

# 70th U.S. Junior Amateur Championship

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In June 2017, I qualified for my first U.S. Junior Amateur Championship. I traveled to Andover, Kansas to play at Flint Hills National Golf Club. From the moment I arrived at the course, the members, volunteers, and USGA officials welcomed me with warming smiles and generous hospitality. Constructed similar to a giant log cabin, Flint Hills' clubhouse had a very cozy feel. One of my favorite parts of the tournament was the locker I given to use. Filled with many tee gifts like headcovers, towels, and a scorecard holder, I was very excited to see what else was in store for the week.

During my two practice rounds, I learned about the course and got to play with Noah Goodwin, who was runner up in the 69th U.S. Junior Amateur and also ranked #1 in the AJGA's Rolex Rankings. Knowing his golfing abilities, I observed how he practiced. He and his caddie discussed potential hole locations on greens and where the best place to leave the ball would be. Often times, Noah would practice wedge shots around the green, which were usually more like flop shots out of the ankle deep bluegrass rough, and be very analytical of how each shot reacted off the clubface. I wished him luck when we both retired halfway through our practice round.

With temperatures reaching over 100 degrees Fahrenheit during an excessive heat warning, playing the first round of stroke play at 2:42 PM was not a walk in the park. The course played just under 7,000 yards with a USGA slope/rating of 75.6/146. I struggled judging the 15-20 mph wind on shots where trees prevented me from feeling the wind. Despite being four over thru eight holes during my first round and five over thru eight holes in my second round, I grinded throughout both rounds to shoot 73-73 and finish +4 for the stroke play portion of the tournament. I finished tied for 53rd out of 156 players, advancing to match play. As the 57th seed, I took on Matthew Wolff of Agoura Hills, California in the first round

of match play. Matt cut the corner on the dogleg right first hole. With his ball sitting down in the thick, four inch rough, I did not expect him to advance his over 200 yard approach shot very far. However, Matt's strength allowed him to muscle out the ball to seven feet from the hole and make eagle. He would later hit his 2-iron past my driver on the ninth hole. During the match, I had many opportunities to catch Matt, but I did not make many putts that day and had a few loose shots. I lost 3 and 1. Matt later defeated his future Oklahoma State teammate, Austin Eckroat, who was the medalist in the stroke play portion of the tournament. Matt eventually made it to the 36 hole final match where he faced Noah Goodwin. Although he was 5 up through 28 holes, Matt lost to Noah 1 down.

The opportunity to play against the top junior golfers from both the US and around the world was an amazing experience. I was able to compare my game and work ethic to many players at the tournament, allowing me to figure out what aspects of my game need to improve. Compared to tournaments like the IMG Junior World Championship, Junior Orange Bowl International Golf Championship, Boys Junior America's Cup, Optimist International Junior Golf Championship, and AJGA events, the U.S. Junior Amateur was by far the best tournament I have ever played, exceeding all of my expectations. The USGA did an excellent job organizing the event and setting up the course. With a USGA official walking alongside every group, pace of play was never delayed and rules questions were not left unanswered. Future host venues of the championship include Baltusrol Golf Club and Hazeltine National Golf Club, two major championship courses. If I did not exceed the age limit, I would definitely try to qualify for next year's championship. The upcoming years of this tournament will be a surreal experience for the players who qualify.