

# GUSTS IN THE WIND

*By Tom Kerrane, Times Herald Staff*

UPPER MORELAND — As the wind picked up at Huntingdon Valley Country Club, so did the big numbers on the scorecards.

Many a player was coming off the course shaking his head.

Yet, somehow, five players managed to break 80 Wednesday afternoon as the Suburban One League Championship took place at the lauded par-70 course.

One of those five sub-80 numbers came from Plymouth Whitemarsh High junior Zach Pogust, whose 79 placed him tied for third overall & meant he won the American Conference title.



“Honestly, I thought I could shoot in the 70s,” Pogust said, “but I was thinking a number around 83 would be pretty solid (Wednesday).”

An 83 would have been pretty solid Wednesday. It would have left Pogust tied for ninth instead of third, and still would have given him the American crown, as he won the division by six shots over Upper Merion’s Eric Slawter.

The tournament is also a qualifier for the District One Golf Championship, which takes place next week at Turtle Creek GC. The top 35 players from Wednesday move on to next week.

In all, seven local players advanced, the cut for districts coming at 88. Following Pogust and Slawter, North Penn’s Ty Flagler also shot an 85. PW’s Rob Radicioni and Luke Heller of North Penn both posted 86s while Rob Bass of PW had an 87.

Upper Merion’s Keith Clawson was one of six players finishing on the cut line of 88, surviving a one-hole sudden-death playoff for one of the final five spots. PW’s Alec Kissell lost his bid in the playoff.

“I was just trying to do what I did all day,” Clawson said of his mindset in preparing for the playoff. “Everyone hit decent drives. I hit a good second shot so I thought I was in good shape.”

As it turned out, Clawson three-putted the playoff hole, but his bogey was still enough to advance.

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“This is my first time here, so I didn’t know what to expect. I just putted real well, except for that (playoff) hole. That’s what got me through.”

Abington’s Ben Cooley was the overall winner after firing a 3-over-par 73, with Council Rock North’s Brandon Dalinka coming in second with a 78.

The weather wreaked havoc with the players, especially as the day progressed and the winds whipped around the course.

The league usually determines a minimum score a player must shoot in order to advance to districts. Originally, that number had been set at 88 this year, but the gusty conditions made league officials decide to omit the number requirement. As it turned out, 88 was right on the mark.

“I wanted to shoot about a 79, but with the conditions, that made it real hard out there,” said Flagler, whose 85 left him in a tie for 21st place with Slawter and two others. “I thought I would be on the bubble. I was trying to go lower, but I couldn’t.

“I felt like I played solid all day, but the wind was tough out here.”

Flagler qualified for districts last year, as well, even making the cut to the second day.

Pogust, who helped lead the Colonials to another American Conference team championship, has played solidly all season. Still, this was his first year competing on the varsity team, and therefore being at the league tournament.

“I didn’t know what to expect here,” he said. “My main focus was always trying to get to districts.”



Going from not starting on varsity last year to an individual league title is quite a jump in one year.

“I did not expect this,” Pogust said. “But, I was expecting good things because my game improved a lot over the summer. I’m happy with how I’m playing.”

He was one of three Colonial players to reach districts for the individual tournament. Five players will be there for the team championship on Wednesday.

Council Rock North had five players qualify Wednesday, while Central Bucks East advanced four. PW was one of four teams that saw three players make the number, along with Pennsbury, Central Bucks West and Hatboro-Horsham.

For seven local golfers, the key to Wednesday was surviving. Fighting off Mother Nature and the pressure of qualifying meant the season will continue for another week.