

3rd Women's Porter Cup, June 11th -13th Valdes steps up to win Women's Porter Cup



By Jay Skurski

LEWISTON – Tradition dictates that any great golf tournament doesn't truly start until the back nine of the final round.

At Niagara Falls Country Club, that adage can be boiled down to the pressure cooker that is the final three holes along the Niagara Escarpment.

Ana Paula Valdes played those beautifully Friday, and as a result found herself as the winner of a great Women's Porter Cup.

Valdes nearly aced the par-3 16th hole, hitting a 5-iron off the tee to within a foot for a kick-in birdie, then followed that up with a 4-foot eagle putt on the par-5 17th hole to surge ahead of eventual runner-up and second-round leader Christina Foster. Valdes' round of 6-under 65 Friday was the best of the tournament and left her at 8-under 205 overall, one shot better than Foster's 7-under 206.

“It’s a pretty big one,” Valdes said with a beaming smile when asked where Friday’s victory ranked in her career. “I’ve won junior tournaments, but never an amateur, so it’s a huge confidence booster.”

Valdes moved to South Carolina from her native Mexico at 14, and will spend her senior year of high school at the Bishops Gate Golf Academy northwest of Orlando, Fla. She’s currently seventh in Golfweek’s rankings of the girls’ class of 2016 and verbally committed to Clemson.

Valdes entered the final round trailing Peters by two shots. She had trimmed the lead to one by the time the final group reached the closing holes. A birdie putt on the par-4 15th that could have tied the lead lipped out, but Valdes didn’t flinch. Her 5-iron from 167 yards on the 16th was a masterful lesson in stick-to-itiveness.

“Fifteen was kind of a motivation to keep going, because those putts kind of hurt,” Valdes said. “I didn’t get discouraged or anything. I just kept pushing myself. I was feeling that club on 16. I thought it was the right one, so I just went for it.”

Valdes’ birdie tied her for the lead at 6-under, but she was just warming up. After finding the fairway on the 17th – a hole that was converted to a par-5 for the event from a par-4 – she had 190 yards left to the pin. She hit a perfect hybrid with a slight helping breeze, leaving herself just 4 feet for eagle.

“I was like, ‘OK, time to be aggressive, your last few holes, finish strong,’ ” Valdes said. “It worked out very well.”

Valdes’ eagle gave her a two-shot lead after Foster’s short birdie putt refused to break and lipped out.

The tournament wasn’t over, though, with the par-3 18th – which has Lewiston Road on its left – still looming.

Valdes hit a pitching wedge from 122 yards to within 10 feet below the hole, but Foster was conceding nothing. She fired right at the flag, and her ball ended up about 10 feet behind the hole.

“I was trying to make a hole-in-one,” said the 19-year-old from the Toronto suburb of Concord, Ont. “It was on line from the tee. I was like, ‘Oh my God, this could go in.’ ”

Foster made her birdie putt, which meant Valdes had to tap in from about a foot for par. She was able to, putting an exclamation point on the third Women’s Porter Cup.

“I love getting nervous on the course,” Valdes said. “It keeps me alive and excited. I had shaky hands with the putter, it was a little nerve-wracking, but I managed it well and it turned out fine.”

With Valdes’ win, tournament director Brian Oakley may finally get his wish of seeing a champion try to defend her title. The first two winners of the event, Casie Cathrea and Brooke Henderson, pursued professional careers after their victories.

Valdes said Friday she’d love to be back next year to defend her title.

Foster, meanwhile, is expected to pursue a professional career. After starting the final round with a two-shot lead thanks to a second-round 66, she didn’t do anything to lose the tournament Friday. Valdes just went out and won it.

“I got outplayed, simple as that,” Foster said. “I kind of struggled early, I missed a couple short putts. But other than that, Ana played amazing. I mean, 65, how do you beat that?”

“I’m just happy that I got in the last group. I haven’t really done that in a while. It was nice to be in contention and see how it feels. Physically, mentally, you take a lot from that. After the round, you can reflect and use it for the future.”

Canadian Josee Doyon, the final member of the last group Friday, finished third at 2-under 211, while Jessica Porvasnik and Brittany Marchand tied for fourth at 1-under 212.

Lewiston's Maren Cipolla led all local finishers in a tie for seventh place after a terrific final-round 67. Cipolla, a member at Niagara Falls, went 5-under on the back nine, including an eagle on No. 17. She assaulted the par-5s on the back, making birdies at Nos. 11 and 13, as well.

"This tournament is so fun," said Cipolla, a junior at Nichols. "It brings out a better golfer in you when you know you're playing with better people. Last year, I was a little tentative, but this year I knew I could play as well as most girls. I thought, 'Just go out there and do it.' "

Clarence's Cat Peters finished in a tie for 10th at 2-over 215 after a closing round of 2-under 69 in another good showing for a Western New Yorker.

[Final results](#)