GOLF

Nick Delio smashes his way to California Amateur golf title

The Cal State Northridge standout wins the final match at Lakeside Golf Club.

By Peter Yoon

Los Angeles Times Staff Writer

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Nick Delio hits golf balls so hard that he cracks them.

Twice during the California Amateur championship, the long-hitting Delio -- a member of the new-generation bomb-and-gouge school of play -- had to take broken balls out of play after smashing them with tee shots.

That didn't stop him from winning, though. Delio, 19, from Valencia, blitzed through the tournament, capping the victory with a 7 and 5 win over Austin Roberts of Carmichael on Saturday in the 36-hole final match at Lakeside Golf Club in Toluca Lake.

Delio, who won his 18-hole semifinal Friday in an 8 and 7 rout and shot 66 on Monday at Lakeside in the stroke-play portion, took a 2-up lead into the afternoon 18, then continued play that was as hot as Saturday temperature, which crept above 100.

His array of drives up to 340 yards helped ignite a birdie-eagle-birdie-birdie start that put him five-under-par through the first four holes and gave him a 6-up lead that Roberts could not overcome.

"After that start, I wanted to make him make birdies to beat me," Delio said.

Roberts, 15, trying to become the youngest winner in the 97-year history of the tournament, could not. His putter went cold and he narrowly missed six putts -- lipping out twice -- in the 12 holes they completed in the afternoon.

Delio, the 2007-08 Big West Conference freshman of the year at Cal State Northridge after averaging a school-record 71.9 for the season, did not lose a hole in the afternoon match.

He did, however, have to take his ball out of play after cracking it with a five-wood tee shot on the 11th hole.

"It flew funny and sounded funny, so I assumed it was cracked," said Delio, who cracked another ball with a driver in the first round of match play Wednesday. "I looked at it and it was, so I took it out of play."
Delio had somewhat of a home course advantage, because his Northridge team practices at Lakeside once a week, but was fortunate just to get in. He was the first alternate after qualifying and learned a week before the tournament began that E.J. Kahn had broken a foot and withdrawn.

"He's a machine," said Jim Bracken, the Northridge coach. "He's fun to watch."

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Regional Digest: Roberts falls in the California Amateur

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Nick Delio, 18, defeated Austin Roberts, 15, of Carmichael 7 and 5 Saturday to win the 97th California State Amateur in Burbank on the strength of the 16th through 22nd holes. Delio went 7-under in winning six holes.

After going two up through the 13th hole, Delio three-putted from 6 feet on the 14th, then drove into a bunker on 15 to square the match. But Delio recovered with two late birdies to finish the first 18 holes 2-up.

"I just told myself, stay patient, and good things will happen," the Big West Conference Freshman of the Year said. "There was a lot of golf left, and I felt like if I could get the lead, I could keep it."

Delio wasn't even supposed to play the State Amateur after failing to qualify in May at Sterling Hills. But as the first alternate, he got the call that a spot was open. A week later he found himself winning the championship.

Roberts' runner-up finish in his first try sets the bar quite high. Mac Hunter remains the youngest to win the title in 1972 as a 16-year-old.

"I couldn't make a putt," the Sacramento Waldorf High School sophomore said. "My iron play was good all week. And I feel like I played well today, but he just played better."

– Bee Sports staff

Tennis

One player is being held together with "duct tape and glue," jokes trainer Zsolt Hajdu.

The other looks as if he could run all day.

Second-seeded Michael Yani, playing with a strained quadriceps, will face seventh-seeded Ricardo Hocevar, who says he trains seven to eight hours a day at home in Brazil, today at 1 p.m. in the final of the Trius Technologies $15,000 Futures at the Natomas Racquet Club.

"The way I see it, it's just one more match," said Yani, 27, of Durham, N.C. "Then I have a week off. I'll keep doing what I've been doing and give it all I've got."
Yani and Hocevar advanced with straight-set victories Saturday. Yani defeated qualifier G.D. Jones of New Zealand 6-4, 6-4, and Hocevar, 23, beat third-seeded Ryler DeHeart of Champaign, Ill., 6-4, 7-6 (5).

Yani outlasted Hocevar 6-3, 5-7, 7-5 two weeks ago in the first round of a $50,000 tournament in Yuba City en route to the title as a qualifier.

However, Yani says his quad feels worse than it did then. He played 11 matches in Yuba City – including doubles, in which he also won the title – and withdrew from last week's $15,000 tournament in Loomis.

Hocevar reached the Loomis singles final, falling to Victor Estrella 6-4, 0-6, 7-6 (8).

"(Hocevar) is very tough," said Yani, a former Duke All-American. "He doesn't give you anything. You have to work for every point. He's very energetic and quick and gets a lot of balls back. To beat that guy, you're going to have to battle."

In today's doubles final at 11 a.m., fourth-seeded Daniel King-Turner of New Zealand and Jones will meet unseeded Scott Oudsema of Kalamazoo, Mich., and Gregory Ouellette of Ormond Beach, Fla.

– Paul Bauman

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BURBANK - A week before the 97th California Amateur Championship, Nick Delio was not even in the tournament.

On Saturday, the 18-year-old Saugus graduate won the match play event over 15-year-old Austin Roberts of Carmichael, 7 and 5, in the 36-hole final match at Lakeside Golf Club.

Delio went from not being in the tournament - he was the first alternate after E.J. Kahn withdrew because of an injury - to becoming a champion.

"It feels great to join an elite group of names, like ... Jason Gore," Delio said Saturday from his parents' home in Santa Clarita.

Delio clinched the win on the 293-yard 13th hole, when Roberts pulled his approach shot into a bunker, could only get to the fringe, chipped long and conceded the match.

"I was six-up going into the hole," Delio said. "I knew if I hit a good solid tee shot, hit a decent approach and left myself with a birdie, I'd probably win. He had to play more aggressively than perhaps he wanted to, so when he got off to a rough start, he hit it into the bunker."

Delio recently finished his freshman season at Cal State Northridge. He became the third Matador in the past 14 years to win the gold medal.

Former Matadors Jeff Sanday won the title in 1995 and Tim Hogarth won in 1999. Delio is the first Northridge player to win while still in school.

"I think I drove the ball well," Delio said. "I think driving it well and straight."

He also became the second straight 18-year-old to win the title and the fourth teenager in the last six years to win the championship.

"It's been a long week," Delio said. "I played well. When my approach shots weren't hit that well, I saved myself by scrambling. If I teed a green, I was pretty solid all week."

Scrambling in golf is a term for missing the green off the tee, then hitting out of the rough and back down into the hole.
Roberts would have been the youngest champion in California Amateur history, but he was denied by the former Centurion.

The California Amateur Championship Web site contributed to this article.

Valencia golfer wins

CALIFORNIA AMATEUR: Delio tops Roberts 7 and 5 in the 36-hole final.

10:00 PM PDT on Saturday, June 21, 2008

The Press-Enterprise

After getting into the California Amateur Championship as first alternate, Valencia's Nick Delio won the 97th edition of the prestigious tournament by overpowering Austin Roberts, 7 and 5, in a 36-hole final match on Saturday at Lakeside Golf Club in Burbank.

The long-driving Delio, 18, kept Roberts, 15, from becoming the youngest champion in the event's history. Delio advanced to the final match by defeating Bermuda Dunes' Scott McGihon, 8 and 7, in the semifinals on Friday.

The championship match was all square after 15 holes before Delio birdied two holes to take a 2-up lead at intermission. He started the afternoon portion of play with three birdies and an eagle over the first four holes to increase his lead to 6 up, and then held on with eight pars and a bogey.

Delio is the third Cal State Northridge player to claim the title in the past 14 years.

MIRJAM SWANSON
CSUN golfer Delio wins California Amateur Championship

By Jill Painter, Staff Writer

BURBANK - Nick Delio played just one match play tournament before the California Amateur Championship.

Still, he had a hunch from the first tee box he'd do well in the 36-hole format.

"I'm not sure if I intimidate them or what," Delio said. "Usually I have the advantage off the tee because I drive longer than most."

Forgive Delio, who will be a sophomore at Cal State Northridge in the fall, for being a bit modest. He had a 340-yard drive and a couple at 328 yards in Saturday's final to bully his way around Lakeside Golf Club in sweltering temperatures. He even cracked his Titleist Pro V1x on his drive at the 11th hole and had to use a new ball.

His short game wasn't bad, either. Delio, who prepped at Saugus High, was up by two over 15-year-old Austin Roberts after the first 18 holes, then pulled away with three birdies and an eagle in the first four holes of the afternoon round to win 7 and 5.

"The hotter it gets, the better I play," Delio said. "I try not to let the heat or wind or rain affect me too much. Just play.

"Everyone's playing in the same conditions."

But not everyone is playing that long off the tee.

Delio hit a 340-yard drive on the 499-yard par-5 fourth hole. He reached the green in two and made a birdie to go up by six with 14 holes left. He needed just 13 holes in the afternoon round to dispatch Roberts.

Delio won the 97th California Amateur and joins a select group of golfers that includes Mark O'Meara, Johnny Miller and John Cook.

He became the third Matador to win the title, following Tim Hogarth and Jeff Sanday.

Had Roberts won, he would have been the youngest champion in tournament history.

Ed Holmes, president of the California Golf Association, was about to help Delio lift the huge California Amateur trophy for a photo opportunity in the post-match celebration, then declined.

"You pick it up," Holmes said. "You hit the ball 340 yards."

But that wasn't always the case. Delio started playing golf seriously when he was 8, but he was never one of the longest kids off the tee, said his dad, Dominic, who caddied for Delio in the
tournament.

"I knew if he made match play he could intimidate the way he hits the ball," Dominic said. "He's hitting wedge, and they're hitting 6-irons and after awhile that wears on you."

Roberts, who's from Carmichael in Northern California, had a remarkable run to the final, but it would've taken a remarkable run of birdies to catch Delio on Saturday. Roberts had several putts lip out and two that sat on the edge of the cup in the afternoon.

"(Austin) just ran into a buzz saw today," said Charles Roberts, Austin's dad.

Delio had never played in the California Amateur and almost didn't play this year, either.

He was the first alternate after qualifying, and learned last week that his friend E.J. Kahn sustained an injury and withdrew.

This was the first time the historic tournament was played in Southern California. It was an undeniable advantage for Delio, who plays at Lakeside every Wednesday with the CSUN golf team.

"He's a machine," said CSUN coach Jim Bracken, who followed Delio.

"He has a great work ethic. He works at it. Obviously, he has an advantage because we get to play here."

Delio started his collegiate career with a bang by setting CSUN's single-season scoring average at 71.9 and earning Big West Conference Freshman of the Year honors.

"Wow, this is amazing," Delio said. "I can only take 10 percent responsibility for my game. The rest goes to my family, friends and God."

And that driver.
TOLUCA LAKE — No matter the circumstances, he wasn’t going to squander a golden opportunity.

About two weeks ago, Nick Delio was at his Valencia home when the phone rang. It was the Southern California Golf Assn., which invited Delio to participate in the 97th annual California Amateur Championship at Oakmont Country Club and Lakeside Golf Club.

At first stunned by the query, the 18-year-old Delio eventually accepted the invitation. Then he made the most of his chance.

The sixth-seeded Delio reached the apex of his career Saturday when he knocked off 20th-seeded Austin Roberts, 7 and 5, at Lakeside to win the championship.

Delio grabbed the championship trophy, which had been previously won by Jack Neville, George Von Elm, Johnny Dawson, Gene Littler, Ken Venturi, Johnny Miller and Mark O’Meara, and raised it in the air in front of a large throng who applauded his effort one final time.

It’s a moment that Delio, who was the first alternate from his qualifying site of Sterling Hills Golf Course in Camarillo and was granted a spot in the tournament after E.J. Kahn suffered an injury, probably didn’t imagine would occur earlier this month.

"E.J. had to drop out with an injury, and luckily they called me up," said Delio, a member of the Cal State Northridge men’s golf program. "I was thankful for the opportunity because I was going to get the chance to show off my skills.

"I had been playing well for a while leading up to the tournament. I took advantage of the situation, and I stuck to my game plan of being able to shoot well on the fairways and greens."

Flanked by family, friends and veteran CSUN golf Coach Jim Bracken, Delio navigated his way the past week through Lakeside’s tight fairways and small greens once played by gigantic celebrities Bob Hope, Bing Crosby and John Wayne. Bracken, who just wrapped up his 22nd season at CSUN, arrived early in the second round of the 36-hole championship.

Bracken must have been impressed with what he saw.

"It’s awesome because it’s great for Nick and CSUN," Bracken said. "He’s comfortable with his abilities, but he’s not cocky.

"Since we’ve had him at Northridge, he’s played great. We are very fortunate that he came to CSUN."

Dello’s story the past week might have made for a good move script since he won a championship on an historic course in close proximity to Warner Bros. and Walt Disney studios.

There’s yet another opportunity just in front of Delio: He’s got the chance to win a second straight championship next June when the tournament moves to Lake Merced Golf Club in Daly City.

There hasn’t been a repeat champion since Frank “Bud” Taylor accomplished the feat in 1955.

"I do have that chance, but it’s a long way from now," Delio said. "I have to wait until I get up there and see the course.

"It’s been a long week and I just want to relax a little bit.”
Dello has earned that right.