**Kuehn Continues Sizzling Summer, Shares First-Round Lead With Smyth**

By Mike Trostel, USGA

**What Happened**

After more than 10 months and a series of cancellations and postponements due to COVID-19, USGA championships returned on Monday with Round 1 of the 120th U.S. Women’s Amateur at Woodmont Country Club in Rockville, Md.

Rachel Kuehn and Riley Smyth, both playing in their first Women’s Amateur, carded 4-under 68s, weathering long rough and fast greens to lead the way as Hurricane Isaias barreled up the Eastern Seaboard, ready to make landfall. Because of a 2-hour and 16-minute weather delay on Monday, play was postponed due to darkness with two golfers still on the course.

Kuehn, 19, of Asheville, N.C., birdied six of her first 11 holes at Woodmont, continuing the torrid play that led her to victories in the North & South Women’s Amateur in Pinehurst on July 18 and the Ladies National Golf Association Amateur Championship on July 29.

“I feel in control over the golf ball,” said Kuehn, a sophomore at Wake Forest University whose older brother Corrie is caddying for her this week. “It's just a confidence thing, and I'm putting pretty well right now. I've been glad to be able to put myself in position to make some birdies and then being able to convert some of those.”

Smyth, 20, of Cary, N.C., made a 15-foot birdie putt on the 337-yard fourth to jump-start her day, following it with four additional birdies and just one bogey over the 6,553-yard, par-72 layout.

“That putt really got my day going,” said Smyth, a junior at the University of Virginia. “It built up a lot of confidence in my putting and most of my birdies came from some pretty good putts.”

Kuehn and Smyth are two of 51 competitors playing in their first U.S. Women’s Amateur this week, which equates to just under 40 percent of the field. But don’t confuse a lack of experience with an inability to make a deep run at Woodmont.

“It was definitely nerve-wracking at the beginning,” said Smyth, who was runner-up at both the CGA Carolinas Women's Amateur and Women's Match Play in 2019. “I was trying to let the experience take over my mind and just let that be only thought.”

Defending champion Gabriela Ruffels, who played with Kuehn, opened with an even-par 72. Her early birdies on Nos. 3 and 6 were offset by two bogeys on the inward nine.

“There was extra pressure, extra nerves, especially with the whole year that's been going on,” said Ruffels, who beat Albane Valenzuela in last year’s championship match. “It's been a long wait to get here, but I'm happy with how I did today and how I handled those first-round nerves.”

Maria Fernanda Escauriza carded a bogey-free, 3-under 69 on Monday, hitting 15 of 18 greens in regulation. The 21-year-old hasn’t had the opportunity to practice much this summer because many golf courses were closed in her native Paraguay and all tournaments were canceled. She arrived in the United States on July 29 and the U.S. Women’s Amateur is her first event of the summer.

“There was only one flight back [to the U.S.] last week, so I had to come on that one,” said Escauriza. “My first priority is to make the cut. I like playing match play, so hopefully that helps me a lot.”

Escauriza was joined at 3 under by Rachel Heck and Megan Schofill. In total, 14 players are under par at this point, including 2019 Women’s Amateur semifinalist Megha Ganne and 2019 quarterfinalist Aneka Seumanutafa, who both opened with 1-under 71s.

Due to the forecasted arrival of Hurricane Isaias overnight, which is expected to drop upwards of 4 inches of rain in the Washington, D.C., metro area, play has been postponed for the entirety of Tuesday and is scheduled to resume on Wednesday morning.

**Notable**

* By postponing play until Wednesday morning, this is believed to be just the third time in championship history that play has been called off for a full day. The other two instances are the semifinal round in 1990 and the championship match in 1925.
* Three players in the top 10, including both leaders, are from North Carolina: **Kuehn** (T-1) from Asheville; **Smyth** (T-1) from Cary; and **Emilia Migliaccio** (T-7) from Cary.
* **Kuehn**’s mother, Brenda, who is in attendance this week to watch her daughter, competed in 13 U.S. Women’s Amateurs, nine U.S. Women’s Opens and two Curtis Cups. She played her final Women’s Open in 2001 at Pine Needles when she was eight months pregnant with Rachel.
* **Ruffels**, a junior at the University of Southern California, is scheduled to take a final exam on Tuesday evening for the summer class she took in Business Communication.
* **Seumanutafa**, of Emmitsburg, Md., is the only player in the field from Maryland and opened the championship by hitting the first tee shot of the day and making a birdie on No. 1.
* In Round 1, green speeds started the day at 11 feet, 5 inches and the primary rough was cut to 3 inches.
* To this point in Round 1, Woodmont’s back nine (38.07) played nearly a stroke harder than its front nine (37.18). Nearly 20 percent of the players who have finished their rounds (25 of 130) scored four strokes or more lower on the front nine, led by USGA champions **Erica Shepherd** (seven strokes) and **Megan Stasi** (nine strokes).
* Round 1 was suspended at 4:27 p.m. EDT due to dangerous weather. Play resumed at 6:43 p.m. EDT and completed for the day with two golfers still on the course.
* Thus far in Round 1, the stroke average is 75.25, with the 426-yard, par-4 ninth hole playing as the most difficult (4.50). The easiest hole was the 334-yard, par-4 11th, which played to an average of 3.86.

**Quotable**

“It's a long week. You kind of have to have that in the back of your mind as you're preparing for it, sleeping well the week leading up to it. I've heard great things about the Am and can back those up with my experience so far.”

– Co-leader **Kuehn**, on playing in her first U.S. Women’s Amateur

“I filled [an application] out kind of as a last-ditch effort. I didn’t think there was much of a chance, but I was shocked when I got the email that I got in. I was disappointed when qualifying was canceled, but it ended up all working out.”

– Co-leader **Smyth**, on getting into the championship

“The course is very different compared to last year. USGA championships are always tough. I could have done better today, I could have done worse. But I thought I scrambled out there pretty well so, I'm happy considering everything.”

– Defending champion **Ruffels**, on her opening round

“To be honest, the first tee shot was kind of nerve-racking. But after that it was just fine. With my mom on the bag, it was a pretty relaxing day today.”

– **Seumanutafa**, on hitting the first ball of the championship

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