

# Six players get through local U.S. Open qualifying

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GREENSBORO — Plopping down \$150 to try their luck at U.S. Open local qualifying at Greensboro Country Club's Farm Course golfers came in all shapes and stages in their lives.

Advancing out of this tournament is the first step in getting to the U.S. Open at Pinehurst No. 2 — and it's not an easy step.

"It's a step closer," said Bruce Woodall, 25, a former player at Virginia who grew up in Eden and lives in Yanceyville rent free with his parents.

Woodall, who calls himself a starving minitour golfer, shot a 6-under 66 in a field of 120 to advance. There were six spots available for the sectional stage of qualifying.

Winning medalist honors was Jonathon Hodge, 28, of Knoxville, Tenn., who shot a 7-under 65 late in the day.

Also advancing were Virginia Tech junior Trevor Cone, who is from Concord. He also shot 66 to tie Woodall.

"This is the first time I've tried qualifying but it was a good day," said Cone, who played in the three position most of the season for the Hokies.

There were four players — 17-year-old amateur Will Gordon, Winston-Salem native Ben Nihart, Donnie Baucom and John Paton — who shot 67 that led to a playoff. They played off for three spots.

All four made par on No. 1 and when Nihart, Paton and Gordon birdied the par-5 second hole, Baucom was eliminated after making par. But Baucom, who is from Orangevale, Calif., is the first alternate.

Also winning the second alternate spot thanks to a birdie in a three-man playoff was Travis Stewart of Jamestown. His birdie eliminated Clancy Waugh, a freshman at Wake Forest, and 49-year-old Steve Larick of Lexington, S.C. They had all tied with 68s.

Waugh missed a 12-foot birdie putt on 18 that would have gave him a 67.

"Overall I played pretty well but the flat stick (putter) wasn't working like I needed it to," Waugh said. "This was good experience and we've had about three weeks off between the ACC's and regionals so it's good to get out here and compete."

After shooting a 67 earlier in the day Nihart thought he was in good shape but once the scores started coming in from the afternoon he said he started to gear up for a playoff.

"It was a long day and you would think when you shoot 67, I would be OK, but that's why it's golf,"

Nihart said.

On the second playoff hole his chip came to within eight feet and he made the birdie putt which was good enough to be among the six who earn spots to sectionals.

“It’s exciting,” Nihart said. “It’s going to be fun for sectionals wherever I end up.”

Nihart, 24, is a former Forysth Junior champion. He works in the fitness center at Sedgefield Country Club, and is a former player at Greensboro College. He recently turned pro after taking a two-year break from golf.

“I was really burned out right after college because I think I played every day,” Nihart said. “I didn’t play for awhile; I got married, and just started working.”

Nihart, who had his college coach as his caddie, Dirk Fennie, has decided to work on his game a little more and this U.S. Open qualifying was part of the plan. He wound up with two bogeys and seven birdies in Monday’s round.

Woodall is a two-year pro who has never played in a Web.com or PGA Tour tournament. He was the second leading-money winner last season on the eGolf Tour, and now he’ll be in the sectional portion of qualifying for the third straight year.

“The next stage is a lot different because there are a lot of guys from the PGA and Web.com tours and it’s more difficult because it’s 36 holes,” Woodall said.

Gordon is a junior at the Cannon School in Concord.

“I would love to play at No. 2 but I know there’s a lot of golf left in the sectional tournament,” said Gordon, who passed the time after his round doing homework at the Greensboro Country Club clubhouse veranda for most of the afternoon.

Gordon said on the first hole, a par-4 that was playing 412 yards, he hit his approach to two feet, made the putt for birdie, and was off to the races.

“I made a lot of eight to 10 foot putts and that really helped me,” Gordon said.

Paton, 25, had the most unbelievable day after nearly missing the qualifier all together. He and his wife, Cody, moved to Charlotte eight days ago from the San Francisco area.

Paton, a graduate of Oregon where he played golf, called the course early Monday morning to see about a practice round but was informed the tournament was today.

“Then we went to the other course (at Greensboro National) which is located downtown so we had to scramble to get here,” Paton said.

Without ever seeing the course he eagled the par-5 second hole when his approach found the cup from

about 100 yards. “My ball was actually in a divot,” he said. “It’s been quite a day to say the least, but I’m excited about the chance to get to the next stage.”

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