

Nordling's Putting Prevails

By RALPH MOORE

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Mike Putnam found the Rolling Hills Country Club "softer" Sunday but not his tenacious opponent, and the finer putting touch and temperament of Chris Nordling earned him his first major amateur golf championship.

Nordling, a student at the University of New Mexico, won the State Match-Play Golf Championship on his 101st hole of the tournament, closing out New Mexico teammate Putnam 3 and 2 in the 36-hole finale.

Rolling Hills is one of the three most difficult putting courses in the state and Nordling, who has played a steady hand since Wednesday's opening round, admitted the reading of the Rolling Hills putts keyed his play Sunday.

"TODAY, IF THERE was any mental strain for me, it was over the long putts and the prospect of leaving myself with those four to five-footers on these greens. Yeah, I had a problem reading them at times. This is one tough course to putt."

Putnam, just as consistent in earning his way into the finale, thought the course was "a lot softer" after Saturday's rain and hail, and said, "I had dirt on the ball most of the time and my shots just were not flying true."

This left him with longer putts to cope with and Nordling's more cautious respect with his putter proved the difference in the match.

"I had a bad lag on the 14th," Nordling said of the morning session where he three-putted, allowing Putnam to pull even with a par. "Then on the 17th I hit it way by the hole and missed it coming back," again allowing Putnam to pull back into a tie.

Three three-putt greens cost Nordling his breakaway chance in the morning while Putnam, four years younger than Nordling, missed five greens in the morning round and scattered too many tee shots to take the initiative.

THE TWO LOBO golfers admitted their morning performance was something less than the talented golf that brought both to the final pairing.

"But my legs got tired and it was hard

The Championship Card

Morning				
PAR OUT	543	444	435-36	
Nordling Out	553	443	445-37	
Putnam Out	443	546	436-39	
PAR IN	444	344	35-36	
Nordling In	444	354	445-37-37-74	
Putnam In (match even)	445	345	435-37-39-76	
Afternoon				
Nordling Out	434	443	435-34	
Putnam Out	444	344	535-36	
Nordling In (wins 3 and 3)	454	443	4	
Putnam In	444	444	5	

for me to hit through the ball," Putnam said.

"I was tired, too," Nordling admitted, "but I told myself I just have to be patient and to take a lot of deep breaths. I was doing a lot of that today. I'm golfed out, I really am."

Tired or not, both players will be at the Hiwan Golf Club Monday for morning starting times in the area qualifying for the upcoming Colorado Open.

Nordling's win assured him a spot on the amateur team for the Governor's Cup and what he thought was an exemption into the Colorado Open. However, he was asked to be at Hiwan just in case the exemption there is in doubt.

The sponsoring Colorado Golf Association switched the match, and stroke-play championship tournaments this year and so David Lee, last year's match champion, and Nordling would be eligible for the one exemption.

"Well, I'm up at dawn again," Putnam, who earned 40 Governor's Cup team points for his runner-up finish Sunday, said of making his 8:20 a.m. qualifying time Monday.

"I'M TIRED, but I guess I have to go up the mountain."

Putnam's erratic approach shots, sometimes stemming from off-line tee shots, placed him at the mercy of the severe Rolling Hills greens and he was openly frustrated once he had the putter in his hands.

"I was reading them all right," he said,

"but I couldn't putt them on the line I was reading. My only problem (with the greens) was physical strain. I usually read and putt the ball well. I checked my head (keeping it still) and that didn't work. I just didn't hit the ball on the line I wanted. . . I didn't have the feel."

Putnam's futile dependence on the putter provided the turning point in the match when he went to the 13th of the afternoon round 1-down.

Both players missed the green, but Putnam was just short and pitched within three feet of the cup. Nordling came out of the trees on the left just inside Putnam. However, Putnam missed what he thought was a putt he needed to halve the hole and he let fly with the putter and stalked off the green.

It didn't help his feelings much when Nordling also missed. Putnam needed that short putt to restore his confidence.

NORDLING WENT 2 up with three to play with an 11-foot birdie putt on the 15th and closed it out when Putnam's wedge was just short of the 16th green and he failed to get down in two. Nordling came from above the pin on the fringe and two-putted for his winning par.

The match was decided when Nordling solved his early putting problems while Putnam's putting remained inconsistent and indecisive.

Putnam made only two birdies in the afternoon and he one-putted the par-5 first hole after a fine chip put him 12 inches from the cup. The only sizable putt he made all day came from seven feet at the par-4 fourth, where he canned "the only decent putt I made all day."

Nordling, who plays out of the Columbine Country Club and who needs just six credit hours to graduate, will be Putnam's roommate at New Mexico in the fall. Putnam grew up playing on the Indian Tree Golf Club links and will return to New Mexico as a sophomore.



Denver Post Photo by Lyn Alweis

SIZING UP A PROBLEM

Chris Nordling contemplates shot from under trees on 13th hole during his win in state match play championship.