

## Sports

# Eight year old Amy Wooten ranked fifth in world after World Championship



Amy Wooten prepares to leave for the California Kids World Golf Championship at Pawley's Island this weekend. Amy is ranked No. 5 in the world after a fifth place finish in the U.S. Kids World Golf Championship in Pinehurst last week. Amy is only eight years-old and hopes to earn a scholarship for college when the time comes.

**By Billy Todd**

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CLINTON — As the result of her play last week at the U.S. Kids Golf World Championship in Pinehurst, Clinton native, Amy Wooten is ranked No. 5 in the world. Amy, who just turned eight in

April, started hitting a golf ball when she was about six years-old, shot a 58 in the nine hole tournament in the eight year-old age bracket.

Amy plays in two separate golf circuits, the National Junior Golf Tour and the U.S. Kids Tour. She is the only golfer on the Junior Tour to have hit a hole-in-one on a par 4 hole. Amy accomplished that feat in February at Hillendale Golf Course in Durham. "It is amazing to me that she was able to hit a hole-in-one already," stated Leroy Wooten, Amy's caddy and dad. "I have been playing for 40 years and just got my first hole-in-one in June on a par 3 hole."

Wooten played in her first tournament just under a year ago, August 15, 2007 in Goldsboro. Ironically this was the day her brother, Garrick Palmer (after Arnold), was also born. "We just did make it home," shared Amy. "Sure does make it easy to remember when I played in my first tournament."

In the eight year-old bracket, golfers play 1,800 yards and nine holes in tournaments. Last week's U.S. Kids World Championship was played at the Longleaf Course in Pinehurst. There were over 1,300, 5-12 year-old kids on hand to compete and over 400 volunteers available to assist with play. Nine different golf courses were used for all the age brackets.

"It was a great experience for the kids," expressed Amy's dad. "There were kids from all over the world competing in this championship."

"I really had a great time meeting people from all over," shared Amy. "I made new friends with girls from China, Japan and Columbia. I can't wait to go back next year."

Amy had to play in two qualifying tournaments in order to participate in the World Championship. Next year by virtue of finishing in the top five, she has an automatic invitation to return for the championship. "My goal is to go back next year and do better than the top five," said Amy.

"Amy speaks fluent Spanish and it was amazing watching her communicate with the girls from Spanish speaking countries. Sometimes the kids were not able to communicate with anyone outside their family and I think they truly enjoyed hearing someone else speaking their language. I know Amy did," commented dad.

Entering the third grade at Butler Avenue later this month, Amy will certainly have something to share with her classmates as to what she did this summer.

Responding to the question, what do you like about playing golf?, Amy said, "I love meeting and making new friends and I really love the competition. It is fun playing on the different courses and seeing how the courses are laid out. I really like it when the course doesn't have some many sand traps in front of the greens."

Wooten commented saying, "Amy does not really enjoy practicing. But if you mention going out to play a little chip and putt challenge, then it is game on." Amy spends a lot of time practicing. It is not unusual to find her on the hole No. 13 at Timberlake, which happens to be right in front of her house, chipping and putting or in her yard. "The neighbors come out in the morning and will shot some with her and that helps her practice," said dad.

Amy's parents are Leroy and Neraida Wooten. According to her dad, her mom did not like golf and often would say something about how much time they spent at golf. "All it took was one tournament," said Leroy. "She was hooked and now she videotapes every tournament. We have to find a babysitter so she can be there. She would not miss it for anything now." Amy's mom does not play currently but as soon as Garrick get a little older, she plans to learn.

This weekend, Amy has played in the California Kids World Championship at Pawley's Island in South Carolina with the finals today. Asking why the California tournament was being held in South Carolina, Leroy replied saying, "I guess since all the world players were only 150 miles away in Pinehurst last week it was a good idea to hold it close by."

With over 30 trophies and awards to her credit, Amy has improved greatly since she began. She started out shooting around 58 for nine holes. Now she scores in the low 30's. "She really helped me out in the father-daughter tournament here at Timberlake," Leroy said smiling.

Amy has her goals set high and hopes to earn a full scholarship to a Division I school. Interestingly enough, her dad hopes it will be to Duke even though he is an avid Carolina fan. "Duke currently has the top women's golf program in the country." said dad. "There were over 90 golf scholarships in North Carolina that were unused this year because there were not enough female golfers who could qualify for them. Hopefully by the time Amy is ready to go to college, she will be able to receive a scholarship."

Amy and her dad expressed their gratitude to the many people who support her. "Wallace and Jane Herring came to Pinehurst twice last week to see her play. The neighbors are always encouraging her to practice and get better," said dad.

"David Orr, Campbell University professor for the Golf Management Program is Amy's coach. He works with her whenever possible and has equipment to evaluate her swing and helps to make corrections where needed," remarked Leroy. "Coach Orr helps me to remember that Amy is only eight and when I forget and ask why she is doing something, he always says, 'She is only eight.' He is truly a remarkable coach and person."

As evident of her actions during the interview, Amy is a normal, bright, energetic young lady that is eight years old. She has an awesome golf swing that would make anyone who has played for years envious. And as her dad says, "If she keeps working hard it will be amazing to see how far she can go." It will definitely be interesting to watch.

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