

FORT LAUDERDALE – Strong, gusty winds and unforgiving greens tested the golfers who played in Monday’s 18-hole stroke-play qualifier for the 86th Ione D. Jones/Doherty Women’s Amateur Championship.

The good news was that every player, regardless of how she fared, gets to play Tuesday in the first round of match play at Coral Ridge Country Club. The first players tee off at 8 a.m. in a Senior Third Flight match.

“We were a couple of beauty queens out there today,” joked former Florida Women’s Amateur of the Year Tara Joy-Connelly of North Palm Beach, who played with 2012 Doherty champion Meghan Stasi of Oakland Park.

The good friends, who often compete together in team events, both shot 10-over-par 83s on the 6,251-yard layout.

“If I had to play poorly,” Joy-Connelly said, “it might as well be today.”

“It was windy, tough conditions, and we weren’t getting any roll on the ball in the fairway, so the course played very long,” said Stasi, who was eight over on the front nine, in part, she said, because she mis-clubbed and short-sided herself several times.

“It was just a practice round for me because we’re being seeded. Match play’s tomorrow and I’m excited for match play.”

Connelly is seeded 10<sup>th</sup> and Stasi 11<sup>th</sup> in the 13-player Amateur division. Defending champion Alexa Pano is the top seed and didn’t have to qualify, but she played to get a feel for her game and the classic Robert Trent Jones course.

“I got to work on some stuff,” said Pano, 13, of Lake Worth. “I learned the speed of the greens. They break a lot more than I’m used to.”

Pano has a bye for Tuesday’s match play, as does No. 2 seed Haeley Wotnosky of Wake Forest, N.C., who led the Amateur division with a 76 that included four birdies. Third-seeded Georgia Oboh of Riviera Beach got the other bye with a 77.

No. 4 seed Marie Arnoux of Miami also shot 77 and she will play 13<sup>th</sup>-seeded Karen Ford of Oak Brook, Ill., starting at 11:28 a.m.

“I know the course and I like it very much. It’s always challenging for me in terms of distance,” said Arnoux, who is not a long hitter, especially in windy conditions, but made up for it with her excellent putting.

“Today for me is a good round,” added Arnoux, who is originally from France and advanced to the semifinals in 2013.

Arnoux played with 14-year-old Makenna Rodriguez of Delray Beach, who is competing in the Doherty for the first time. A ninth-grader at American Heritage School in Delray, where she plays on the golf team, Rodriguez shot an 82 and is seeded ninth.

“My strengths are my approach shots and my putting,” said Rodriguez, whose round was highlighted by a birdie on the 145-yard, par-3 12<sup>th</sup> hole after she hit a hybrid to eight inches. “I love hitting my hybrids.”

Sylvie Van Molle lives in France and also is playing in the Doherty for the first time. One of 48 golfers 50-and-over, she was the Senior division medalist with a 75 that included three birdies.

“It’s a Trent Jones course and we have some Trent Jones courses in Europe, so it was a little familiar,” said Van Molle, who is originally from Belgium.

“The wind made it so complicated, you’re happy to be on the green. But on the first nine holes, nothing went in. I putted better on the back nine. I got lucky on 18 and made a 40-footer for birdie.”

Van Molle is the No. 2 seed in the Senior division, behind defending champ Lisa Schlesinger of Fort Myers, who, like Pano, played Monday to get a feel for the greens.

Terrill Samuel of Toronto, who lost in the finals to Schlesinger last year, is seeded third after a 76. No. 4 seed Carolyn Baumel of Miami Beach shot 77. Fifth-seeded Gigi Higgins of Cape Coral and No. 6 Diane Lang of Weston both shot 78.