CU transfer Petersen wins State Stroke Play

By GARY BAINES
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PUEBLO — Scott Petersen, who has the distinction of winning more state junior golf titles than anyone in Colorado history, opened a new chapter in his career Sunday by claiming the State Stroke Play amateur championship at Pueblo Country Club.

Petersen, who hopes to start playing tournament golf for the University of Colorado this season after transferring from Tulsa in 1990, posted a three-shot victory by carding a 3-over-par 74 in Sunday’s final round. His 7-under-par 277 total was three better than defending champion Dave McCleave and Colorado State golf coach Mark Crabtree, both of whom are from Fort Collins.

Crabtree, a CU golfer in the 1970s, thus kept intact his amazing run of close-but-no-cigar finishes in the State Stroke Play. He’s been in the top five each of the last six years, but has yet to win. He has two second-place finishes, two thirds, a fourth and a fifth.

"Hopefully, some year I’ll win," said Crabtree, who continues to struggle on the greens. "I still contend I have the best record of anyone during that stretch, but I’ll finish where I finish until I become a better putter."

Crabtree closed with a 69, while McCleave had a 71. In fourth place alone at 282 was Tom Kalinowski of Durango, who also hopes to play golf this season for CU. Kalinowski’s record this summer now includes winning the State Public Links Championship, a second in the State Match Play, a U.S. Amateur berth and a fourth in the State Stroke Play.

But the tournament belonged to Petersen after his 6-under 66 Saturday — his best competitive round ever — gave him a six-stroke advantage heading into Sunday’s final round. Although Crabtree threatened to give Petersen a run on Sunday, Petersen’s lead was never less than three strokes.

“This feels real good, but it hasn’t really sunk in yet,” said Petersen, a 21-year-old from Englewood. “It’s a big step for me. I’ve been close in tournaments all summer. I thought it was just a matter of time.”

But the victory didn’t turn out to be the runaway it looked like it might become after 54 holes. Petersen gave McCleave and Crabtree a chance by 4-putting the first hole Sunday for a double bogey.

Crabtree, who started the day eight back of Petersen, made up ground by going 4 under par on his first 10 holes, which narrowed the gap to three. But a poorly hit wedge shot on the par-5 11th resulted in a bogey, and Crabtree also missed a couple of short putts down the stretch.

“I knew the only way I’d have a chance of winning was by shooting 5 or 6 under," said Crabtree. "I had some chances on the front side, but I didn’t make the putts that would’ve put some pressure on Petersen. Still, that’s an awful lot of shots to make up.”

The crucial stretch for Petersen came on Nos. 13-14. He took a three-stroke lead into the par-3 13th hole, but rolled his first putt 10 feet past the cup. But he dropped in that testy uphill par putt to maintain his lead.

"The long putt made him put him left enough space (to finish the round with some comfort),” said Crabtree.

Petersen gave himself some more breathing room with a 12-foot birdie on No. 14. But as it turned out, both McCleave and Crabtree had to make final-hole birdies to finish within three of Petersen.

For the day, Petersen carded four birdies, five bogeys and a double bogey.

Now the main thing Petersen has to sweat out is whether he has the grades to officially enter CU this fall and compete for the golf team. For the past year, he’s been taking CU Continuing Education classes and practicing regularly with the Buffs.

If CU doesn’t admit him, Petersen says he will go to another university rather than lose one of his two remaining years of athletic eligibility.