

Lessons Learned propel Zaia to Southwestern League Girls Golf Championship:

Host: Menifee Lakes Country Club

Rd 1 Lakes Course-Par: 35-37=72 5,453 yds

Rd 2 Palms Course-Par: 36-36=72 5,721 yds

Note A: Finishers 1-7 qualify for CIF-SS Individual Tournament on Wednesday

Note B: Finishers 1-8 Earn First Team all Southwestern League, others 2nd Team

By: Derryl Trujillo

Inland Sports Senior Writer

Traditionally the Southwestern League is one of our strongest leagues in every sport. That also is true on the links as evidenced by the scoring in Thursday's girls golf finals hosted by Menifee Lakes Country Club's Palms Course. Vista Murrieta's Venecia Zaia shot a -2 round of 70 and took advantage of a late mistake by Murrieta Mesa's Angela Heo to win the league title by two shots 143-145. It's the first league individual title for a Bronco since Allie Kim's from three years ago.

Thursday's final round was played under mostly calm conditions and the scores reflected it in a big way.

All three players (Heo, Zaia, and Jordyn Parr from Temecula Valley) hit solid tee shots right down the middle of number #1 fairway. Parr flew her approach shot over the flag to a position about twenty-five feet above the hole but three putted to open with a bogey. Heo hit her approach shot into the front bunker and was unable to get up and down. Both would bogey their first two holes of the day but par number three after failing to capitalize on short approaches.

When given an opportunity to take control of a championship good players capitalize and that's exactly what Zaia did in the opening segment. On number one she stuck an approach to about twelve feet straight downhill and nailed the birdie. At number two she missed the green right with a right hand pin and green running entirely away from her but drained a ten foot par putt to maintain the lead. Then her two putt on number three from about twenty five feet gave the Broncos standout a two shot lead after their opening segment.

On the par three fourth (125 yards) Parr stuck an approach to roughly eight feet and drained a birdie to get a dropped shot back. Zaia and Heo both got up and downs for par with Venecia draining about an eight footer to do so. At number five Heo recorded a birdie after hitting an excellent chip from in front of the green to basically tap in distance. Venecia & Jordyn both recorded pars leaving themselves tricky two putts on the par five green. At number six Parr lipped out a par putt and made bogey along with Zaia who had a lip out of her own. Heo recorded a par from the lower level. After six holes Venecia & Angela were tied for the tournament at even par.

At number seven Heo drained a birdie putt from just short of the green to get a dropped shot back and take the lead by one. Zaia made a par two putting from the lower level to a flag cut on a narrow tier while Parr made another bogey failing to get up and down from a difficult short sided position. On number eight ,despite excellent approach shots from Jordyn and Venecia to less than ten feet, they both made pars. Angela two putted for par from fifteen or so feet. Heo reached the 445 yard par 5 ninth in two but only made a par after three putting from a lower level than Thursday's flag was located on. Parr missed another excellent birdie opportunity from less than five feet while Zaia got up and down from the right hand greenside bunker for birdie. At the turn Heo & Venecia were tied on even par for the event while Parr was four shots back starting her back nine.

Heo had another near birdie miss on number ten from about five feet to the front hole location. At eleven she then played from a greenside bunker to the back pin and failed to get up and down two putting for par from the lower level. Venecia narrowly missed a birdie from long range catching the lip from thirty feet and making par at ten. On eleven she missed reaching the par five green in two by about 10 feet then got her up and down for birdie. Parr bogeyed ten and gave herself a tap in for birdie at eleven sticking her approach to mere inches from the hole. Our final group made pars at twelve and thirteen with all three missing pretty good looks at birdie on the latter hole. There was one final swing in Zaia's favor at number fourteen ,a par five playing 439 yards, in the final round. After Heo hit an excellent tee shot to within around 200 yards of the green she attempted to reach it in two but ended up in the water. She'd end up taking three to get down from the drop circle for a double bogey seven. Venecia hit an excellent approach to four feet and drained the hard breaking birdie putt putting her four shots clear with four to go and was a single revolution from consecutive birdies before making par at fifteen. Parr missed another birdie opportunity on fourteen and for the first time began to show frustration with her putting while also making par on fifteen. Heo made a gutsy ten footer on the last par three to give herself a chance with three holes to go.

With three holes to go it was quite clear that the chasers were going to have to catch Venecia. Angela missed the green by a step to her left at sixteen and chipped down to about ten feet before nailing another gutsy par putt. Zaia found herself on the middle level of a three tier green putting to a lower level pin and got the speed on her lag correct for par. At seventeen all doubt was removed as to who the champion would be in 2018. Parr pulled her approach into the left hand bunker and made bogey from there. Heo's approach plugged on the front of the green and she two putted after taking relief. Venecia used the backstop and hit a brilliant approach from a little more than a hundred yards to tap in distance for her fifth birdie of the day. Angela recorded one final birdie on eighteen by hitting an approach to tap in distance for a final round 73. Our leader made a double bogey on eighteen completely flying the green, leaving her third short and taking three to get down for a championship winning 70. Jordyn recorded a two putt par for 76.

I spoke with our champion Venecia Zaia after the awards ceremony and asked her about how crucial two par saves of roughly ten feet in her first four holes were to winning a title. She

remarked “Those saves allowed me to keep that birdie on the board and ultimately momentum on my side.”

When I asked our champion about what she'd take away from this performance Zaia remarked “Definitely my second round. Yesterday after a solid front nine I fell apart on the back. Today I kept the round going after a great front side and that's something I'm really proud of.”

Broncos coach Ryan Heise also sat down for a moment. When I asked him about what Vanecia has meant to his program he remarked “She's been a big pick me up and allowed us to shoot some CIF-SS qualifying scores to enter the team event at Jurupa Hills.”

I asked Heise about what stood out about her game that first day and he remarked “You could tell she's very confident in everything she does out there picking clubs, getting yardages and reading conditions. It's definitely refreshing to see someone not taking four or five practice swings and just stepping in with confidence to hit the shot.”

Southwestern League Tournament Final Leaderboard:

1. Vanecia Zaia (Vista Murrieta) 73-70=143 (-1)
2. Angela Heo (Murrieta Mesa) 72-73=145 (+1)
3. Jordyn Parr (Temecula Valley) 73-76=149 (+5)
4. Mackenzie Carpenter (Great Oak) 87-77=164 (+20)
5. Kaila Higgins (Great Oak) 84-81=165 (+21)
6. Emma Mahaffey (Temecula Valley) 80-89=169 (+25)
7. Kailani Dugdale (Vista Murrieta) 80-90=170 (+26)
8. Ariell Besler (Great Oak) 84-87=171 (+27)
9. Mia Golovich (Murrieta Mesa) 81-91=172 (+28)
10. Nazreen Ali (Great Oak) 91-81=172 (+28)
11. Shannon Martin (Great Oak) 87-87=174 (+30)
12. Kate Wantasiripong (Great Oak) 90-88=178 (+34)
13. Anna Mitchell (Murrieta Valley) 96-90=186 (+42)
14. Olivia Sonia (Chaparral) 96-95=191 (+47)
15. Andrea Sanchez (Vista Murrieta) 98-99=197 (+53)
16. Gabby Ennemoser (Murrieta Mesa) 100-98=198 (+54)
17. Jasmine Motta (Vista Murrieta) 96-107=203 (+59)
18. Jordyn Janert (Temecula Valley) 99-105=204 (+60)