

NGGA WOMEN'S AMATEUR CHAMPIONSHIP

ESCAPING SPYGLASS

PACIFIC GROVE GRAD REES NOT SHAKEN BY POOR ROUND; LIAO WINS ON FINAL PUTT



Corinna Rees watches her drive on the 8th fairway during the NCGA's Women's Amateur Championship at Spyglass Hill Golf Course.

REG REGALADO/Special to The Herald

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It could have been devastating.

Former Pacific Grove High golfer Corinna Rees had played steady through the first 27 holes of the 4th Annual NCGA Women's Amateur at Spyglass Hill, positioning herself for a back-nine run to win the title. The leaders were all within reach, both on the scoreboard and physically, as she had earned a spot in the last group with her first-round 81.

But on that back nine she made three triple bogeys in a row, had three other doubles and picked up just two pars on her way to carding a 94 that included a 53 coming in.

It could have been devastating.

But after signing for her unusually high number, the junior-to-be at the University of Arkansas was smiling and laughing just like winner and Stanford senior-to-be Ki-Shui Liao, who shot a pair of 79s to hold off Cal-Berkley-bound Diane Kwon by one.

Sure, Rees had a disappointing day. But she's come back from worse. And she's seen others come back from worse.

After a strong freshman season where Rees posted the second-best score for the Razorbacks at the NCAA Central Regional and was named an academic All-American, she sat out the fall semester of her sophomore year with mono.

This past spring she tried to play her way back into the starting lineup and nearly did despite the restart. Rees made it back for two tournaments and just missed out on traveling with a team that finished a program-best eighth at the NCAA Championship.

"I almost made postseason play," Rees said. "It was a flip of a coin between another girl and me. I was happy with the way I caught up and the way I was able to get back in contention."

Her role model was Stacy Lewis, who just finished up at Arkansas and burst onto the national scene by taking the lead after three rounds of the U.S. Open less than two weeks ago. Four years earlier, Lewis had back surgery to correct her scoliosis. She even had a rod and five screws inserted in her back. But Lewis went from wondering if she would be able to play collegiate golf to becoming a four-time All-American, winning two SEC championships and the 2006 national title.

"It seemed like every time she teed it up she was winning," Rees said. "Not only

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Corinna Rees sinks a putt for par on the 8th hole.

Reese

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that, but she's such a nice person. You can always count on Stacy. She's like having an extra coach."

And for the two years Rees played with Lewis, the master schooled the pupil. And Rees was taking notes.

"I never was dumb enough to go against Stacy," said Rees with a laugh. "But I always enjoyed playing with her. I played two years of golf with her and she is probably the most competitive person I have ever met. She's so deserving of everything she has."

While Rees faded on the back nine Tuesday, Liao kept it together, going 1 over for her last eight holes. Liao had calculated by the 18th hole that she had everyone in her group beat, but she made a six-footer for par to unknowingly win the tournament by just one shot.

After shooting a first-round 85, Kwon bounced back with 1-over 74 (No. 16 played as a par 5) to

nealy close out her deficit three groups ahead of Liao. Kwon made three birdies on the day but bogeyed the last to finish just her second round at Spyglass.

"Yesterday was my practice round," said Kwon with a laugh after warming up to the course.

Liao got off to a rocky start Monday as well, almost shooting her way out of the tournament after opening with an 8-over 44.

"After that I was just like, 'Forget it. Just play.' And I was 3 under on the back side going into 18," Liao said. "That really got my confidence up a lot."

But Liao brought it back with a 2 under 37 on Monday and played consistently Tuesday to shoot her second straight 79. Her heart skipped a beat when she saw that 74 on the scoreboard, but after some quick math, she figured out that she had indeed won.

"A 74 on this course is still a great score," Liao said.

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