**Vilips, Mouw Share Lead After Round 1 of Stroke Play**

By Ron Driscoll, USGA

**What Happened:**

William Mouw and Karl Vilips, both top-50 players in the World Amateur Golf Ranking (WAGR), shot rounds of 2-under-par 69 on Monday to share the lead after 18 holes of stroke play in the 72nd U.S. Junior Amateur Championship at historic Inverness Club in Toledo, Ohio.

The pair lead by one stroke over seven players, including the 2018 runner-up, Akshay Bhatia, of Wake Forest, N.C., who at No. 4 holds the highest position in the world ranking in the 156-player field. Reigning champion Michael Thorbjornsen, of Wellesley, Mass., is another stroke back at even-par 71, tied with seven other players as he seeks to join three-time champion Tiger Woods (1991-93), the only player to successfully defend his title in this championship.

The venerable club, which was founded in 1903, hosted the first of four U.S. Opens on its Donald Ross-designed course in 1920, and this week is hosting its eighth USGA championship.

Vilips, 17, of Australia, who advanced to the Round of 32 in last year’s championship at Baltusrol Golf Club, recorded the lone bogey-free round of the day.

“You have to put it in the fairway off the tee,” noted Vilips, who is No. 47 in the WAGR. “Every fairway bunker I found, I was up against the lip. I took my medicine on those holes and trusted my wedge game. Overall, I hit it well from tee to green and putted well.”

Mouw, 18, of Chino, Calif., also advanced to the Round of 32 at Baltusrol last year and reached the Round of 16 in the 2018 U.S. Amateur at Pebble Beach. He captured the California State Amateur two weeks ago.

“I learned a lot last year playing in these tournaments,” said Mouw, who is No. 26 in the WAGR. “I am much more mature. I like where my game is.”

Ricky Castillo, of Yorba Linda, Calif., who at No. 22 is the next-highest in the WAGR after Bhatia, also opened with a 1-under 70.

**What’s Next:**

The field will be trimmed to 64 players after Tuesday’s second round of stroke play. Match play will begin on Wednesday, and the championship will conclude with a 36-hole final on Saturday. Friday’s semifinals and Saturday’s final will air on FS1 from 2-4 p.m. EDT each day.

**Notable:**

All 156 competitors this week have received letters of congratulations and encouragement from eight-time USGA champion Jack Nicklaus, eight-time major champion Tom Watson and nine-time USGA champion Tiger Woods. The letter from Woods that awaited them on Monday morning noted that, “I have been pretty fortunate in this event,” a nod to his record three victories, and reminded players to enjoy the experience.

2018 Junior Am runner-up Akshay Bhatia made the lone eagle of the morning wave, on No. 13. Bhatia hit 3-iron off the tee of the 527-yard par 5, then knocked a 4-iron onto the green off a hanging lie from about 230 yards away. He made a 35-foot putt for eagle. There were two eagles in the afternoon wave, as Jared Bowser holed out a 168-yard 7-iron approach on the par-4 15th hole, and Tyler Lipscomb eagled the par-5 eighth hole.

The par-71 Inverness Club course has just three par 3s and two par 5s, and the five toughest holes in Round 1 were all par 4s. The 473-yard 14th led the way at a stroke average of 4.58, while the 442-yard fourth hole was next-toughest at 4.57. The 527-yard, par-5 13th hole played as the easiest by far, with a 4.83 stroke average and 57 birdies against 68 pars.

Monday’s first round of stroke play was suspended twice for severe weather for a total of 1 hour, 49 minutes. The round was halted for the first time at 3:12 p.m. and resumed at 4:26 p.m., then was delayed again from 5:21 to 5:56 p.m.

**Quotable:**

“I felt real confident going to the back nine. I hit every fairway and every green until the last hole. I was hitting extremely good putts. I thought they were all going to drop but none of them did. I like the way I am setting myself up for this course.” – Michael Thorbjornsen, the defending champion, who opened with an even-par 71

“Going from there, one day off, and then coming here, it’s been a lot the last few days. It’s definitely a real blessing to win the Ohio Am; it’s something that I’ve wanted to do the last few years. To put my name on a trophy with Arnold Palmer, Jason Kokrak, Ben Curtis and some other names is really, really cool.” – Maxwell Moldovan, of Uniontown, Ohio, who hit the first shot of the championship on Monday and shot 3-over 74 after winning the Ohio Amateur title on Saturday

“There is a lot less pressure on yourself. You know you belong here. It helps me just play golf and you are not really worried about anything. I am enjoying the moment.” – Kelly Chinn, of Great Falls, Va., who shot even-par 71 on Monday and was the medalist in the 2018 championship

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