

U.S. GIRLS, KOREA BOYS CAPTURE TOYOTA JUNIOR GOLF WORLD CUP

Koo paces U.S. girls to record 11-shot romp; tiebreaker needed to settle boys' crown

TOYOTA CITY, Japan (June 21, 2024) — As Jasmine Koo headed home from last year's Toyota Junior Golf World Cup supported by Japan Airlines, she voiced a desire to come back and "conquer" Chukyo Golf Club in the way Japan's titleholders had.

Consider it mission accomplished.

Even with a couple of slips down Friday's stretch, Koo not only repeatedly put her stamp on the record book in capturing the girls' individual title but was the catalyst that emphatically ended the United States' title drought with a stunning 11-shot romp.

"This is probably the biggest junior event there is," said Koo, whose closing 2-under-par 70 also gave her the event's 54-hole scoring record. "To come back and win it — this is so special, because golf (can be) such an individual sport.

"I think the individual title is great," she added, "but the happiness comes from our team winning. Our entire team can share in it."

The U.S. boys very nearly made it a double triumph, actually tying Korea at the top of the team leaderboard but falling short in a tiebreaker. With two of three scores counting each day toward the team total, the first tiebreaker was Friday's third score — where Korea's Jaehyun Park bested Jackson Byrd by two.

Korea claimed its second championship in the event's 30-year annals, the other taking place in 2003.

"When we won in 2003, everybody was very happy," said Korean captain Namyang Hur. "Since then we have been trying to win another, but without success. Now we are thrilled to win again."

The result literally came down to the final putt, where Billy Davis faced a 12-footer to give Team USA an outright victory. His attempt had the speed, but curled off in the final feet.

“I actually hit a really good putt,” said Davis, whose third consecutive 67 left him second for the individual title. “I just misread it.”

Hur’s reaction? “I wasn’t watching,” he said with a laugh.

Japan’s Mao Matsuyama brought some hardware to the host nation by claiming the boys’ individual title on a day that began in rain and ended in bright sunshine. A 3-under-par 68 was enough to seal a two-stroke victory over Davis, finishing at 14-under 199.

“I like the rain,” said Matsuyama, who made four birdies on the front nine before the skies began to clear. “The greens were a little softer, which helped me with my iron play.”

Rain also had drenched the course Tuesday, forcing cancellation of a round for just the second time in Junior World Cup history and shortening the event to 54 holes. Not that it much kept Koo and her U.S. teammates from taking dead aim at the record book.

The previous record for largest margin of victory was 10 shots, when Japan won the 2018 title over 72 holes. The U.S. girls began Friday four shots clear of their nearest pursuers, then watched the gap grow on the way to finish at 27-under-par 405.

“I’m just so proud of everyone,” said Nikki Oh, whose Friday 66 made up for any momentum Koo might have lost. “We all played really solid all week, just stuck to our game plan. I’m super excited.”

Friday marked the first U.S. team title since sweeping both crowns in 2017.

Koo, whose 64 on Thursday rewrote the girls’ single-round record, finished at 16-under 200 to break the 54-hole scoring mark set a year ago by Japan’s Yuna Araki.

For a time, the Californian looked like she might obliterate the mark — reaching 18-under despite two bogeys shortly after the turn. However, she endured a watery double bogey at No. 18.

“Obviously it was a great week,” said Koo, who was low amateur at the LPGA’s Chevron

Championship. "Today I had no expectations because I hardly ever play in the rain. I played really good in the opening holes and when the skies cleared, I think I just (exhaled). I definitely think I got too comfortable."

Even so, Koo's performance set a high standard for anyone to follow. In seven rounds over two years on the Ishino course, she posted a 66 or better in four of them.

Thailand, making its Junior World Cup debut, used a strong final round to push past Japan for runner-up honors. Pimpisa Rubrong led the way with a closing 71, grabbing a share of third individually.

"This is a dream for our nation," said Thailand coach Pompetch Saraputhi. "We've worked so hard and when we qualified, we were so happy. We made this a major for our national team."

Japan's Mamika Shinchi took second individually behind Koo, finishing four shots back after a closing 70. The Japanese team was hamstrung for a second consecutive day when back pain left Aina Fujimoto unable to play, meaning the scores of Shinchi and Nana Hidori would count regardless.

"It's unfortunate because Aina is a strong player," said Shinchi, winner of the Australian Women's Amateur. "I thought there was going to be a lot of pressure, but it wasn't that bad once we started."

The Toyota Junior Golf World Cup is the final stop of a process that began with 70 national teams entered in regional qualifiers across six continents. The boys' field featured 12 teams competing for the championship; nine teams advanced to the girls' finals.

"Everyone here this week should be commended for their wonderful display of golf skills and outstanding sportsmanship," said William Kerdyk, chairman of the tournament committee. "More importantly, each has represented their countries with dignity and honor."

More information about the Toyota Junior Golf World Cup Supported by Japan Airlines can be found online at WJGTC.org, including a video library that includes interviews with former participants.