

Robinson's Melanie Walker rolls through Heritage Oaks to win Virginia girls' golf title

By **Jake Lourim**



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In a normal year, the Virginia girls' golf championship that Melanie Walker won Monday would have come a full month after the team championship. The pandemic-shortened campaign, though, has condensed the postseason, stringing together district, region, team and girls' open tournaments in back-to-back-to-back-to-back weeks.

Perfecting a rhythm she started earlier this spring, the Robinson junior kept rolling, shooting a 4-under-par 66 to win by five strokes at Heritage Oaks Golf Course in Harrisonburg.

Last week at the team tournament, Walker finished with nine straight holes at par or better, and with only a week between outings, she had plenty of opportunity to build on that. She struck the ball well again during a practice round Sunday at Heritage Oaks, another reason to feel good about Monday's tournament. When she birdied the first hole Monday, she grew even more confident.

And then she played the first 17 holes of Monday's tournament without a bogey, speaking afterward about the importance of making pars with a handful of six-foot putts. Even on No. 18, she recovered from a tough third shot into a bunker to make bogey on the par-5.

"In years past, she probably would have tried to play a little more aggressive," Robinson Coach Marvin Sim said. "I think this year she realized where she should play aggressive and where she should play a little bit more conservatively."

When she shot a 1-under 71 at Williamsburg National Golf Club a week earlier, she played with Langley senior Kelly Chinn, who won the tournament. Along the way, she recalled the benefit of observing Chinn, the American Junior Golf Association's boys' player of the year in 2020.

"I was taking notes on what he does and how to improve myself," Walker said. "He kept on pushing and getting birdies to keep building on his score. I was trying to replicate him, and I really learned a lot from that round."

By season's end, Walker had improved on each score the following week, and as she learned this spring the importance of finding a groove, she'll carry that into the summer and into her senior season.

"She was just laser-focused toward the end of the season," Sim said.

Rock Ridge's Sydney Hackett and Independence's Julie Shin tied for second at 1 over.

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