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## Nihart looking forward to sectional qualifying

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Posted: Monday, May 12, 2014 12:00 am

By John Dell/Winston-Salem Journal

When Ben Nihart was reminded that he won the Forsyth Junior in 2007, he said: "I wasn't 6-5 then."

Now, at 24 and every bit of 6-5 after a very successful college career at Greensboro College — where he helped the Pride to a Division III national championship in 2011 — Nihart has decided that a pro-golf career could be in his future.

Nihart quit golf cold turkey, at least competitive golf, for about a year and half. During one stretch he went six months without touching a club.

You would have never known that Nihart was away from the game earlier this month at Greensboro Country Club's Farm Course, where he advanced through local qualifying for the U.S. Open.

He quietly turned pro in April, playing in a mini-tour event in Myrtle Beach, and then tried to Monday-qualify into the Wells Fargo Championship.



What Nihart is trying to do isn't unusual. He has a full-time job at Sedgefield Country Club as a personal trainer specializing in golf-specific workouts. He'll take vacation time to stay sharp for the U.S. Open sectional qualifying later this month, but said that being a pro golfer for the first time isn't strange.

"I was actually confident when I turned pro because I felt like I had more direction," said Nihart, who was home-schooled and played on the Forsyth Home Educators golf team during high school.

During his time away from the golf course, he went to the Titleist Performance Institute to



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become certified to be a personal trainer.

He looked at turning pro right after college but admitted he didn't have the funds to travel around the country on the various mini-tours.

"It's expensive just starting out with travel, hotels, and everything else, so I didn't want that life then," Nihart said.

Instead, he got into the golf business. He said the time away from playing was good for him.

"I wasn't going to go back out there and play (for a living) if my heart wasn't in it," Nihart said. "But I'm feeling very good now about my game and where I am with my putting and everything else."

Nihart also has support from his wife, Lindsey. They were married last July after meeting a few years ago at a college tournament in Atlanta. She was attending West Georgia at the time.

"It's kind of funny story but on one of our first dates I was with the team and I didn't have a car, so she came and picked me up at our hotel," Nihart said.

When asked if his college coach, Dirk Fennie, knew about the two straight nights of Lindsey picking him up for dates, Nihart laughed.

"I'm not sure what he knew, but I guess it worked out for me because we're married now," Nihart said.

Fennie caddied for Nihart during the local qualifying last week, when Nihart shot a 67 then made it through a playoff to advance among the six spots available.

"Coach Fennie was a big help as my caddie and it really helped me because he knows my swing pretty well," Nihart said.

Nihart will try to keep his game sharp for the sectional qualifier.

"I haven't been a pro for long but getting through the local tournament was a big boost for me," he said about his confidence level, "and I just want to try and keep it going."

## Around the green

- **Ryan Sullivan** of Winston-Salem will also go through sectional qualifying. Sullivan won the Forsyth Junior in 2005 and '06 before Nihart won it in 2007. "Wouldn't that be cool to have two former Forsyth Junior champs at the U.S. Open?" Sullivan said....

- Applications are available at most of the area golf courses for the Forsyth Senior Golf Tournament, which will be held May 22-23 at Maple Leaf and Old Homeplace. Golfers who live in Forsyth County and are 55 or older are eligible. Applications are also available at [www.cityofws.org](http://www.cityofws.org). For more information call **Dick Butler** at 734-1212....

- Summit's middle-school golf team, coached by **Jason Felton**, completed its fourth straight undefeated season by going 13-0. Summit also beat two high school JV teams this season....

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