

By Steve Waters

FORT LAUDERDALE – Alexa Pano hung in and then hung on to win her second Amateur division title in three years Friday at the 87th Ione D. Jones/Doherty Women's Amateur Championship.

The 14-year-old from Lake Worth, who won the tournament in 2017, overcame a two-hole deficit on the front nine to defeat Marisa Messana of Plantation 1 up on a day that started off chilly, windy and cloudy at Coral Ridge Country Club.

“It was a pretty tough day,” Pano said. “I haven't really played well this whole week, especially today. It was just not my best. There were a couple of things that I did that just kind of held it together and helped me finish it off.”

The match between Pano and Messana, a four-year starter at Clemson who graduated last spring and is now pursuing a master's degree there, was back and forth. Messana won the first hole, Pano won the next two, then Messana birdied the fourth and fifth to take a 1-up lead.

Messana won the seventh with a par to go 2 up, but after they halved the eighth, Pano won the next three holes with pars for a 1-up lead.

“My turning point was sort of at No. 9, when I started feeling like I started playing better,” Pano said. “That was kind of when I was like, ‘Hey, you're playing really bad, get it together.’ And I made a par there and won the next two holes.”

Messana evened the match with a par on the 12th hole, but Pano won the 13th with a bogey and the 14th by sinking a 20-foot birdie putt to go 2 up. The players halved the next two holes with pars, then Messana rolled in a third birdie putt to win the 17th.

Needing to win the 18th to extend the match, Messana reached the green with a hybrid from a fairway bunker, but her 30-foot birdie putt came up just short. Then Pano, who chipped her third shot close after her approach came up a few yards short of the green, sank her par putt to end the suspense.

“I felt like I had the same mindset the whole time, that I was focused on my game and I wasn’t really worried about what she was doing,” Messana said. “I was aware of what she was doing, but I knew I had to play my game and stay focused on hitting the best shots that I could hit.

“I felt like I executed well when I needed to. I had that little stretch of holes where I hit some shots that cost me, but then on the way in I kind of refocused and made sure to kind of get back in my zone and pull off some shots when I needed to, which was good to see that I did that. I wish I could’ve done a few more and a few more putts would’ve dropped but it’s OK. It was an awesome match.”

Playing in the twosome ahead of Pano and Messana, Lisa Schlesinger of Fort Myers won her third straight Senior Women’s Championship, defeating Terrill Samuel of Etobicoke, Ontario, 5 and 4.

“I probably played my best golf today,” Schlesinger said. “I was very consistent. I didn’t make too many mistakes.

“I can’t believe I won it again. I really can’t. This is such a prestigious tournament and there’s so many good players here, I’m just lucky. The stars have to align, and that’s what happened.”

It was Samuel’s third consecutive appearance in the final match, which started off with the players halving the first three holes. Schlesinger won the fourth and fifth with a birdie and a par, lost the seventh, then won the eighth and ninth with a birdie and a par to go 3 up.

Samuel won the 10th with a birdie, but Schlesinger won the 11th and 12th to go 4 up and closed out the match by winning the 15th.

In a meeting of former Senior Championship winners, M.J. Hiestand of Naples defeated Andrea Kraus of Baltimore, 2 and 1, to win the Senior First Flight. Kraus was 2 up after three holes, but Hiestand won the sixth and seventh holes to square the match.

After Kraus won the ninth hole to go 1 up, Hiestand won the 10th and 11th to take a lead she never relinquished. She won the 16th for a 2-up lead and halved the 17th to close out the match.

In the Senior Second Flight final, Sylvie Van Molle of France won six of the first seven holes, three of them with birdies, and went on to defeat Maggie Brady of Washington, D.C., 6 and 5.

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