

Monterey County SPORTS

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Prolo runs away with Pub Links by six shots

By KEVIN MERFELD
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It was 10:45 a.m. on the first day of the U.S. Open at Torrey Pines, which meant 21-year-old spectator Kyle Prolo had to kill 15 minutes before he could buy beer. So he wandered over to a swing simulator that had a closest-to-the-pin contest going. The winner earned an all-expenses-paid trip to the 2009 U.S. Open at Bethpage Black in New York.

His first swing was tight.

"It was a Callaway built for about a 30-handicap," said Prolo of the club he swung.

But his second swing was just right. Hole in one.

"I told him he needs to go and qualify for the Open now," said his dad, Mike, after hearing about the shot and the free trip.

The way Kyle is playing, that might not be so far-fetched.

Prolo followed up his first-round 3-under 69 at Spyglass Hill with another beauty, shooting a 71 to win the NCGA Public Links Championship by six shots over Chris Marin of Monterey and Brent Booth on Tuesday. Prolo played the first eight holes in 3 under, briefly struggled with four bogeys in



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five holes, but then righted the ship by closing with two birdies.

He finally breathed easy when he put his drive in the fairway on No. 18.

"That drive isn't the easiest thing in the world," Prolo said.

Monterey's Chris Marin tied with Brent Booth for second-place in the NCGA Public Links Championship, shooting 146 over the two days at Spyglass Hill. Marin earned the first alternate spot for this year's U.S. Amateur Public Links championship with a 143 at a 36-hole open qualifier last Thursday at Coyote Creek GC.

"Once my drive was in the fairway, it was an easy walk."

Prolo just finished his junior year at Idaho State, but found out two days before the team's last tournament that the program was being dropped. That sent Prolo scrambling, but he

will transfer and play for the University of San Francisco his senior year.

"I wanted to play four years of golf," Prolo said. "I've gotten better every year. I was really getting good. I wanted to find another place to play."

Prolo felt at home at Spyglass, a course he had played as a member of De La Salle's golf team in matches against Stevenson until he graduated in 2005.

"This course is always hard," said defending champion Scott Hardy, who finished fifth at 5-over 149. "Especially when the NCGA sets it up. They put the tees all the way back and they use some tough pins. If you break par out here, you played great."

Marin, who also caddies at Spyglass, shot back-to-back 73s, winning a playoff for second place with Booth. Marin was solid but never got closer than four shots — Tuesday's opening margin — while playing with Prolo in the final group.

"I know the greens out here," Marin said. "I just couldn't make a putt."

Another local, Pacific Grove resident Bill Moore, had an interesting day at the

tournament he won in 2001. Moore made five birdies, but also had three double bogeys before finishing with a triple and a 77, which put him in seventh place at 8-over 152.

Both Marin and Booth were originally just relieved to make the Public Links after watching their scores balloon in the wind during qualifying for the tournament. Marin shot a 78 at San Juan Oaks in San Juan Batista, while Booth posted an 86 at Spanos Park in Stockton, yet both scores somehow earned medalist honors.

Booth showed he belonged on the final day, catching Marin with a 71 that included three birdies and two bogeys.

"It was a solid round," Booth said. "I'd definitely take it."

But no one was happier with his game than Prolo, who will play in the U.S. Public Links after qualifying with rounds of 72-68 at Coyote Creek in San Jose.

"This is a good tune-up on this course," Prolo said. "I don't think it will get much tougher than this."

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