

Dean wins match play title 2-and-1

By Todd Phipers

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Brett Dean converted a new swing into a new level of success in Colorado amateur golf yesterday.

The 21-year-old Evergreen golfer, a major force in the state as a high school and junior player, lived up to the potential he showed as a teenager by defeating David McCleave of Fort Collins 2-and-1 in the 36-hole final of the Colorado Match-Play Championship at Bear Creek Golf Club.

The Arizona State junior, a runnerup in the prestigious Broadmoor Invitational two years ago, said he sought the help of a Phoenix teacher after deciding he had "reached a plateau with my golf.

"He's been able to bring me to the next level," Dean said of his Arizona mentor. "I have been able to hit it a lot better than I did a year ago."

Playing competitive golf for the 11th straight day in the championship match, the slender, stoic (and tired) Hiwan Golf Club representative proved the soundness of his revamped swing by rebounding from being down 3 in the morning round to rally for the title in the Colorado Golf Association-sponsored championship.

He did it by rebounding from an early deficit and fighting off the challenge of his opponent, whose putting touch and scrambling ability made for a well-played and highly competitive final.

"David played well and putted extremely well," Dean said. "It kind of frustrated me. I'd think I have him and he knocks in countless 8-footers all day. But fortunately for me, I hit it extremely well and I was able to make a few clutch putts when I needed to."

McCleave, a 21-year-old University of Wyoming golfer, appeared to be gaining command when he won four out of five holes starting at the 11th to turn a one-hole deficit into a 3-up lead at No. 15 of the first half of the final match.

"I just kind of got in a bad rut," Dean said of that stretch. "I was bleeding really bad, but I was able to get it stopped. He had me really concerned because he was playing so steady and putting so well. I thought the guy who was putting the best would have the better chance and I wasn't putting as good as he was."

A long birdie from the fringe at No. 17 got one back for the champion in the morning round, but he still was down 2 with 18 holes to play.

Dean headed for the afternoon round intent on sticking to the game plan that got him to the final match. "I couldn't do anything different. I kept pulling out a 1-iron," he said of his conservative strategy off the tee.

McCleave started having problems off the tee and that was the difference. "After I got off the tee-box I hit it fine for the most part and I made a lot of putts to stay in it on the last 18. I don't know what the deal was, but I gave it my best shot."

Two birdies and a par in a four-hole stretch starting at No. 6 in the afternoon round pulled Dean from his three-hole deficit into the lead, and after McCleave briefly had pulled even with a birdie at the par-5 12th, Dean took the lead for good with a par on No. 13.

It was at the par-5 15th, however, where Dean thought he made his key shot, a 20-foot birdie putt with McCleave sitting just 10 feet away for his birdie. "I figured the way he was putting, he was probably going to make it for birdie. I told myself if I knocked this in this could be the tournament, the key thing."

McCleave responded with a birdie putt of his own. "He showed a lot of guts," Dean said. "But luckily, I was able to hold on from there."

He closed out the match three holes later.