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Cover: Western Golf Association Chairman John Fix presents 2008 Western Amateur champion, Danny Lee, with the George R. Thorne trophy. Photo by Art McCafferty

New Zealand's Danny Lee Wins 2008 Western Amateur



Photo by Art McCafferty

Danny Lee putts during the final round while his caddy, Rambert Sim, looks on.

By Gary Holloway
Western Golf Association

Benton Harbor, Mich. (Sunday, August 3, 2008) – New Zealand's Danny Lee showed why he is among the world's top-ranked amateurs Sunday, delivering a pair of 4 and 2 match play wins to

claim the 2008 Western Amateur Championship at Point O' Woods Golf & Country Club in Benton Harbor, Mich.

Lee became the first winner

since Bubba Dickerson in 2001 to take both medalist and match play honors, joining an elite group of dual winners that includes Phil Mickelson (1991), Scott Verplank (1985), Curtis Strange (1974) and

Ben Crenshaw (1973).

“This is a huge event,” said Lee, 18, of Rotorua, New Zealand. “It gives me so much confidence. This is the first time I played really well in the United States. It’s special. It’s the biggest win of my life.”

Up against UCLA’s Erik Flores in the championship match, Lee struck early, dropping three straight birdie putts on the middle three holes of the front nine to forge a 4-up lead through six.

After moving to 5-up through 12, Lee and Flores matched birdies on the par-5 13th before Flores dropped two straight birdie putts to cut Lee’s lead to 3-up. On the par-4 16th, Lee finally closed the match, 4 and 2, with an 8-foot con-

ceded birdie putt after Flores failed to make his own birdie putt.

“I know he’s a good player and was going to come back,” said Lee. “I was thinking ‘Oh, he’s going to come and get me.’ I was really nervous the last couple of holes. All I was thinking was don’t make any mistakes and make pars.”

Flores wasn’t expecting Lee to fold.

“That guy’s tough,” said Flores, 21, of Grass Valley, Calif. “He’s really impressive. He’s a machine.”

But Flores was hoping to give Lee a tougher match.

“I didn’t play very well today. I just didn’t hit my iron shots close,”

he said. “I didn’t have any looks at the hole.”

Leading up to the final match, Flores’ had played near flawless golf.

“This week was awesome,” he said. “I shot even par my first stroke play round, then I was under par in the rest of the stroke play ... three straight 67s ... and in match play.”

Flores finished the match with Lee at 2 under par, but it wasn’t nearly enough to stay with Lee, who shot 31 on the front and was 6 under for the round.

I played 36 holes with him Friday,” said Flores. “I expected him to play well.”

Born in Korea, Lee moved to New Zealand when he was nine. Heading into the Western Amateur, he was fourth in the Golfweek Scratch Players World Rankings. The win at Point O’ Woods this week moved him to the top of the world rankings. Lee earned medalist honors on Friday with a 12-under-par 268 total in 72 holes of stroke play.

A lot of hard work before coming to the United States to play the summer amateur circuit helped prepare him for success, Lee said.

“I practiced so hard ... eight hours a day,” he said. “I expected to play really well in the United States. I think I’ve done a great job.”

In the morning semifinals, Lee and Flores both notched 4 and 2 victories on the strength of birdie binges on the back nine.



Rambert Sim, of San Diego, California, served as caddy for family friend Danny Lee.



Eric Flores (l) and Danny Lee tee off on Point O’ Woods during the final round of match play in the Western Amateur Championship

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Photo by Art McCafferty

The Gallery approaches during the final round of play at Point O' Woods

Lee defeated Conrad Shindler, 20, of Westlake, Texas, with birdies on three of the final four holes. He never trailed after driving the green on the par-4 eighth hole and draining a 10-foot eagle putt.

Shindler briefly pulled to all square with a five-foot birdie putt on the par-3 ninth, but Lee countered with a short birdie putt on the par-4 10th to regain a 1-up lead. Lee's birdies at 13, 15 and 16 closed out the match.

"He's a great player," said Shindler, a sophomore at Texas A&M. "He's not going to make the mistake to give you a free hole. I shot even par and lost, 4 and 2. I

hit my putts, they just didn't go in. I burned three edges and had one monster lip out."

Shindler left Point O' Woods Sunday with some newly-found confidence.

This shows me I can play with anyone, not just in the nation, but in the world," he said. "It's pretty special to make it this far in such a prestigious event."

Flores finished with a flourish, hitting Dubuisson with a string of five straight birdies and seven birdies over the final eight holes.

A chip-in on the par-4 12th gave

Flores his first lead of the match and jumpstarted his game. Four birdies later, he accepted congratulations from Dubuisson and moved into the championship match.

"It's always bad to lose," said Dubuisson, 18, of Mougins, France. "Sometimes you win, sometimes you lose. It's okay.

"His putting was very good. This morning my putting was bad," he added. "I was not very lucky."

Dubuisson, 53rd in the world amateur rankings heading into the Western Amateur, will take a week off from golf before playing in the Canadian Amateur. **MG**