

McCleave hangs on for state am crown

By GARY BAINES
Camera Sports Writer

GREELEY — Dave McCleave of Fort Collins led the State Stroke Play amateur golf tournament virtually wire-to-wire, but it ended none too soon as far as he was concerned.

McCleave held a seven-shot lead after the first nine holes of Sunday's final round at Highland Hills Golf Course, but a hard-charging Gary Longfellow from Castle Rock made up all those strokes on the back nine to force a playoff.

Fortunately for McCleave, what had been a foregone conclusion did indeed come to pass when he sank a 15-foot birdie putt on the first hole of sudden death to claim the state amateur title.

"I tried to choke it away," said McCleave, who went five over par in his last 10 holes of regulation play. "Thank God I didn't."

McCleave, a 21-year-old junior at the University of Wyoming, shot a 2-over-par 73 in Sunday's final round to finish with a 72-hole total of 5-under 279. Longfellow, a two-time winner of this event, also came in at 279 after making birdies on three of his last four holes to fire a final-round 71.

Former University of Colorado golfer Mark Crabtree ended up third at 282 after closing with a 67 Sunday. That marked the fifth straight time Crabtree has finished in the top five in this event without winning it. And once again, putting kept him out of the top spot. "Nothing new there," he said.

"I guess when it's my time, I'll win it," said Crabtree, now the Colorado State golf coach.

Just about everyone felt it was McCleave's time this year after he made the turn Sunday with a seven-stroke advantage.

"I didn't think I had a chance the way he was playing," admitted Longfellow.

But the complexion of the tournament changed dramatically on the final nine holes. McCleave bogeyed Nos. 10 and 11 after driving in the trees, then Longfellow knocked in a seven-foot birdie at No. 12, cutting the margin to four.

But when Longfellow 3-putted the par-3 14th for a bogey — his fourth 3-putt of the day — the lead was back to five and McCleave again looked like a shoo-in for victory.

Longfellow made a 3-foot birdie on the 15th to pick up a stroke, then watched another turn of events as McCleave hooked his drive out of bounds on the par-4 16th. That errant tee shot led to a double-bogey 6, leaving Longfellow just two behind.

Again on 17, though, McCleave seemed to regain his composure by hitting the ball six feet from the flag on the par-3. But much to McCleave's surprise, Longfellow dropped a 40-foot birdie there and McCleave missed to allow Longfellow to get within one.

McCleave made a routine par on the par-4 18th, which left his fate up to Longfellow, who had a downhill 12-foot birdie attempt to tie. He barely got it to the hole, but it did indeed drop in to force a playoff.

Longfellow insisted later he didn't realize the putt would get him into a tie. "I didn't think the putt meant anything," he said. In any case, Longfellow had shot a 3-under-par 32 on the back nine, while McCleave had a 39.

In the playoff, Longfellow hit one of his few errant shots of the week, pushing his approach on the par-4 first hole to the right of the green. Just prior, McCleave had placed a 4-iron shot 15 feet to the right of the flag.

some pressure after I knocked it stiff," said McCleave.

After Longfellow chipped up short, McCleave ended the tournament by sinking the birdie putt.

"I guess it wasn't to be this time," said Longfellow.

The victory puts McCleave in position to win the State Amateur of the Year honors. In addition to this win, he was the runnerup in the State Match Play earlier this summer.

"I feel I'm definitely one of the best amateurs in the state," McCleave said. "And I think it maybe says something about my character to lead wire-to-wire."

State Stroke Play

Results after Sunday's final round of the State Amateur Stroke Play at the par-71 Highland Hills Golf Course in Greeley. x — indicates won in sudden death playoff.

x-Dave McCleave, Fort Collins	65 68 73 73—279
Gary Longfellow, Castle Rock	70 69 69 71—279
Mark Crabtree, Fort Collins	72 72 71 67—282
Rick DeWitt, Arvada	77 70 70 69—286
Tom McGraw, Westminster	72 70 72 73—287
Shane Bertsch, Evergreen	72 69 76 70—287
Scott Petersen, Englewood	73 70 69 76—288
Micha Rudosky, Cortez	73 70 75 71—289
Scott Peterson, Denver	71 74 71 74—290
Tony Aguilar, Arvada	71 70 73 77—291
Owen Ellis, Boulder	71 70 73 78—292
Greg Chinn, Greeley	71 72 77 72—292
Chris Nordling, Englewood	74 71 74 74—293
Steve Ivan, Pueblo	70 74 77 72—293
Erik Heiny, Greeley	77 73 72 72—294
Brian Dewbre, Lamar	74 69 76 76—295
Matt Julander, Littleton	73 73 74 75—295
Eric Larson, Colorado Springs	76 74 75 70—295
Bob Heiny, Greeley	73 73 74 76—296
Jeff Potts, Denver	72 79 68 78—297
Charlie Luther, Denver	74 76 72 75—297
Dave Brown, Englewood	71 75 76 75—297
Charles Brown, Colorado Springs	77 68 77 75—297
Shawn McGeachie, Meeker	74 73 76 74—297
Greg Shakespeare, Littleton	73 74 75 77—299
Randell Harrist, Littleton	70 77 76 76—299
Morgan Murphy, Salida	74 78 73 75—300
Paul Alexander, Boulder	74 74 74 79—301
Ted Warner, Greeley	75 74 77 75—301
Kent Moore, Englewood	77 75 75 74—301
Jeff Salter, Denver	77 75 76 73—301
Keith Martin, Longmont	76 71 74 81—302
Stephen Feuring, Denver	73 79 73 77—302
Rich Reisner, Pueblo	77 75 74 76—302
Mike Mulhern, Denver	75 76 75 76—302
George Ortiz, Denver	77 74 76 75—302
Tray Shehee, Boulder	71 71 79 82—303
Dan Armstrong, Aurora	72 73 78 80—303
Wenzel Brown, Greeley	71 75 81 76—303
Peter Pappas, Greeley	77 73 75 79—304
Bob Russo, Denver	76 76 77 75—304
Chuck Fisher, Englewood	78 73 73 81—305
John Ward, Aurora	78 74 77 77—306
Joe Brady, Littleton	73 77 82 75—307
John Zerwin, Denver	79 73 74 81—307
Kelly Crone, Larkspur	79 73 74 83—309
Thomas White, Englewood	76 75 75 83—309
Charles Whalen, Denver	78 72 82 77—309
Steve Kerr, Aurora	76 71 85 80—312
David Buddenbaum, Fort Collins	73 77 87 75—312
Paul Mullette, Denver	76 77 83 83—319