

Golfer Jennifer Johnson exceeds goals as freshman

Written by Nick Kosmider, *The State Press*
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Nine months ago, Jennifer Johnson made her goals clear.

The ASU golfer said in September she wanted to earn All-American honors during her freshman season in Tempe.

With the spring campaign recently concluded, even those lofty expectations have been exceeded.

On May 21, Johnson completed her first NCAA Championship tournament as the runner-up at 8-under par, four strokes behind Oklahoma State's Caroline Hedwall. As a result, in addition to earning First-Team All-American honors, Johnson is a finalist for the Honda Sports Award, an honor given annually to the top collegiate golfer in the sport.

"I thought it was a pretty good season," understated Johnson said. "I definitely became more independent with my game. I learned how to manage my time and practices."

Johnson picked a good time to have her best tournament of the year. She led the NCAA Championships, held at the Pete Dye Golf Course in Landfall, Md., for the first three rounds before falling to Hedwall on the final day. With a large gallery following her every shot, Johnson said nerves were a factor over the final 18 holes.

"I was really happy with how I played," Johnson said. "I was trying to go out there and not give away any shots and just play my game. ... I felt a little bit of pressure. Winning the NCAA [Championship] is one of the biggest things you can do as an amateur, so it was definitely on my mind. I just didn't take advantage of some birdie attempts on the last couple holes, and I had a few course management mistakes."

While her 72.40 scoring average was good enough for sixth in the nation, Johnson's rookie campaign was also filled with some trying moments that tested her resolve.

After playing stellar golf for much of the Thunderbird Invitational earlier this season, an event held at ASU's Karsten Golf Course, Johnson struggled down the stretch, charged



with a double bogey on that 18th hole that left her team one shot short of a victory.

“Every player you can think of has bad finishes,” ASU coach Melissa Luellen said at the time. “It’s what you do with it that matters.”

True to her resilient form, Johnson played some of her best golf after the Thunderbird Invitational.

She bounced back the following week at the Pac-10 Championships, putting herself among the leaders following the first round, only to retire from the tournament, along with teammate Giulia Molinaro, due to a stomach virus.

“It was frustrating, because I was playing really well the first round,” Johnson said. “It was our tournament to win. It was one of those things that was just bad luck and you can’t really control.”

Healthy and determined, Johnson played her best golf of the year at the NCAA Championships, proving a mental toughness Luellen said she has seen in Johnson since she was barely a teenager.

“She’s doing awesome. I’m so proud of her,” Luellen told the ASU athletics Web site following the third round of the tournament. “She’s so calm on the outside.”

Though the ASU season has concluded, there is still plenty of golf on the horizon for Johnson.

On June 11, she will begin play in the prestigious Curtis Cup, an event held near Boston that pits the eight top American amateur golfers against the top eight players from Great Britain and Ireland.

“The course, when we first pulled up, I thought we were somewhere in Europe,” Johnson said of the Essex Country Club where the tournament is being held. “It’s not a very traditional U.S. course. ... I think it will be a really good setup.”

Johnson has three other tournaments lined up for the summer, including the U.S. Open on July 5, fitting in a couple of trips to see her grandparents in between.

“It will be a busy summer,” Johnson said with a chuckle.

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