OLIVE SEIZES STATE CROWN

Self-Made Golfer Passes 'Kiddie Corps'

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John Olive didn't choke Sunday and the 33-year-old real estate executive thus saved himself from one of the oldest cliches in sports.

Playing out of the Country Club of Colorado the self-made golfer was born in the Bronx and who played both basketball and baseball at the Air Force Academy, fired a tidy 33-33-48 to win the N.C. Morris state stroke golf championship with a 280.

Asked when he first began playing competitive golf, a friend of Olive blurted out "Thursday." It was very nearly correct.

"I started playing golf while I was a cadet," the 1967 AFA graduate said. "This is only my second state amateur tournament."

Warren Simmons, former state amateur champion on the faculty board at the AFA, told Olive to "keep your head down and hit the ground with every shot." It was his only lesson other than "what I picked up watching other guys."

ALL OF THIS was biker drap for the two 18-year-old frontrunners Olive passed with a string of four birdies that started at the 18th hole at the Foothills Golf Club.

Steve Jones of the High Plains Golf Club in Yuma, Colo., had a lock on the lead with his nine-under-par 270 going into Sunday's final round. And, it appeared to be another young move as Terry Kahl of Ptiimotosoa Golf Club (and a sophomore-to-be at the University of Colorado) held second with his 271, three better than Olive.

Olive and Gary Longfellow, the Lakewood Country Club veteran, felt like cheapskates losing it up Sunday.

But when the dust settled on the front nine Jones found himself tied with Olive. Kahl, despite an eagle drive on the par-four third hole, was a shot back and Longfellow was three back.

Kahl took the lead at nine-under with a bogey drive on the 345-yard third and a 129-yard wedge shot that burned into the cup on the 18th. But he triple-bogeyed the par-four ninth where his second shot flew out of bounds behind the green and he finished the slippery hole with three putts.

Kahl's 72-77-74 was a ghoul routine in that he rallied to push Olive by only one shot after a bird on the 17th. But he went into the water on the 18th with his tee shot and scrambled for a double-bogey six that left him in fourth with a 283.

THE DISCONSOLATE youngster who will be 19 on July 2, put it bluntly when he said "I just lost five shots on two holes and you don't win with that kind of golf."

Saturday he came within one shot of the course record with a 63 and credited new contact lenses for improved approach shots and putting. Sunday the right lens broke and wouldn't stay in. He removed both just prior to his eagle on the third hole.

Longfellow, the only amateur to win the Colorado Open, three-putted the sixth and seventh holes and missed birdie puts of seven feet on both the 11th and 17th and had a nine-footer curl off on the 18th. He made up three shots on the field with his 33-34-69 and tied Jones for second at 282.

"Had I putted better...and I made those I would have been right in there," Longfellow correctly assessed his chances.

Jones was the victim of a weak start with bogeys on second and third holes. His fifth at the third came off a short one putt as his short game failed him. Also, he failed to make any significant putts and this is a shattering experience for young players who expect everything to go in. His prior rounds of 71-69-68 came off a command of the par fives and putts that dropped from every angle.

Sunday he was one over on the par fives and pointed out that "I have missed a lot of 34-35-36-birdies and I couldn't make a birdie." He will be 19 on July 2.

"I JUST TRIED too hard," he said of his pressure-packed position going into the final round. He returned a 38-37-75 for his 282.

Olive has a Ping putter he picked up from an AFA buddy the year this style came out. He has rehauled it but refuses to give it up.

"It's just a weekend player, really," he smiled. "The guys call me the greatest par putter around."

Sunday he closed in on birdie putts of six, 12, 20 and five feet, the bird on the ninth coming after a 40-footer he put a foot from the pin.

"That was my best shot of the tournament," he said. "And I left it (the 90-foot) in my car and had to run back and get it after we teed it up on the first hole."

Olive had two bogeys when he three-putted the seventh, but then he put the four-birdie string together and through the 11th he had a three-shot lead with his nine-under status.

His only other bogey came at the 13th where he drove into the ditch to go in eight under. Longfellow birdied there but then missed the short birdie at 17th that would have tied for the lead. Kahl birdied 17 to tie Longfellow but gave it back on the 18th.

Olive earned an exemption for the championship flight in the Colorado Open (July 11-17) at the Hiwas Golf Club while Jones and Kahl were in Monday's qualifying for one of 10 spots among the nearly 150 hopefuls.

"I guess I'd like to play in that... that's the best challenge in the state. But I sure wasn't counting on it," Olive said.