

Lake Worth's Pano, 14, advances to Doherty semis

By Steve Waters
Special to The Post

FORT LAUDERDALE — Alexa Pano wasn't bothered by Wednesday's windy weather in her match against Jamie Freedman.

The 14-year-old from Lake Worth scored a 5-and-4 victory in winds that topped 20 mph to advance to today's semifinals of the 87th Ione D. Jones/Doherty Women's Amateur Championship at Coral Ridge Country Club.

"I think it's pretty fun playing in the wind," said Pano, the 2017 Doherty champion and winner of the Dixie Amateur in December. "The whole Dixie Am was wind just like this. It just makes things interesting and it makes it a lot more fun."

Pano and Freedman, of Davie, who graduated from Nova Southeastern University last spring, were all square through four holes as Pano had some difficulty on the greens. Then Pano birdied the fifth and sixth holes to take a 2-up lead and never looked back.

"I struggled in the beginning," Pano said. "The first four holes, I had no speed control. Once I kind of settled in, I actually putted really well throughout the rest of the day."

Pano was 3-up after nine holes, birdied the 13th to go 4 up and won the 15th with a par to close out the match. And with a cold front and more windy weather in the forecast, she's looking forward to her match today against Marie Arnoux of Miami, a 3-and-2 winner over Elle Nachmann of Boca Raton.

"I feel confident in the

wind. That's like my favorite kind of conditions to play in," Pano said. "As long as I can keep my putter rolling, I feel pretty good."

The wind was the least of Meghan Stasi's worries.

Stasi, who defeated Pano in last year's Amateur Championship final, knew the odds of her defending her title Wednesday were not good.

A two-time winner of the tournament, Stasi came down with the flu on Monday, had a bye for Tuesday's opening round of match play and felt terrible during her 2-up loss Wednesday to Marisa Messana.

"I really didn't have a lot of energy. I've been in bed for two days," said Stasi, of Oakland Park. "I tried to hang in there as much as I could but I didn't hit too many great shots and then the three-putts just kill you. Most matches, pars are going to win, and I just didn't have too many."

Stasi won the first hole with a par, but Messana, of Plantation, won the next three holes to go 2 up, and led the rest of the way.

"We both struggled a little bit, honestly," said Messana, who plays Courtney McKim of Raleigh, N.C., in the other semifinal match today. "It was tough with the wind."

Pano heading to Augusta: Pano has been invited to play in the inaugural Augusta National Women's Amateur, which will be held at Augusta National Golf Club on April 3-6.

Played the week before the Masters, the international field of 72 players will compete over 54 holes with a cut to 30 players after 36 holes.