U.S. Amateur Public Links Championship a finish to remember. Even if no one could see it.

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JOSEPH RODRIGUEZ/News & Record

Lion Kim (left) yawns while waiting with his caddy, Travis Haskins, after play is suspended at Bryan Park on Saturday. Kim won on the 31st hole.



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