McCleave hangs on for state-am crown

By GARY BAINE
Chicago Tribune Writer

GREENE — Dave McCleave of Fort Collins led the State Amateur with a 1-over-par 71 in the tournament virtually wire-to-wire, but it ended no sooner as far as he was concerned.

McCleave held a seven-shot lead nine holes into Sunday’s final round at Highland Springs, but finished with the hard-charging Gary Longfellow from Castle Rock who made up all those shots, and then some, in order to force a playoff.

Fortunately for McCleave, what had been a foregone conclusion was a done deal when he pounded his second shot into the cup on the first hole of sudden death to clinch the state amateur crown.

“I tried to choke it away,” said McCleave, who averaged 71.766 in his 18 holes and sank the putt on the first hole of sudden death to claim the state amateur title.

“I didn’t,” McCleave, a 21-year-old junior at the University of Wyoming, shot a 2-over-par 73 in Sunday’s final round to finish with a three-over-par total of 216, Longfellow, a two-time winner of this event, also went 2-over, but failed to take the title by making birdies on three of his last five holes to fire a final-round 71.

Former University of Colorado

Gary Crabtree, who had Crabtree, a third place in the tournament with a seventh-straight straight time Crabtree has finished in the top five in every event with the win. Once again, putting him out of the top 5. Nothing new here, he said.

“I guess when it’s my turn, it’ll be me,” said Crabtree, the Colorado State golf coach.

Fortunetally, everyone felt it was McCleave’s day this year when he made the turn Sunday with a seven-stroke lead.

“| didn’t think I had a chance the way he was playing,” admitted Longfellow.

But the composition of the tournament changed dramatically Also on the nine holes, McCleave bogeyed Nos. 10 and 11 after driving in the rough, but that point that McCleave knocked in a score-to-birdie at No. 12, cutting the margin to four.

But when Longfellow 3-putted the par 4-16th for a bogey, his did not the point that McCleave again looked like a shoo-in for victory.

Longfellow made a 3-foot birdie on the 13th to pick up a stroke, then watched another turning point as McCleave hooked his drive out of bounds on the par-4 14th. That errant tee shot led to a double-bogey 8, leaving Longfellow just two back.

Again on 17, though, McCleave seemed to regain his composure by hitting the ball six feet from the flag on the par 3-17th. Now, McCleave’s surprise, Longfellow dropped a 40-foot birdie there and McCleave once again led Longfellow to get within two.

McCleave made a routine par on the par-4 18th, which left his fate up to Longfellow, who hit a downhill 12-foot birdie attempt to keep him at bay.

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