



## Dane Watanabe

*73rd U.S. Junior Amateur Championship Hawaii qualifier*

On July 7, 2021, I was told that there was a spot available for me to compete in the 2021 U.S. Junior Amateur Championship at the Country Club of North Carolina (CCNC). This came as a shock to me since I was originally a first alternate. I called my coach, Casey Nakama, to tell him about this and he told me that I had to go since it might be a once in a lifetime opportunity. I accepted the spot and now my parents and I had to re-book our flights and hotel reservations. The re-booking process was a hassle, but it was all worth it in the end.

When I arrived at CCNC, I was greeted by a tour guide who took me through the clubhouse to the registration area. At registration, I received a packet that included my scorecards, yardage books, tee sheet, and guidelines/rules for the tournament. After I completed the registration process, the tour guide took me down the staircase to the locker room. I found a lot of cool accessories and goodies inside my locker including a golf shirt, yardage book holder with my name on it, a jacket, and a letter from Webb Simpson, the chairman of the tournament and currently a PGA Tour player.

I played my two practice rounds on CCNC's Dogwood and Cardinal Courses. The layouts were extremely challenging, both measuring 7,200-7,300 yards, with narrow fairways, long rough, and undulating greens. I knew the key to playing well was hitting fairways and greens.

I played my first round of stroke play on the Cardinal Course. I birdied my first hole of the tournament after sticking a wedge to three feet. Unfortunately it didn't quite go as planned after that. I shot four over on both nines for a total of 79. My ball-striking was off, which made it hard to get up and down from the thick rough surrounding the lightning-fast greens. I knew I had nothing to lose during my second round on the Dogwood Course. I started off rough, with a five over on my first nine. Even though I was out of making it to match play already, I still wanted to finish my first U.S. Junior Am on a high note. I made four birdies on my back nine, balancing out four bogeys to finish with a gritty even-par 36 for a total of 77.

Even though I wish I played better in my first U.S. Junior Amateur, it was still an enjoyable and unforgettable experience. In addition to the course and facility being pristine, all of the people that I met were very friendly and respectful. Not to mention the free food and ice cream definitely hit the spot.

I am very thankful that I had the privilege of competing among the best juniors in the nation. Now I know what I can improve on in order to be competitive in these national tournaments. I will always remember competing in the U.S. Junior Amateur and I'm excited for another opportunity to qualify next year.