Johnston Rolls to Men’s State Amateur Victory

Nick Dietzen, MSGA Communications Director

The oldest country club in Montana holds up well in competition with scores at or near par, and usually in contention. This year looked similarly except for one exception: Ryggs Johnston was competing at a different level altogether.

The Libby product, who has too many junior golf victories to list, added arguably his most prestigious title with a victory at the 101st Montana State Amateur Championship. Johnston, a three-time state high school champion, is heading into his senior year at Libby High School and has already committed to Arizona State University for fall of 2019.

Johnston opened with 68, one shot from the lead, but the 18-year old put his game into another gear in round two with 10 birdies and posting 62 (-8), and creating a sizable, seven shot cushion going into the final round. A ho-hum 67 with one bogey closed out the tournament for Johnston at -13, eight shots better than runner up Joey Lovell of Bozeman, who also shot ...Continued on the next page

O’Neil, Smith Capture Women’s State & Senior Ams

Nick Dietzen, MSGA Communications Director

Soon-to-be junior Morgan O’Neil of Rocky Mountain College displayed tournament grit as the Laurel native, who began the final round with a one-shot advantage, was able to overcome a difficult start and eventually come out on top. O’Neil faced a one-shot deficit with four holes remaining to win her first Montana State Women’s Amateur Title.

O’Neil and Bozeman High’s Annika Danenhauer jostled for position atop a crowded leaderboard, but ultimately O’Neil managed to string three consecutive pars on holes 15-17, bogeyed the 18th, and won by two over Danenhauer. O’Neil shot 76-70-77, 223, for her three rounds. Danenhauer finished her tournament with 71-76-78, 225.

Former champion and University of Montana golfer, Teigan Avery, shot 226 and tied with ...Continued on the page 3
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a final round 67 and played brilliantly in his own right with a total of 205 (-5), that in likely any other year would have been enough to win.

The tournament offered warm temperatures, mild wind, and conditions that allowed for good scoring on accurate approach shots. Butte Country Club features smaller, turtle-shaped greens, making for some challenging up and downs in the short game and sharp breaking putts. While many struggled to match birdies without bogeys, Johnston certainly did not have much trouble as he collected 19 circles on the card and making only six bogeys over the three days.

Lovell made four birdies during his final round en route to his 67. Billings golfer and reigning Montana State Junior Champion, Joey Moore, placed third after shooting 71 on his final round, despite making four birdies. His 208 total was one better than fellow final-group competitor Josh Hedge, also of Billings. Hedge, who won three-consecutive State Amateurs from 2005-2007, shot 72 in his final round.

Tate Tatom of Big Sky and the Air Force Academy made seven birdies en route to 67 and a tie at 210 with Bozeman’s Chris Goldan who shot even-par 70. Garrett Woodin of Laurel and MSU-Billings made six birdies in an even par round of 70 and Billings’ Colton Hudson, whose back nine 31 gave him a 68, to tie Woodin at 211.

Rounding out the top ten was Payton Taylor of Hamilton, who closed with 67 for a 212 total and Sean Benson of Montana Tech and originally of Billings managed four consecutive birdies on holes 10-13, ending with 72 and 214 overall. Defending champ- ion, Caleb Stetzer of Anaconda shot 70 and tied 11th at 216 with Missoula’s Sean Ramsbacher, who tees it up for Montana Tech.

Johnston will also have his named etched on another trophy, this time with fellow Libby resident and part-time Johnston caddy, Joe Cielak. Johnston and Cielak combined for the low, two-person team from a golf course/club for rounds 18. Cielak was the 2017 MSGA Mid-Amateur Champion. There were 111 players from around the state who competed in the MSGA’s signature tourna- ment of the year. The event is open to amateur players with handicap indexes of 12 and below. Click here for full results.

Thank you to the wonderful staff at Butte Country Club who welcomed the event and competitors with classic Butte hospitality.

DO YOU HAVE A GHIN# or other record outside of the MSGA?
If so, we need to link your records, if this hasn’t been done already! With the merge to one network by 2019, this needs to be completed soon to eliminate problems and confusion for both you and anyone searching your record. Just email your information to support@msgagolf.org, and we’ll set you up!
WOMEN’S AMATEUR ... from page 1

Butte Central’s Tricia Joyce for third. With final round scores trending higher, Great Falls’ Cathie Tronson was able to vault up the leaderboard thanks to a tournament-low round of 69 (-2). Tronson tied with Montana State University’s Coral Schulz of Whitefish at 227 for fifth. Anna DeMars, a teammate of O’Neil’s at Rocky, finished seventh with 231, followed by Jackie Lee of Missoula (232) in eighth, Sydney Rochford of MSU-Billings and Three Forks (234) in ninth, and Emily Garden of Missoula, Renae Heisler, and Shealyn Hafer (both golfers at MSU-Billings) all tied for 10th at 237. In all, 29 golfers vied for the state title. Click here for full results.

Another state title was up for grabs at Missoula Country Club as 121 golfers from around the state competed in the Montana State Women’s Senior Amateur. Jo Smith, an MCC member, was able to use some home course knowledge and weather a challenging final round to come out ahead by a shot over Bobbie Lacklen of Libby.

Smith, like O’Neil, entered the final round with a one-shot advantage and was able to hold on to her lead, thanks especially to surviving the crucial 16th hole with a par as Lacklen double-bogeyed. Smith has been a mainstay near the top of the leaderboard in previous senior amateurs, with a second and third on her resume, but a victory at her home course was a great way to collect a trophy in front of friends.

Smith opened with rounds of 80-80-85, for a winning score of 245. Lacklen, the runner up, shot 79-82-85, 246. Julia Jones (Missoula) placed third with 248, followed by Vicki Lucas (Polson) at 249 for fourth, and Julie Embleton (Hamilton) at 252 in fifth. Rounding out the top ten were Lisa Forsberg (Billings) in sixth (253), Marianne Nelson in seventh (258), Helene Michael in eighth (261), Laura Wilson (Billings) in ninth (262), and Susan Toder (Missoula), Carol Van Valkenburg (Missoula), and Karen Jacobson (Laurel) tied for tenth at 265. Click here for full results.

The following awards were presented on Friday night of the tournament: Chris Nowlen, MSGA Paul Allen Award; Toni Bickford and Maggie Crippen, MSGA Hall of Fame Awards; and Brooklyn Olson, Kinsey Irvin, Tierney Messmer, and Kaelyn Volk, MSWGA Scholarships.

A hearty thank you to Missoula Country Club for the hospitality and for being a great state amateur host venue for the second year in a row (Men’s in 2017).
Team Colorado Wins Boys Junior America’s Cup - Montana Hosts at Fairmont Resort
Nick Dietzen, MSGA Communications Director

The 46th annual Boys Junior America’s Cup showcased fantastic junior golfers from the western side of the continent as 18 teams competed at Fairmont Hot Springs Resort Golf Course in Anaconda.

After three days of play, four-player teams from the United States, Canada, and Mexico vied for bragging rights and a trophy. Each team score was the best three scores from each day.

When the final scores were tallied, Team Colorado edged out Mexico by one shot and Utah by three strokes. Colorado was led by Dillon Stewart of Fort Collins, who was the overall medalist with a sterling performance of 64-68-68, 200. Stewart was an incredible 16-under-par for the tournament.

Team Montana was five shots off the top ten, finishing in 12th at 657. Joey Moore and Jace Rhodes of Billings and JR Small and Justus Verge of Bozeman competed for Team Montana. Moore, who will head south to play collegiately this fall at San Diego State University, was the low scorer for all three days with rounds of 69-71-71, 211 (-5). Moore finished 13th overall. Verge, who will be a freshman at Bozeman High School, shot 75-75-72, 222. Small, also at Bozeman High school shot 71-77-76, 224, and Rhodes posted 78-78-81, 237 for the tournament. Click here for full results.

Montana played host to the championships and now will wait likely 18 years for the next rotation cycle. Many thanks go out to the staff of Fairmont Golf Course, volunteers, and tournament organizer and Montana Captain, Sparkey McLean of Anaconda, for hosting this prestigious event.

Congratulations to our newest Ace Club Members!

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Bill Widaman, 7/23/18, Meadow Lark CC, Hole #16, 190 yds, 6 Iron
Justin Walsh, 7/22/18, Green Meadow CC, Hole #15, 171 yds, 8 Iron
Randall Cote, 7/20/18, Indian Spgs Ranch GC, Hole #15, 105 yds, Pitching Wdg
Scott Dimke, 7/19/18, Meadow Lark CC, Hole #16, 187 yds, 5 Iron
Marina Ramias, 7/18/18, Village Greens GC, Hole #11, 94 yds, Pitching Wdg
Dean Victoria, 7/10/18, Laurel GC, Hole #17, 178 yds, 3 Rescue
Kyle Sheppard, 7/1/18, Prairie Farms GC, Hole #13, 175 yds, 7 Iron
Justin French, 6/6/18, Prairie Farms GC, Hole #4, 150 yds, 5 Iron
Doug Sheppard, 5/23/18, Prairie Farms GC, Hole #4, 155 yds, 6 Iron
Chris Ryan, 9/6/17, Yellowstone CC, Hole #13, 174 yds, 8 Iron
Dennis Robinson, 6/23/15, Pine Meadows GC, Hole #6, 143 yds, 8 Iron
Montana Competes in Girls Junior America’s Cup

The Girls Junior America’s Cup took place at Hiwan Golf Course in Evergreen, Colorado. MSGA Boatwright Intern, Lauren (Hausauer) Nielson captained Team Montana as the girls headed south to compete with 17 other teams from the continent.

Team Mexico was victorious with a team total of +12 for three days of competition. They won by 11 shots over Southern California. Washington was third. Cory Lopez was +2 for the championship to win medalist honors by one shot over Serena Sepersky (+3) of Southern California. Maria Fernanda Martinez and Maria Alejandra Ferrer, both of Mexico, tied for third at +6.

Team Montana was 17th overall. Representing the Treasure State were: Kylie Esh of Missoula, Kameryn Basye and Laurel Ward of Bozeman, and Tierney Messmer of Sidney. Esh, who will compete for the University of Montana this fall, closed out her junior career as the low scorer all three days with rounds of 80-75-77, 232 (+22). Esh finished 30th overall. Basye shot 82-78-84, 244; Ward shot 84-87-85, 256; and Messmer shot 92-87-88, 267. Click here for full results.

Montana will host the 2021 Girls Junior America’s Cup.
Patrick Murphy Claims U.S. Amateur Spot
Nick Dietzen, MSGA Communications Director

No rest for the victorious as newly minted Montana State Amateur champion, Ryggs Johnston, traveled from Butte to Missoula to vie for a spot in the 2018 U.S. Amateur. But Johnston was bested in a three-hole playoff at The Ranch Club by Calgary’s Patrick Murphy.

The 36-hole qualifier had the feel of a Pac-12 duel as Murphy, a UCLA senior, and Johnston, an Arizona State commit for fall 2019, needed extra holes to decide the victor. Murphy birdied the opening hole, but did not have the lead until the final putt was holed. Both players were five-under-par through 36 holes, finishing three ahead of third-place Joey Moore of Billings who was also under-par at -2. Johnston had opportunities on the first two playoff holes for birdie, but it was Murphy who made par-saving putts on both holes to extend the match that ultimately came out on top as he parred the third playoff hole (hole 18) and Johnston made bogey.

Whitefish’s Mark Mance and Billings’ Garrett Woodin shot even par for the 36 holes to tie for fourth. Johnston has been added to the field after qualifying as an alternate. Click here for full results. This year’s U.S. Amateur will be played at Pebble Beach in California next month.

Acharya Impresses in Fourth of July Tournament Win
Nick Dietzen, MSGA Communications Director

Former touring professional and Columbus native, Jasi Acharya (now of Carver, MN), put together an impressive wire-to-wire victory at the 82nd Annual Earl Hunt Fourth of July Tournament at Whitefish Lake Golf Club. Acharya opened the tournament in dazzling fashion with a course record 63 (-8) on the South Course. A four-time Class B state champion and 2006 Big Sky Conference Medalist at the University of Montana, she was playing in her first tournament since regaining amateur status from the USGA.

Acharya’s opening round included a 30 on the front nine and featured six birdies and an eagle on the par-5 sixth hole, good enough to set the South Course Record at 63. She was unable to keep that pace, but closed with rounds of 77 and 76 to finish at 216 (+2), four clear of runner-up Stephanie Hulbert of Magnolia, Texas. Teigan Avery of Kalispell was third with 226, Morgan O’Neil of Laurel was fourth at 230, and Kylie Esh of Missoula was fifth at 233.

On the men’s side, Cory Mehl of Seattle was victorious with a final round 71 (-1) on the North Course to finish at 214. Mehl, a former winner of the event and third-place finisher last year, overcame a nine-shot deficit to best 36-hole leaders, Logan Lindholm of Kalispell and Andrew Medley of Scottsdale, Arizona -- both competitors shot 78 in windy conditions. Conor Rooney of Whitefish and former champion Robb Bergeson of Billings tied for fourth at 217.

In the seniors’ competition, Rich Boswell of Calgary, Alberta, closed with an even-par 72 to finish at 223, good enough to edge out Peter Benson of Billings by one shot. Benson finished with 80 for a 224 total. 2017 Montana State Senior Champion, Brett Bennyhoff of Great Falls, was third at 231, Thomas Shea of Whitefish was fourth at 233, and Sam Saunders of Buckeye, Arizona, was fifth at 235.

Hurlbert Qualifies for U.S. Senior Amateur
Nick Dietzen, MSGA Communications Director

The 2010 MSGA Mid-Amateur Champion, Craig Hurlbert of Hamilton, has qualified for the U.S. Senior Amateur at Eugene Country Club in Eugene, Oregon, August 25-30. Hurlbert, shot 70 (-2) at Falcon Crest Golf Course in Kuna, Idaho, to earn medalist honors. Hurlbert, currently playing out of Magnolia, Texas, was two better than the next finisher.

Good luck to Craig next month in Eugene!