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Teen golfer shines at Harder Hall Invitational

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Kyle Roig had been expecting to represent her native Puerto Rico at the Copa de las Americas golf event in Argentina earlier this month. Financial constraints prevented Puerto Rico from sending a team, but the 16-year-old American Heritage-Plantation High School student didn't sulk.

Instead, she took action. Roig entered the Harder Hall Women's Invitational in Sebring, Fla., and stunned the field by winning the prestigious tournament in a playoff Jan. 9.

The odds were against Roig, who was placed on a waiting list two days before the event and was granted entrance only after another golfer withdrew. She traveled to Sebring the day of the practice round and proved why she's one of the premier amateur golfers in the country, going toe to toe with the finest U.S. amateurs and college players.

Roig's 18-foot birdie putt on the first playoff hole put her in the record books as the winner of the 55th edition of the tournament. Her determination was evident when she rallied after falling behind by two strokes in the final two holes. In the playoff, she held off 14-year-old Alexis Thompson, Golfweek's No. 1 amateur and junior.

"I feel it's my top accomplishment right now, because it's known as such a prestigious event, and a lot of notable professional golfers have won it before," Roig said. "It was an awesome experience and gives me confidence that I can play against difficult competition and talented players."

Roig's list of accomplishments is long. She earned the Class 1A individual state championship in her freshman and junior seasons and holds the county high school record for most rounds under par in 18-hole tournament play. She is one of the stars of a Patriots program that has won the state championship in four of the past five seasons.

Roig has been playing golf since childhood, inspired by her father, who often took her to driving ranges in Puerto Rico. Roig, who speaks Spanish, Portuguese and English, started to master the latter



after taking ESOL classes when she arrived in Pembroke Pines at age 10. She enrolled at American Heritage and first played golf in a team-oriented environment in the seventh grade.

Roig is a member of Lago Mar Country Club, a private equity club that reopened Jan. 1 after renovating its golf course and clubhouse. Roig has played at Lago Mar since she first relocated to the United States.

"I feel I have spent more time at Lago Mar than at home," she said. "I practice on the driving range and play with members. The club's members are super and they're family to me. The renovation is really nice and it's a great place."

Roig is also a dedicated student with a 4.8 GPA. She has placed first in Heritage's Science Fair for two years.

"Kyle has made a tremendous commitment. She is unbelievably dedicated and works hard," said American Heritage golf coach Brandt Moser. "She is very talented academically, and that really separates her. She is able to compete at the same level as others at golf while putting in more of her hours to academics. That is truly the amazing part."

Moser said many young golfers of Roig's ability are home-schooled and may spend more hours on the course than in the classroom. But Roig takes it upon herself to make up missed work if she plays in tournaments during the school week. She is ranked 26th among juniors and is 23rd in the national amateur rankings.

"I am playing with confidence and that's very important," Roig said. "I must stay focused and play my game."

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