

GOLF | THE 140TH BRITISH OPEN

Bookies doubt U.S. will end its slump in majors

SANDWICH, England (AP) — Tiger Woods is back home, nursing a sore leg. The rest of American golf isn't doing so well, either.

The United States is mired in its longest drought of the modern Grand Slam era, having gone five straight majors without a victory.

Phil Mickelson was the last American to capture a title, more than a year ago at the 2010 Masters. Since then, it's been two golfers from Northern Ireland (Rory McIlroy and Graeme McDowell), two from South Africa (Charl Schwartzel and Louis Oosthuizen) and one from Germany (Martin Kaymer).

While players from all over the world describe the U.S. slump as nothing more than cyclical, Nick Watney concedes that it's getting a bit bothersome.

"You never want to hear you're inferior," he said Wednesday.

Coming into the British Open, Eu-

ropeans hold the top four spots in the world rankings. Steve Stricker is the highest American, at fifth.

With Woods sidelined by an injury, McIlroy, 22, is a solid favorite to follow up his eight-stroke victory at the U.S. Open with another major title at Royal St. George's. The bookies also like a pair of Englishmen who happen to be 1-2 in the world rankings, Luke Donald and Lee Westwood.

The Americans?

Just an afterthought on the eve of the opening round.

"In the grand scheme of things, it's not such a big deal. In 40 years time, it will look like a hiccup," said Padraig Harrington of Ireland, a three-time major winner. "But when you look at the smaller picture, it's easy to say that Europe has become dominant in golf — until you remember that two of those majors were won by South Africans. They're a strong country,

too. And I think the next few majors might be won by the Australians."

As in many sports, from basketball to tennis to swimming, the rest of the world has sliced into America's once-commanding position. Golf is no different, with 24 nations represented at this seaside course in southern England.

Some of them, it would seem, have only tapped into their potential.

"Certainly we all expect that in the next couple of decades, Asia is going to have a very strong presence in the game of golf," Mickelson said.

But for all the talk about this being more about the rest of the world catching up than the Americans falling off, it's clear the most recent generation of U.S. golfers has yet to fulfill its potential.

Remember all the fresh young faces on the team that stunned Europe in the 2008 Ryder Cup, 20-some-thing such as Anthony Kim and

Hunter Mahan and J.B. Holmes? None of them has broken through in a major, and Kim might be the most mystifying of all. Tapped to be the next great American player, Kim has yet to recapture his swing since thumb surgery and got into the British Open only as an alternate.

Another batch of youngsters has shown potential, led by 27-year-old Dustin Johnson.

He was leading by three strokes going to the final round of last year's U.S. Open, but an 182 opened the door for McDowell's win. At the final major of 2010, Johnson missed out on a playoff at the PGA Championship when assessed a two-stroke penalty for not realizing he was in a bunker when he grounded his club. Kaymer went on to beat another American, Bubba Watson.

"We've got a lot of great young players coming up," said Ben Curtis, who won the last British Open played

at Royal St. George's in 2003. "A few of them just need a little bit more experience."

Only one other time since The Masters began in 1934 have the Americans gone four straight majors without a win. That was 1994, when the Americans were shut out by Zimbabwe's Nick Price (British Open, PGA Championship), South Africa's Ernie Els (U.S. Open) and Spain's Jose Maria Olazabal (Spain).

That year capped another glorious era for golfers beyond America's shores. Over a five-year span beginning in 1990, non-U.S. golfers won 11 out of 20 majors.

All over the world, there were impressionable youngsters who would mature into today's champions.

"When you grow up watching guys from your country win majors, it's reasonable to believe that you can win majors when you grow up," Harrington said.

LOCAL GOLF

Bartlett, Leopold share medalist

Five former winners of the RIGA Amateur, and W. Va. winner qualify for match play.

By PAUL KENYON
JOURNAL SPORTS WRITER

WARWICK — Qualifying in the 106th R.I. Golf Association Amateur Championship turned into a match of the former champions. The only twist is that not all of them are Rhode Island champs.

No fewer than five previous Amateur winners, Bobby Leopold, Charlie Blanchard, Brad Valois, Mike Soucy and George Pirie, played well enough in the 36-hole qualifying to earn one of the 32 spots in match play, which begins Thursday. A sixth, Paul Quigley, bidding to become one of the oldest players ever to reach match play, at age 67, was eliminated in a playoff.

But all the usual stars were upstaged by a new guy on the scene.

First-time competitor Jonathan Bartlett of Carnegie Abbey recorded the best score of the event, a 5-under 66 Wednesday. That put him at 6-under 136 and in a tie for medalist honors with 2009 champion and home-course favorite Leopold.

Bartlett is a champion, too. The former University of Mississippi star — he played in qualifying with an Ole Miss badge on his visor — won the West Virginia Amateur last year. Since he is now a Rhode Islander, the New England director of sales for the Carnegie Abbey Club and the new Newport Club, Bartlett was not able to defend his title when the West Virginia event was held last week.

He is making a great debut in his new home. The 34-year-old turned in some spectacular play on the way to his 66 on a course that he had not even seen until he took to the first tee Tuesday morning. Bartlett parred the first four holes, then bogeyed the fifth. He then went 7-under over the next 12 with birds at 6, 9, 10, 11, 16 and 17 to get to 7-under for the tournament.

Only a bogey on the last hole prevented him from having sole possession of the top spot. Even with the performance, he was not overly excited.

"To be honest, I was probably playing a little better last year, just because I was playing more," Bartlett said. The hot weather and walking the course actually helped him.

"Getting in and out of carts does not help me," he said. "Walking like this is good for me. I don't know what playing two rounds in a day will do, but I'm feeling pretty good."

The former champions more than held up their end. Leopold and Blanchard fig-



PawSox 2011 SCHEDULE

vs. Durham Bulls at McCoy Stadium
THURSDAY, JULY 14 @ 7:05 PM
 Christmas in July
 PawSox Special Christmas Gift

FRIDAY, JULY 15 @ 7:05 PM
 Carl Crawford Scheduled Rehab Appearance
 PawSox Replica Jersey Night

SATURDAY, JULY 16 @ 6:05 PM
 Carl Crawford Scheduled Rehab Appearance
 PawSox Free Youth Clinic, 2:00pm - 3:15pm

SUNDAY, JULY 17 @ 1:05 PM
 Go Green Shopping Bag Day
 Sunday Run the Bases

vs. Lehigh Valley IronPigs at McCoy Stadium
MONDAY, JULY 18 @ 7:05 PM
 SpongeBob Squarepants and Patrick

TUESDAY, JULY 19 @ 7:05 PM
 SpongeBob Squarepants and Patrick

WEDNESDAY, JULY 20 @ 12:05 PM
 Day Baseball - Play Hooky!

THURSDAY, JULY 21 @ 7:05 PM
 PawSox Cap Night

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World No. 1 Luke Donald of England chips onto the third green during Wednesday's final practice round at Royal St. George's.

AP/JON SUPER

Wind indicating torturous course

SANDWICH, England (AP) — Steve Stricker can appreciate better than most how Thursday's Royal St. George's, the overwhelming favorite to add the claret jug to his U.S. Open trophy.

One day after winning the John Deere Classic with a birdie-birdie finish on the green, manicured fairways of a TPC course in America's heartland, Stricker was trying to stand upright on the lunar links of Royal St. George's. The yardage book was more of a guide than the gospel. It was tough to control his ball through the air, even harder when it was bouncing along the ground.

"It's quite a turnaround," Stricker said Wednesday. "To learn and adapt to this style in 2½ days is a challenge."

That short time was all he needed, however, to learn what most others have about this links course in the south-east of England. It's a strong test for golf's oldest championship on a mild day. When the wind is up, which it has been all week, it can be a beast.

The 140th edition of this championship gets underway Thursday at Royal St. George's, as unpredictable as any links on the Open rotation. This is the course where Greg Norman in 1993 became the first Open champion to win with all four rounds in the 60s. It's the same course where Ben Curtis was the only player to break par when it was last here in 2003.

A dry spring has kept the rough from getting too thick, which is but a small reprieve.

The piece of information getting most of the attention on the eve of the British Open was the weather report. The forecast is for gusts up to 25 mph Thursday morning with patches of rain, before the wind tapers off in the afternoon. The wind is expected to remain moderate Friday morning, then switch directions and return to gusts up to 25 mph by the end of the day.

If that holds true, the players teeing off early Thursday and late Friday could get the worst of it. And as a reminder of how significant the tee times can be, remember that Louis Oosthuizen teed off at 6:41 a.m. in the second round last year at St. Andrews, missed the worst of the weather in his round of 67 and

was on his way to a seven-shot win.

Among the early starters Thursday, Rory McIlroy, the overwhelming favorite to add the claret jug to his U.S. Open trophy.

McIlroy, who has not played since his record-setting win at Congressional in June, did most of his preparation last week at Royal St. George's. He played in a strong, southwesterly wind, which is typical this time of the year. The 22-year-old from Northern Ireland played at 6:30 a.m. Wednesday in a wind coming out of the opposite direction.

It's a different test for McIlroy, with conditions much more firm and dry than at the U.S. Open.

"It's firm. It's fast," he said. "But the thing is with this wind, you're going to have to keep the ball low. But sometimes it's hard to run the ball into these greens because they're so undulating and they can go so many different ways."

The wind direction during three days of practice has the Royal & Ancient concerned enough that it might move some tees forward. Chief executive Peter Dawson said the most likely candidates were the par-5 seventh (some players couldn't reach the fairway) and the par-3 11th (Phil Mickelson couldn't reach the green with a driver).

Then there's the par-4 13th, where Stricker hit driver off the tee and driver off the fairway to get it near the green.

"Now, if the wind turns around, it's a different story," Dawson said.

It's different for everybody — even in the same group.

Siewert Cink, who won at Turnberry two years ago, was reminded of that while playing a practice round with Davis Love III, Lucas Glover and two-time Open champion Padraig Harrington. They came to the par-3 sixth hole, which measures 162 yards to the front edge of a green that is 35 yards deep. They all hit pitching wedge with the wind in their favor.

"Some of them were short by about 50 feet, and some of them went through the green into the rough," Cink said. "And they all landed within five yards of each other."

rounds of match play will be contested Thursday.

OSWGA Amateur

It will be defending champion Samantha Morrell against medalist Ali Prazak for the Oregon State Women's Golf Association Amateur Championship.

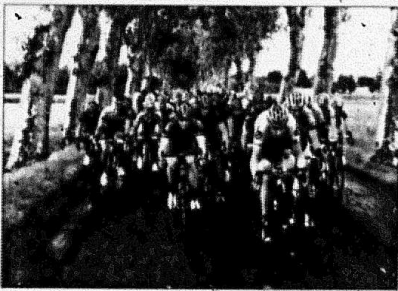
The two young stars powered their way into the title match Wednesday with easy victories in the semifinals at Laurel Lane.

Morrell, who just finished her sophomore year at Old Dominion, had too much for Kris Kennedy, 9 and 8. The North Kingstown resident will go against Tverton's Prazak, a 5-and-4 winner over Nancy Diemoz. Prazak, who also was medalist in 2009, earned the top seed when she shot 72 in qualifying while Morrell was second at 75.

Kay Bullock and Brenda Martin won their semifinals to advance to the championship in the First Division.

pkeryoon@projo.com / 277-7340

TOUR DE FRANCE | STAGE II



AP/LAURENT CIPRIANI

The main pack of riders pedal through the rain during Wednesday's 104.8-mile 11th stage of the Tour de France.

Mountains to test Contador's balky knee

ASSOCIATED PRESS

LAVAL, France — Defending Tour de France champion Alberto Contador wants to show his rivals he is still the world's best climber when the race hits the Pyrenees on Thursday. It just depends whether his troublesome right knee lets him.

The three-time champion has been bugged by a swelling in his right knee since he crashed on last week's fifth stage, and he banged the same knee again when falling off his bike on Sunday's stage nine.

With two mammoth climbs up the Col du Tourmalet and an uphill finish to Luz-Ardiden awaiting him on Thursday's 11th stage, the Spaniard feels quietly confident his body will not let him down. It had better not, otherwise Andy Schleck and Cadel Evans, his main Tour rivals, will not hesitate to try to knock him out of contention.

Cruel, but that's the Tour. After all, Contador did not wait around when Schleck's chain came off last year. "My knee is responding well so I'm obviously very happy," Contador said after Wednesday's 11th stage. "But keep in mind that I didn't climb the Tourmalet today. I have to see how it responds and on that basis I will make a decision how to do the

race on the last climb tomorrow." British sprinter Mark Cavendish won Wednesday's 11th stage with a blistering late attack to clinch his third Tour stage win of the race, and Frenchman Thomas Voeckler kept hold of the race leader's yellow jersey after Sunday.

Evans is the best placed of the main Tour contenders and the Australian veteran currently leads Schleck by 11 seconds overall, and Contador by 1 minute, 41 seconds. Schleck, who lost last year's Tour to Contador by just 39 seconds, now leads him by 1:30.

Contador's priority on Wednesday was more about staying on his saddle and letting the rain massage his sore knee on a 104.1-mile, flat and rainy route from Bayle-les-Mines to Laval.

"The knee did not bother me at any time today," a relieved Contador said. "The rain was actually soothing my knee today as it almost felt like ice."

Contador, however, knows there is nothing soothing about the Pyrenees.

Stage 12 is a 131.1-mile trek from Cugnaux to Luz-Ardiden and has three significant climbs which sprinters like Cavendish dread and climbers like Contador love.

HOCKEY | RHODE ISLAND REDS

SIHR lauds '55-56 squad

The Society for International Hockey Research has judged that the 1955-56 Rhode Island Reds, who finished first in the American Hockey League regular season and won the Calder Cup, produced the "greatest minor-league season of all time."

SIHR, consisting of nearly 500 worldwide hockey researchers and historians, published the award in its recent Hockey Research Journal, stating "Led by Camille Henry's 50 goals and Zelig Toppanzini's 113 points (both tops in the AHL), the Reds went from worst (1954-55) to first in 1955-56."

Six members of the 1955-56 team will be present when the R.I. Reds Heritage Society holds its 11th Annual Reunion Weekend, Aug. 5-7. They are Johnny Bower, three-time consecutive AHL Most Valuable Player winner and a four-time Stanley Cup winner with the

Toronto Maple Leafs, defenseman Bob Robertson, and forwards Ray Ross, Ron Attwell, Bruce Cline and Bill McCleary.

About 35 former Reds and other ex-pro players are expected to attend the society's weekend activities.

"Reds' Night at the PavSox" will be held Saturday, Aug. 6, starting at 4 p.m. It includes a barbecue, hockey-player introductions and the PavSox playing the Buffalo Bills at McCoy Stadium.

On Sunday, Aug. 7, the society will host its annual cookout at Goddard State Park, in Warwick, beginning at noon.

Both events are open to the public. Deadline for reservations is July 23. The charge is \$35 per person for each event.

For more information, please call the society's office at (401) 247-2666 or e-mail UNH1959@aol.com.

MURPHY

Continued from C1

Most victories in Division I

Patty Kazmaier Award as the best player in women's college hockey. The Bears were ranked No. 1 most of the season and finished No. 2.

In 2002, Brown overcame a 3-6-1 start and finished 25-8-2, won the ECAC tournament and reached the championship game of the NCAA Frozen Four. The Bears beat top-ranked Minnesota in the semifinals and lost to Minnesota-Duluth, 3-2, in the final.

Murphy's players won eight by League and three ECAC player of the year awards, one Ivy and ECAC rookie of the year award, and one ECAC goaltender of the year honor. She coached seven Olympians and four All-Americans. Katie King and Tara Mounsey were stars on the 1998 gold-medal Olympic team. King is the head coach of women's hockey at Boston College.

Murphy has won coach of the year awards and has coached U.S. National and Junior National

teams. She was instrumental in starting grassroots hockey for girls in Rhode Island and has encouraged the growth of girls hockey in the Rhode Island Interscholastic League.

Murphy also put her knowledge and passion for women's hockey to good use as a TV commentator. She covered the Olympics in Nagano, Japan, in 1998 and the World Championships in 2000 and 2004.

Despite all that success, the Brown women had a rough skate since their 15-13-5 season in 2006. They suffered through five consecutive losing seasons, won only 27 games during that period and finished at or near the bottom of the Ivy League and the ECAC.

Throughout her tenure, among the longest in Brown coaching history, Murphy was an outspoken advocate for gender equity. She pushed for fair treatment of female athletes at Brown during the Title IX case in the early 1990s.

Murphy grew up in Cranston, played hockey at Cornell, was a two-time captain and four-time All-Ivy selection. She graduated in 1983 and worked as a production manager for Data General until she joined Shea's staff in 1987.

essex@projo.com • 277-7340

IN THE NEWS

GOOD DEEDS

Chalmers helps patients

Former Kansas Jayhawks basketball star **Marko Chalmers** is opening a specialty shop for cancer patients at Lawrence (Kan.) Memorial Hospital. Chalmers, now with the NBA's Miami Heat, told the Lawrence Journal-World he wants to help cancer patients because the disease claimed the mother of a childhood friend. Mario's Closet will carry a variety of free or low-cost accessories, such as wigs, prosthetics and hats.

TENNIS

Purse money up

The U.S. Tennis Association says the singles champions at this year's U.S. Open will each receive a record \$1.8 million. Total prize money is rising by more than \$1 million to \$23.7 million, the most ever for the tournament. The U.S. Open starts Aug. 29.

BASKETBALL

Sun beaten in Indy

Katie Douglas scored 20 points, and the Indiana Fever defeated the Connecticut Sun, 90-78, on Wednesday afternoon to stretch their win streak to seven games. The 10-3 Fever have the WNBA's best record. **Tina White** scored 17 points and **Tina Charles** had 15 points and 11 rebounds for Connecticut (6-5).

The Indiana Pacers introduced former Lakers assistant **Brian Shaw** as their new associate head coach Tuesday. He will work

alongside Pacers coach **Frank Vogel**, a man he knows from their days on Los Angeles' staff together during the 2005-2006 season.

COLLEGE BASKETBALL

Xavier AD in charge

Xavier University's athletics director **Mike Robinson** will head the NCAA Division I men's basketball committee for the 2012-13 season. He replaces UConn AD **Jeff Hathaway** as chairman after the upcoming season and tournament.

The NCAA Division I Women's Basketball Committee has publicly reprimanded Baylor coach **Kim Mulkey** and Louisville coach **Jeff Walz** for comments and actions during the 2011 championship tournament. Walz used profane and abusive language toward game officials as well as kicking the scorer's table during a loss to Gonzaga. Mulkey expressed displeasure after her top-seeded team was put in the same bracket with Texas A&M, a Big 12 foe it had faced three times already last season. The Aggies beat Baylor on their way to the national title.

HOCKEY

Murray in Alaska

Rob Murray is the new coach of the Alaska Aces. Murray was introduced as coach of the ECHL

Aces, the defending Kelly Cup champions, at a downtown Anchorage news conference on Wednesday. For the last three years, he has been head coach of the AHL's Providence Bruins.

NCAA champion Minnesota Duluth and five other top hockey programs will make up the new National Collegiate Hockey Conference at the start of the 2013-14 season. Minnesota Duluth, Colorado College, Denver, Nebraska-Omaha and North Dakota of the Western Collegiate Hockey Association will join current Central Collegiate Hockey Association member Miami of Ohio in the new league. The upstart conference hopes to also add Notre Dame.

OLYMPICS

Madrid to try again

Madrid will bid for the 2020 Olympics, hoping to replicate Pyeongchang's success in winning a bid after a third consecutive attempt. Madrid Mayor **Alberto Ruiz-Gallardon** confirmed the Spanish capital's candidacy on Wednesday, citing Pyeongchang's victory as providing the necessary push for Madrid to bid again.

A new course in the seaside region of Barra in Rio de Janeiro will host the golf tournament at the 2016 Olympics. The Royal & Ancient governing body says the Riua Siro unit has been confirmed by Rio's organizing committee as the venue for golf, which is returning to the Olympic program for the first time since 1904.

Journal Wire Reports

SCOREBOARD

THURSDAY ON THE AIR

Baseball
7 p.m., **WFSX** Yankees Blue Jays
9 p.m., **WFSX** Yankees Blue Jays
WNBA Basketball
6 p.m., **ESPN2** Seattle Storm-San Antonio Silver Stars, live
Bicycling
6:30 a.m., **VX2** 2011 Tour de France, Stage 12, from Cugnaux to Luz-Ardiden, live
Golf
7 a.m., **ESPN** 2011 British Open, from England, live
3 p.m., **ESPN** 2011 British Open, from England, live
7 p.m., **ESPN** 2011 British Open, from England, highlights of the first round
4 a.m., **ESPN** (Friday) 2011 British Open, from England, live
Tennis
2 p.m., **CNN** World Tennis Tennis, Washington
Kastles Philadelphia Freedoms
RADIO DIALS
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GOLF | BRITISH OPEN

Clarke, Glover lead, but it's wide open

By DOUG FERGUSON
ASSOCIATED PRESS

SANDWICH, England — Darren Clarke snatched along bumpy fairways on a wild ride at Royal St. George's that was filled with blunders and brilliance, and one final birdie that brought the kind of ovation he had not heard in a decade at the British Open.

Right behind him was Lucas Glover, far more steady in closing his solid round with eight straight pars.

When a sun-baked and windblown second round finally ended Friday, they shared the lead in a major that is living up to its proper name.

The Open Championship is every bit of that.

Before anyone could get excited about the prospects of Clarke delivering yet another major to Northern Ireland, all it took was one look down the leaderboard — all the way to the bottom — to realize this championship was just getting started.

Only seven shots separated first from worst going into the weekend.

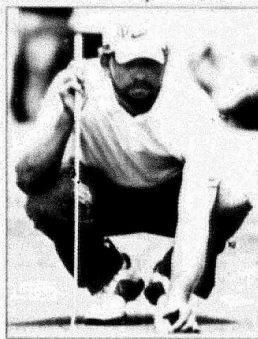
"There's still two days of tough golf and tough weather ahead of us," Clarke said.

Clarke, a forgotten figure as Graeme McDowell and Rory McIlroy captured the U.S. Open the last two years, bounced back from a double bogey to make a 50-foot eagle putt and survived a few more hiccups on his way to another 2-under 68.

Glover, playing the kind of golf that won him a U.S. Open two years ago in New York, has made only three bogeys in the opening two rounds. He had a 70 to join Clarke in the lead at 4-under 136.

"Unlike often when you're in contention in a championship where it may be between six, seven, eight of you, now it's between the whole field," Thomas Bjorn said. "You've just got to go out there and knock down and see where it gets you to on Sunday afternoon."

Bjorn (72) was one shot behind along with PGA champion Martin Kaymer (69), Chad Campbell (68) and Miguel Angel Jimenez (71). The 29 players within four shots of the lead included U.S. Open champion Rory McIlroy, who met his goal of getting to even par for the tournament with a



Lucas Glover of the U.S. closed the second round with eight straight pars.

spectacular save from a buried lie in the pot bunker to make of the 18th green.

McIlroy will play Saturday for the third straight time with Rickie Fowler, a fellow 22-year-old who brought his way to a 70 and then summed up the state of this British Open going into the weekend.

"It's basically a new tournament starting tomorrow," Fowler said.

That won't be the case for Luke Donald, who became the second No. 1 player this year to miss the cut in a major. His hopes ended when his ball plugged so badly in a bunker on the 17th that he had to play back toward the fairway, only to see it roll back into the sand. Donald at least was in good company. Lee Westwood at No. 2 missed the cut and refused to speak to reporters.

Even with a beloved figure like Clarke in the lead, nothing is drawing more attention than the weather.

The forecast is strong wind and increasing rain late in the morning, followed by heavy rain and even stronger gusts in the afternoon. Depending on the weather, it could be a repeat of 10 years ago at Royal Lytham & St. Annes, when David Duval started the third round seven shots out of the lead and wound up with a share of the lead by the end of the day.

"There's an awful long way to go yet, and I believe the forecast for the weekend is very, very poor, which I quite look forward to," Clarke said. "But the course is going to play very, very tough. If that's the case, then the tournament is still wide open for an awful lot of players."

So many players in fact, that it was easy to overlook Phil Mickelson, who has never fared well at the British Open and suddenly finds himself within three shots of the lead going into the weekend.

"I'm looking forward to that challenge, and I'm hoping I've got the shots now to be effective in it," Mickelson said.

The eclectic mix of contenders still includes 20-year-old amateur Tom Lewis, who shared the lead after the first round with a 63 and held it together until the end of his round when he three-putted the 17th and was fortunate to make bogey on the final hole. His shot from the rough went over the green and was headed out of bounds until the ball hit the stake. He shot 74, and was still only three shots behind.

On the other end of the spectrum was 61-year-old Tom Watson, who put another memorable show with a hole-in-one on the sixth hole, hitting a pure 4-iron from 160 yards into the wind that took one hop and hanged off the pin before dropping into the cup.

"They're all lucky when they go in," Watson said. "But that's what I was aiming at."

The group at 2-under 138 included a former Ryder Cup captain in Tom Lehman (67) and the current captain in Davis Love III (68). They were joined by Masters champion Charl Schwartzel, who has experience with a crowded leaderboard. He was among eight players who had a share of the lead on the final day at Augusta National until he birdied the last four holes to win by two.

SOCCER | WOMEN'S WORLD CUP

NEXT: Sunday, USA vs. Japan, 7 p.m.



U.S. goalkeeper Hope Solo trains for Sunday's World Cup final against Japan.

It's history vs. hustle in U.S.-Japan matchup

By RAF CASERT
ASSOCIATED PRESS

FRANKFURT, Germany — With two World Cup titles and three Olympic gold medals, the United States has history on its side in Sunday's final against Japan.

But with their lightning quick passing and slick combination play, the Japanese may well have a grip on the future of the game.

The physical, sweeping game of the Americans stands in sharp contrast with the close, possession-oriented game of Japan, turning Sunday's match into an intriguing clash of styles.

The United States beat Japan in two pre-World Cup exhibitions, but that will count for little in the final.

"They're a different team here in the World Cup," U.S. captain Christie Rampone said. "It brings a different level."

The accolades for Japan have been coming in from all angles, comparing its style with that of Barcelona and Brazil's "beautiful game."

Japan has sought to develop that flair for years, but only this time do they have the confidence to execute it at the highest level. Japan coach Norio Sasaki said his team was ready to reach the Olympic semifinals three years ago in Beijing, and "this time we said, let's go to the final."

The cup itself is within reach, he said.

"It's definitely not impossible," Sasaki said. "It is a once-in-a-lifetime chance to win this and beat the No. 1 team in the world."

Japan's breakthrough victory came in the quarterfinals last weekend when it beat host Germany, the two-time defending champion, in extra time when it proved fiercer than its big, lumbering opponent.

Even if Sunday is Japan's first final in the record books, Sasaki said his players already have one under the belt — against Germany.

"This was almost like playing the final in terms of pressure, attitude and expectations," Sasaki said of the game against Germany. "The actual final will be a very similar situation."

That same weekend, the United States had a similar experience, rallying in an intense match against Brazil with a penalty shootout win. It created a groundswell of support across the United States.

"Obviously, coming from behind against Brazil is historic," said Abby Wambach, who scored in the last minute of extra time to tie it 2-2 and force a shootout. "It's one of those moments that may never happen again."

"I want it to be life-changing at the end of the road. Because right now, I'm still very much involved in this and I'm not trying to think anything other than Sunday and winning."

Both rode their emotional surge through the semifinals, with Japan beating Sweden, 3-1, and the United States posting the same score over France.

An American confidence boost comes from the history books. In 25 matches dating back to 1986, it has beaten Japan 22 times and remains unbeaten.

However, there is a first for everything. Japan already reached its first semifinal and final.

"We are just ready to face that challenge," Sasaki said.

BRITISH OPEN JOURNAL

McIlroy grinds his way into contention

ASSOCIATED PRESS

SANDWICH, England — On a sunny day when the old-timers shined, the kid made sure he was right in the thick of things at the British Open.

Another major title is still in Rory McIlroy's grasp, though he isn't going to run away with this one.

The 22-year-old from Northern Ireland tenaciously carved out a 1-under 69 Friday that left him four strokes off the lead at Royal St. George's, where just seven strokes will be separating the field heading into what figures to be a wild — and possibly stormy — weekend.

Darren Clarke and Lucas Glover are at the top of a leaderboard filled with experience, from 40-somethings Thomas Bjorn, Miguel Angel Jimenez and Davis Love III to 52-year-old Tom Lehman.

But there's something for everyone (except maybe the home country). Phil Mickelson, check. Sergio Garcia, check. Major champions Martin Kaymer and Charl Schwartzel, check and check.

And McIlroy, lurking in the rearview mirror, looking to add

the claret jug to his U.S. Open title.

"It was a grind," he said. "It would be nicer to be a couple better, but I'll take that going into the weekend. I'm very happy with my position."

Westwood takes a fall

Lee Westwood was full of confidence on the eve of the British Open. He said he had the patience to conquer Royal St. George's and win that elusive first major.

By Friday, he was gone. A second-round 73 sent an irritable Westwood tumbling out of the tournament at 4-over, a stroke above the cut.

The second-ranked Englishman wasn't the only big name out before the weekend. Top-ranked Luke Donald hit the exit, as did former winners Padraig Harrington, Ernie Els, Ben Curtis and Mark Calcavecchia. Also out were No. 7-ranked Matt Kuchar and 2010 U.S. Open champion Graeme McDowell.

Of the 71 players remaining, only 13 occupy positions in the world's top 30. And two of the left-

overs are amateur players — 20-year-old Englishman Tom Lewis (1-under) and 21-year-old American Peter Uihlein (2-over).

The only crumb of comfort for Donald, who bogeyed his last four holes for an uncharacteristically sloppy 75, is that he's assured of retaining his No. 1 ranking next week.

That's because Westwood followed him out of Sandwich.

After his bold claims on Tuesday that he would master Royal St. George's, he sloped off with barely a whimper, refusing to talk to reporters.

That had been expected of him. A top-three finisher in all the majors, he ended Tiger Woods' 281-week reign as No. 1 in October and has been one of the world's most consistent performers in 2011.

Westwood started Friday like he meant business, making a birdie at the par-4 No. 11 to go to even par.

That was as good as it got.

A dropped shot at No. 2 was soon backed up by a double bogey at No. 8, and he couldn't recover.

Uihlein makes cut in England

Peter Uihlein, the reigning U.S. Amateur champion and former varsity golf player at Providence Country Day school, has finished second round



Uihlein

play at the British Open, recording a 1-over 71 for the second consecutive day. His total score of 2-over par guarantees that he will make the cut.

Uihlein competed but failed to make the cut this year at The Masters and the U.S. Open. The winner of last month's Northeast Amateur at Wannamoisett is second among the five amateurs playing in Sandwich, England.

Uihlein had a tremendous run early Friday, collecting birdies on four of five holes during the front nine before losing momentum with a bogey and then a double bogey. He was consistently at par on the second nine, except for a single bogey that left him at 1-over par for the day. Uihlein's score left him six strokes off the lead.

RIGA AMATEUR

Metacomet's Merluzzo, Valois vie for title

By PAUL KENYON
JOURNAL STAFF WRITER

WARWICK — There will be no need for R.I. Golf Association officials to move the hardware they present to their Amateur champion. It is going to stay right where it has been for the last year, at Metacomet Country Club.

That was assured Friday when Brad Valois and Steve Merluzzo, both Metacomet members, advanced to the 36-hole title match. They earned the right to compete for the title taken last summer by Garrett Medeiros, who is now playing professionally by winning twice Friday in the 106th Amateur at Potowomut.

Merluzzo, 28, rolled in a seven-foot downhill putt on the final green to edge newcomer Alex Stimpson of Portsmouth, 1-up, in his semifinal. Valois, 24, held off medalist Jonathan Bartlett of Carnegie Abbey by the same margin, when he dropped in a 3-foot par putt on the final green to have the hole and maintain his 1-up advantage.

While they play at the same East Providence club, the finalists enter the match from different directions.

Merluzzo is new to the top ranks, someone who was a six-handicap when he was playing high school golf at Cranston West. He is only now emerging as a championship-level player under the tutelage of Metacomet pro CJ Talbert.

Valois, on the other hand, has been a star for some time, a two-time Amateur champion (2006 and 2007) and a three-time Junior winner before that while he was at Toll Gate.

"It feels good to be back," he declared after nipping Bartlett.

It seems as if Valois is beginning a second career. He looked to have pro potential as a teenager, but he's been all but absent for the last two years after finishing URI. When he did play, his scores were considerably higher than last summer.

"I just had a rough couple of years," he said. "I wasn't playing too much golf. I was in a different situation and made a lot of changes that have allowed me to be back here today. It really does feel good to be back."

He works as a financial adviser for New York Life and plays with a calmer attitude than he used to.

"I dropped everything. I walked away from it for almost a year and went and got a job," he said.

He joined Metacomet four months ago and began playing more. After experimenting with numerous swing changes, he decided to go back to the way he began.

"I switched back to my original teacher, Shawn Campbell here at Potowomut," he said. "I try not to play this too seriously. I'm not doing it for a living, that's for sure. I'm just out here having fun. I have a day

job."

Valois had a memorable day, first getting past former champion Charlie Blanchard, 2 and 1, and then outlasting Bartlett in the afternoon. Bartlett, who has back problems, had made seven birdies, including four in a row, in winning his quarterfinal over Potowomut's Jonathan Pannone, 3 and 2. But he struggled physically in the afternoon. He regularly was twisting his neck, holding his back and walking slowly.

"I'm not top-notch," Bartlett said when it was over, "but that's no excuse. It's part of the tournament."

Merluzzo also had to grind in the semis as he and Stimpson, a first-time tournament participant, put on an excellent match. Merluzzo was 2-up through six holes and never trailed. Three times he got his advantage to 2-up, but Stimpson kept coming back. Stimpson won the 17th to pull even. However, on the 18th, his drive went through the fairway and ended to rest against a tree. He had to take an unplayable lie. He seemed nicely and had a five-iron for a bogey. Merluzzo also missed the green on the par-4 and chipped seven feet past the hole, not an easy putt.

He rolled it straight in the middle to win the hole and the match.

"I couldn't feel any better right now," he said, after draining the clutch putt.

Merluzzo has won the Metaco-

met title each of the last two years, a credit, he said, to the help Talbert, the club pro, has given him, as well as the Metacomet course itself.

"The greens are so hard and fast there your short game gets a lot better," he said.

Merluzzo, who is a government scientist, now plays to a plus-one handicap. He and Valois have played together twice.

"Just fun at the club," he said. "We've never played together in a tournament."

They will Saturday, with the state championship on the line.

The morning quarterfinals saw the elimination of former champions Blanchard and Bobby Leopold.

Leopold and Stimpson staged perhaps the most dramatic match of the week before Stimpson prevailed with a birdie on the 20th hole. Leopold led early, then Stimpson came back to lead by two. Leopold forced extra holes when he birdied the 16th, 17th and 18th. On the 20th, Stimpson made a 15-foot uphill putt for his bird. Leopold was within eight feet but was above the hole. When he missed, Stimpson advanced.

Friday's quarterfinals

Alex Stimpson def. Bobby Leopold, 20 holes; Steve Merluzzo def. Alex Lewis, 4 and 2; Jonathan Bartlett def. Jonathan Pannone, 3 and 2; Brad Valois def. Charlie Blanchard, 2 and 1.

Semifinals

Merluzzo def. Stimpson, 1 up; Valois def. Bartlett, 1 up.

Saturday's championship

3:30 a.m.
pkenyon@projo.com / 277-7340

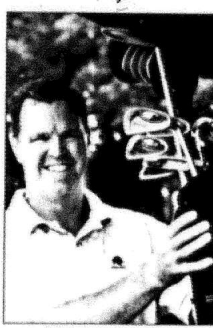
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