

Hoefle leads early, but misses Open by 4 shots

Written by Tom Fruehling

Monday, 06 June 2011 22:01 -

Linn-Mar coach and teacher Bill Hoefle missed qualifying for the U.S. Open by four strokes Monday after leading the pack over the first 18 holes.

Hoefle's first round score of 66 tied him for the lead with amateur Jace Long of Dixon, Mo., at the sectional qualifying at the St. Charles Country Club in suburban Chicago. Both shot 74 in the second round, tying them with three others at 140.

Professional Bennett Blakeman of Burr Ridge, Ill., shot a 68-67 to take top honors in the meet. He and two amateurs who shot 136 qualified out of field of 27 for the U.S. Open, June 16-19, at the Congressional Country Club in Bethesda, Md.

"I played very well all day," Hoefle said Monday night. "Really, I hit the ball the same in both rounds.

"But the putts I was making in the first round didn't fall in the second round. And I had some good breaks in the first round that I didn't get in the second.

"It adds up to a different score, but I was in the hunt. A 69 in the second round, and I'd be in the U.S. Open."

Hoefle, 40, is the sophomore boys basketball coach and assistant boys golf coach at Linn-Mar who just finished his sixth year as a business teacher at the school. He played golf professionally for six years after graduation from Oklahoma State University in 1994.

This was the fifth time in his career that he has made it past a local qualifying round. Two years ago, he missed making the U.S. Open by two shots after scoring a double bogey on the final hole.

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Hoefle said he had no similar regrets after his finish on Monday, with perfect conditions in the morning to hot and windy by the afternoon.

"Having the lead after 18 holes was a great experience," he said. "And I had a great time. It was a lot of fun. I had a chance but didn't quite make it."