

By Steve Waters

FORT LAUDERDALE – Despite a frigid start to Monday’s stroke-play qualifier in the 87th Ione D. Jones/Doherty Women’s Amateur Championship, it didn’t take long for Alexa Pano to warm up and continue her hot play of the last five weeks.

Temperatures were in the high 40s Monday morning when the players in the Amateur division teed off at Coral Ridge Country Club. Pano, 14, of Lake Worth, led all qualifiers with a 1-over-par 73.

“I missed a lot of putts, but I’m OK with it. My ball-striking was pretty good today,” said Pano, who went off at 8:20 a.m. “It was really cold in the morning. Once I got loose, I felt pretty solid.

“The fairways here are really great. It’s one of the better courses I’ve played in a while, so it’s been really nice.”

Pano came into the tournament off a second-place finish out of 79 players, most of them college golfers, in the Women’s South Atlantic Amateur Golf Championship. Playing Wednesday through Saturday, she shot a four-round total of 3-over-par 291 at Oceanside Country Club in Ormond Beach.

Earlier this month, Pano won the girls’ 16-18 division of the Junior Honda Classic, firing rounds of 70-77 on the Champion course at PGA National Resort & Spa in Palm Beach Gardens to win by eight shots. And in December she won the Women’s Dixie Amateur by one shot with a 5-under 283 score at Woodlands Country Club in Tamarac.

The 2017 Doherty champion, who lost in the championship match to Meghan Stasi last year, Pano earned a bye for Tuesday’s first round of match play, along with the top-seeded Stasi, of Oakland Park. Third-seeded Elle Nachmann of Boca Raton and No. 4 Courtney McKim of Raleigh, N.C., also received byes after posting 75s.

Melissa Loh of Dallas and Marie Arnoux of Miami also shot 75, but because they finished after Nachmann and McKim, they will play Tuesday. Loh faces Shirley Vaughan of Canton, Ohio, who shot 88. Arnoux meets Diane Booth of Las Vegas, who shot 84.

In the other two Amateur matches, No. 7 Jamie Freedman of Miami Beach, who shot 78, faces No. 10 Amy Kennedy of Naples (83). No. 8 Marisa Messina of Plantation (79) plays 10th-seeded Dana Williams of Boca Raton (80).

Messana, who was a four-year starter on the Clemson University golf team, is now pursuing a master's degree in human resources at Clemson while working on her course management and scoring in the hopes of turning pro. She played in some mini-tour events and finished tied for 11th at the Dixie. This is her first Doherty since her high school days at American Heritage in Plantation.

"I'm trying to play as much as I can and get myself out there in competition," Messina said. "I didn't start off so great today, but then I finished 1-under for the last few holes, which was nice to kind of get back into a groove and hit the ball well and give myself a chance."

Tama Caldabaugh of Ponte Vedra Beach, Gigi Higgins of Cape Coral and Mimi Hoffman of Springfield, Va., each shot 76 to take the second, third and fourth seeds, respectively, in the Senior Championship division behind defending champ and top seed Lisa Schlesinger of Fort Myers.

Also qualifying were Marilyn Hardy of Magnolia, Texas (77); Reggie Parker of Hobe Sound and Sara Jane Rose of Tamarac (78); Patsy Ehret of Stuart and Susan Temple of Vero Beach (79); 2018 runner-up Terrill Samuel of Etobicoke, Ontario, Meg Giusti of The Villages and Carolyn Baumel of Miami Beach (80); Kathy West of Tulsa, Okla. (81); and Beatriz de Arenas of Guatemala, Taffy Brower of Boynton Beach and Ellie Large of Jupiter (82).

Tuesday's matches begin at 8 a.m. with the Senior second flight. The Senior Championship matches start at 9:04, followed by the Senior first flight at 10:08, the Amateur division at 11:12 and the Senior third flight stroke play at 11:44.

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