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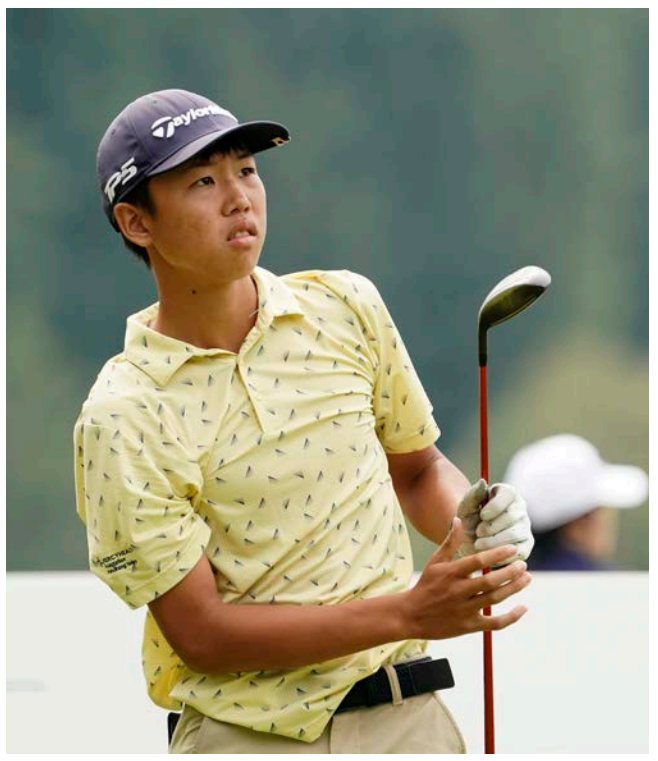
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# Young NOTL golfers play well in U15 Canadian championships

Kevin MacLean
The Lake Report



Above: Eli Perng of St. Davids put together two strong rounds in last week's Canadian U15 championships, shooting 77 and 75. Below: St. Davids golf Kaige Zhu turns 13 this week. Last week he finished fifth in the championships. CHUCK RUSSELL GOLF CANADA



Golf can be a cruel game.

One day you're up, playing the game of your life, and the next day the golf gods throw you a curve or two that can leave you wondering what the heck happened.

For St. Davids youngster Kaige Zhu that was one of the tough lessons learned last week at the Canadian under-15 championships in British Columbia.

He only turns 13 this week, but playing on the national stage last Wednesday against kids more than a year older, Zhu started the tourney in stellar fashion.

He fired a 5-under 67 over the 6,300-yard layout at Pitt Meadows Golf Club near Vancouver and was atop the leaderboard.

On Thursday, his final round started well with two birdies in the first four holes. But he ran into trouble on his middle six holes and finished with a 6-over 78, good enough for fifth place.

His St. Davids Public School classmate Eli Perng, 13, also competed and, with rounds of 77 and 75, finished in a tie for 34th in the field of more than 50 golfers from across the country.

For both young players, just starting Grade 8, the tournament was an important learning experience.

Zhu's day 1 score was his best round ever, his mother Jane Zhu told The Lake Report.

Everything seemed to go his way as he had just one bogey and four birdies. Then, for good measure, he finished with an eagle 3 on the closing hole, a 458-yard par 5.

"It was his best score in his whole golf life so far," his mother said.

On Thursday, that all changed and between the sixth and 12 holes he carded a bogey, a double and a triple to slip out of contention. But that's golf.

Having the lead on such a big stage, he was under some pressure, his mom said, but the day was "a great lesson" and learning experience for him.

Perng was steady and consistent, though his dad Richard, who caddies for Eli, said he played well but "not great" during the competition.

"There were probably six loose shots over the two rounds that cost him heavily. His driver and putter were his best weapons during the tournament," he told The Lake Report.

He didn't three-putt any greens and missed very few fairways off the tee.

"All in all, it was an excellent experience and he knows that he will have one more chance at this competition next year," he said.

Both boys, who also play on their school's golf team, have been competing in youth tournaments in Canada and the United States this summer.

And Perng won the junior club championships at both Eagle Valley Golf Course in Niagara Falls and Cherry Hill in Ridgeway.

Last summer, they both played in the Notah Begay Junior Canadian Golf Championship in Kahnawake, near Montreal, in the age 10-11 division.

They finished first and second that time, with Zhu two shots ahead of Perng.

They're also multi-sport athletes: Zhu is a talented tennis player and Perng plays hockey at the AA level.

Travis Glass, the head teaching pro at Eagle Valley and coach of the Brock University team, has coached Perng since he was three.

On occasion, he said, he's also advised Zhu, who plays out of Royal Niagara Golf Club in NOTL and is coached by his dad Mike, who also handles caddy duties.

Glass, who grew up in St. Davids, is proud of both boys and the success they've had at such an elite level.

Glass is director of the U.S. Kids Niagara golf tour and he noted Zhu and Perng were among about a dozen young boys and girls from the tour who qualified for the Canadian championships.

Richard Perng said his son and Glass "plan to work hard over the winter, focusing on consistency and distance."

And while Zhu focuses a bit more on tennis this fall, Perng will soon be trading the links for the rink and playing right defence for the Niagara Falls Canucks U14 AA team.

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