

Record round for Leishman

63 earns Aussie medalist honor

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By Keith Prince

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Tall and talented Australian Marc Leishman left the golf course somewhat distressed Wednesday after being assessed a two-stroke penalty that left him at even-par 72.

In Thursday's second qualifying round of the 54th W.E. Cole Cotton States Invitational, the 21-year-old Aussie used that earlier disappointment as motivation.

Playing his first six holes in an amazing seven-under par and finishing that nine at 8-under-28, Leishman went on to post a 9-under 63.

Both his first nine and his 63 are records for the prestigious Cotton States, dating back through a list of world golfing greats that began with Don January in 1951.

"I was upset about the penalty Wednesday but totally with myself. It was my fault," he said of the penalty resulting from him taking a practice putt on the 17th green.

After losing those two strokes, Leishman — who was last year's medalist at 65 — posted a 72 to leave 27 players ahead of him in the race for medalist honors this year.

It didn't matter, however, as he again took the medalist honor by shooting 72-63—135, winning by a shot over Troy Denton of Dallas, a UNLV golfer who posted 69-67—136.

"We don't have that rule at home," Leishman said of the two-stroke penalty. "But I was wrong and I wanted to play well today."

A look at Leishman's front-nine card showed a stunning result: Birdie, birdie, eagle, par, birdie, eagle, bogey, birdie, birdie.

The back nine had a more mortal look at one-under-35 with eight pars and one birdie.

"I played well back there, too, but didn't leave myself many easy putts," he said. "... This is my best score ever in tournament competition, although I shot 62 once on my home course. And, the 28 is definitely my best nine ever."



Arely Castillo/The News-Star

Marc Leishman rebounded from a two-stroke penalty Wednesday to shoot a 63 Thursday at the Cotton States.

Leishman, who is playing his third summer of amateur golf in the United States, said he will likely turn pro this winter.

"I will try to get my card either in America or in Europe," said Leishman, who has won tournaments in five countries (Argentina, Mexico, Japan, United Kingdom and Australia).

"But I haven't won in America yet, so I would love to win here," added Leishman, who lost in the quarterfinals here last summer.

To win this event he will have to march through what is probably the most talented field ever in the Cotton States.

And, while the field features college players from across the country it also includes nine golfers with local ties — including 1999 champ Bob Cooper, the Monroe lefty who became the oldest Cotton States champ ever at 43 in 1999.

Cooper got in with rounds of 75-74—149 and today faces Ryan Zamorano, this year's national junior college champion from Paris (Texas) Junior College who fired a 66 Thursday after opening with 74.

"I had only one bogey (with seven birdies), mainly because I hit more fairways," Zamorano said. I also hit a lot of good irons today, especially my wedges."

Said Cooper: "This is my first individual tournament in a year and I could tell it. But I was more relaxed today and I love match play so we'll just see what happens."

Other local players surviving the qualifying rounds include Louisiana Tech's Derek Busby (71-76—147) of Tallulah and recent Kilbourne graduate Corey Bartlett (74-72—146), who is headed to Tech this fall.

"I played pretty much the same but had some three-putts," Busby said. "I had to keep grinding but I love match play and am looking forward to it."

Added Bartlett: "I avoided any big mistakes and made a couple of key par putts on 10 and 14 of about 10 feet to keep the round going. I had only played one round here before this week so I feel good about my scores."

Also moving on are Monroe's Preston Smith (69-72—141), another Tech golfer, plus Louisiana-Monroe's Daniel Keeton (69-74—143) and Casey Russell (77-72—149), both of West Monroe.

"It was a struggle today, totally opposite of yesterday, mainly because I only hit four fairways all day," Smith said.

Added Keeton: "I just never got it going today. Nothing came easy."

And, Russell said, "I played better today and I'm just glad to get a chance in match play."

Ironically, two former St. Frederick all-state golfers, Brandon Aydlett (70-70—140) and 17-year-old Matthew Harvey (76-73—149), now of Austin, Texas, will square off against each other in a 9:40 a.m. match today.

Aydlett, who graduated from LSU last December but also suffered a broken collarbone about that time, said, "This is the two best back-to-back rounds I've played since coming back. I especially felt good about playing the back nine 3-under both days."

Harvey, now a top Texas prep player at Georgetown High School in Austin, said, "I got off to a better start today (35 front nine with no bogies). The goal in qualifying was to get to match play, so I look forward to Friday."

Another golfer with local interest who is still alive after a solid 69 Thursday is ULM golfer Pat Collagan (72-69—141).

"I had a great front night with birdies at 3-5-6-8 so I felt pretty comfortable out there the whole round," he said.

Today, the 64-man field will be sliced to 16 going into Saturday.