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HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT GOLF

Highland girls take title by 15 shots

TIM ROGERS
Plain Dealer Reporter

MASSILLON — Just when you think that maybe the Highland girls golf team can't play any better, that perhaps it has reached the apex of its season, it climbs another mountain.

It happened on Tuesday when the Lady Hornets, boosted by a career round by one of their lesser-known sophomores and a typical round by their highly regarded sophomore, shot a 15-over 303 to run away with the Division I district golf championship at The Legends of Massillon.

Second place went to defending champion Massillon Jackson, which finished 15 shots behind at 318, preventing schools from the Cleveland area from sweeping the four qualifying spots for next week's state tournament on the Ohio State University Gray Course.

Hudson (333) and Brecksville-Broadview Heights (337) also qualified by finishing third and fourth, respectively. Hudson, led by Natalie Goodson's 6-over 78, will play in the state tournament for the third time in the past five years while Brecksville, led by a 79 by senior Tess Stevens, advances for the first time since 2003.

Walsh Jesuit junior McKenzie Bell (77), defending district champ and All-Ohioan Nicki Henry (79) of Kenston and Wadsworth freshman Alice Ho (79) earned three of the four individual qualifying spots. Henry, The Plain Dealer's reigning player of the year, returns to the state tournament for the second year in a row.

How impressive was Highland in winning the first district title in school history? Jackson won

this event last year with a score of 338, and Highland was second at 345.

The victory, keyed by sophomores Jessica Porvasnik and Jessica McRae, did not surprise coach Mary Becker.

"Having been the runner-up here last year and watching Jackson get that championship trophy was great motivation for them this year," said Becker. "They just keep getting better and better."

While Becker might not have been surprised by her team's score, she had to be at least startled by the round turned in by McRae, who had not broken 80 this season until going 33-41-74 on Tuesday to finish second to Porvasnik's solid medalist round of par-72.

"On the drive down here, we were all focused," said McRae, whose round included four birdies on putts that ranged from 10 to 20 feet. "This is the big time. My round was all putting. I wasn't hitting the ball close enough for tap-ins, but I was able to make some putts."

Porvasnik, who has pretty much carried the Hornets all season and is a star in the making, said her round would have been lower had it not been for a four-putt on the ninth hole.

"I left a few shots out there," she said. "But this feels great. We really wanted to beat Jackson. Now, we have something bigger to shoot at."

Juniors Stephanie Horvath (78) and Lauren McKinzie (79) completed Highland's scoring.

Junior Angela Codian's 76 led Jackson, which qualified for the third year in a row.

To reach this Plain Dealer reporter:
trogers@plaind.com; 216-999-5169



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Kenston's Nicki Henry reacts to sinking a birdie putt on the fourth hole Tuesday at The Legends of Massillon. She shot a 7-over 79 to earn a state qualifying spot.