Kailer Stone, 17, of Alameda Calif., is a two-year U.S. National Development Program (USNDP) Grant Recipient. This annual, reimbursement-based program supports families of competitive junior golfers who show both financial need and outstanding potential to advance through the USNDP Development Pathway.

Excelling through the grant, Stone made his debut in the 77th U.S. Junior Amateur at Trinity Forest Golf Club, in Dallas, Texas, advancing to the Round of 32 in July. Verbally committed to play for Pepperdine University in 2026, Stone also claimed back-to-back titles at the Northern California Junior Championship (2024, 2025) and became just the third player in its 96-year history to accomplish that feat. Stone holds the 54-hole scoring record for the championship, shooting 16-under-par 200 at The Club at Ruby Hill in 2024. He also boasts several top 10 finishes this year.

USGA summer intern Taylar Paige chatted with Stone about how the USNDP Grant has helped launch his success both on and off the course.

Q. What impact has the USNDP Grant had on your journey and performance in golf?

Stone: The USNDP is amazing. They provide strong support systems that help you improve in the areas where you need it most. Thanks to the Grant, I've been able to play in more tournaments than I ever have in the last two years. It has also helped my family support me as I travel to play tournaments across the country. You need to play against the best players in the world if you want to improve. It's been amazing having their support. Not only have I excelled on the course, but personally as well.

Q. What opportunities have stemmed from you being a USNDP Grant Recipient?

Stone: Two years ago, the Program helped me get into an AJGA open [competition]. I played really well there, and which propelled me into a lot of other tournaments. Once you play well in a couple of tournaments, you get invites from others. Having their support in getting me into a few tournaments has allowed me to start competing in some of the best golf events across the country.

Q. What are your future aspirations in the game of golf?

Stone: The PGA Tour is my long-term goal. Pepperdine is going to be an amazing place for me to grow and prepare for the Tour. That's always what I wanted to do with my life.

Q. Have you connected with other athletes or mentors through the USNDP network and how have those relationships supported you?

Stone: Coach [Chris] Zambri has helped with strategies and game management at numerous tournaments. Taking the time to carefully go through the course has been extremely helpful, just like we did at the U.S. Junior Amateur. Planning out the course before you see it is important. I've met a couple people who are USNDP members and it's really cool to be a part of a community of golfers who have the same goals as you.

Q. How did it feel to compete in your first U.S. Junior Amateur, and what stood out to you?

Stone: It was definitely way better than I expected. The USGA did an amazing job with the championship...and yeah, it was really fun. I had a great time and hopefully I'll be going back next year. That would be great.

Q. You started strong, sharing the lead after the first round of stroke play. What was your game plan as you approached the week?

Stone: I kind of just went out with no expectations and just played my own game. I didn't really look at the leader board at all. I got off the 18th green [after the first round of stroke-play] and my caddie was like, "Dude, do you know where you're at?" And I was like, "Nope." I was just focused on each hole, each shot, and I think that's really the recipe to putting together a good round.

Q. You advanced to the Round of 32, what was your mindset going into match play?

Stone: Obviously match play is way different than stroke play. You're not just playing yourself and the course, you're playing somebody. So personally, I like playing a little more aggressively in match play, putting pressure on [my] opponent. When you get to that first tee, if you apply the pressure and get ahead on the first or second hole, then you have the advantage the whole day. During the Round of 64, I played Cameron Kuchar [son of PGA Tour star Matt Kuchar], and he was a tough opponent [Stone won 2 and 1]. He made some great putts, but you just have to stay patient knowing you will get opportunities. It's just a completely different mindset, but it's really fun.

Q. From your perspective, what makes a USGA championship so special?

Stone: With all the support from the volunteers, all the sponsorships, all the signs, everything just makes it seem like you're out on Tour. Obviously, I didn't make it to the semifinals or the championship match [Stone lost to Mingbo Jiang, 3 and 2], but they even had [TV] cameras out there. Just the way you're treated with all the staff, it's amazing.

Q. You won back-to-back Northern California Junior titles, tell me a little bit about those victories and how it felt to win in your home state?

Stone: Yeah, it was awesome. Two years ago, I played some of the best golf of my life. I set a scoring record. That was a really great tournament. Going into this year's championship, I wasn't focused on needing to defend. I just focused on playing good golf knowing I would be in contention. Having the support from the people out there watching meant a lot. It was just really cool to go back-to-back. Being the third player to do it made it super special.

Q. Having experienced success through the USNDP Grant, why would you recommend this opportunity to aspiring junior golfers?

Stone: The USNDP gives you so many great opportunities in and outside of golf. Tools and resources that can help you improve, like calls with the nutritionist. Those are really insightful and gave me some good tips on how to improve my health so I can be better on the course. The grant helps a lot with travel and being able to play elite tournaments. From having mentors like Coach [Chris] Zambri who help you plan your game, calls about how to approach the mental game, financial components, VISION 54, it's all great. The USNDP provides support that enhances your overall well-being, not just your performance on the course.

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