

8th Women's Porter Cup, June 9th-11th, 2021

Kan Bunnabodee Wins 8th Women's Porter Cup



Kan Bunnabodee Wins 2021 Women's Porter Cup Playoff

Courtesy Niagara Gazette by Jerry Sullivan

LEWISTON 6/4/2021— A week or so ago, Brian Oakley got one of those phone calls that every golf tournament director dreads. Kan Bunnabodee said she was sorry, but she had to withdraw from the 8th Women's Porter Cup because of an injured right thumb.

"Two hours later, she called me back and said, 'Mr. Oakley, I think I'm going to try it,'" Oakley said Friday afternoon.

Bunnabodee, the No. 1 player for Purdue, did a lot more than try. Despite the sore hand, the Chonburi, Thailand native shot an efficient 3-under par 69 in the third and final round at Niagara Falls Country club to finish at 4-under and win the prestigious amateur tourney by three shots.

Chelsea Dantonio of East Aurora, the only local to finish high, shot 69 on Friday to wedge her way into a four-way tie for second at 215, 1-under par. Canadians Monet Chun and Ashley Chow also finished 1-under, along with Sifat Sagoo of India, who is Bunnabodee's teammate at Purdue.

Chun began the day with a 1-shot lead. But Bunnabodee emerged from a pack of six golfers who began the day within two shots of the lead. Straight off the tee and resourceful around the greens, she took the lead with a 7-foot birdie putt on the par-4 eighth hole and never relinquished it.

"I came to this tournament without any expectations," said Bunnabodee, 19. "I injured my thumb and I was like, 'I just want to come here and have fun and play with friends.' I think that's why I played on my 'A' game.

"I surprised myself because I didn't think I could play 100%."

Bunnabodee traveled to Niagara Falls with Sagoo, her friend and college teammate. The Porter Cup community didn't provide its customary private housing because of COVID-19 concerns, so they stayed at a local Marriott, about 12 minutes from the golf course.

"We couldn't go back home this summer because of COVID," said Sagoo, who got within a shot of the lead at one point on the back nine. "Both of our countries' borders are closed. We're spending the whole summer together, so we're going to be playing a lot of tournaments together.

"She's a really fun-loving person" Sagoo said of her friend. "She's one of the persons who is really chill on the golf course, doesn't really think that much and is always having fun. You always see her smiling."

The closest Bunnabodee came to being unnerved was on the eighth hole, when a dog ran onto the course from a nearby yard and grabbed Nicole Abelar's ball in its mouth. Rules officials had the ball replaced at the approximate spot where the dog fetched it.

"At first, I thought it was my ball," Bunnabodee said. "I was kind of nervous, because I don't know the rules about a dog taking the ball away."

She was unflappable the rest of the way. Canada's Brigitte Thibault, the top-ranked amateur in the field and perhaps the longest hitter, got within a stroke with a birdie on 11, then gave it back with a bogey on 12. Bunnabodee got the key birdie on 13 after stripping her hybrid onto the green from 205 yards.

No one could make a good enough run on a windy, mostly overcast day. Dantonio got off to a slow start, then went 6-under for a 15-hole stretch to get to 2-under before three-putting the 18th for a bogey. She was 5-under for the last 36 holes and wished there could be a fourth round today.

"Yeah, or that I didn't get off to such a slow start on the front nine in the first round," Dantonio said. "But that's golf. The most important thing is that I fought back and I didn't give up."

Dantonio is no stranger to late surges. Two years ago, she shot 65 at Lancaster CC in the final round of the state amateur to make up seven shots and force a playoff before finishing second. She's done with her college career at Winthrop and looking to go to LPGA qualifying school.

"This is one of the tournaments I look forward to most," Dantonio said, "because it's local and it's always got a great field. Showing myself I can compete with the top amateurs gives me a little extra push for when I go to Q school. That is at the end of August out in California. I'm actually really excited for it. By then my game is going to be in even better shape."

Bunnabodee also has visions of playing on the tour. Last year, when she was back in Thailand during the pandemic, she won the Thai LPGA event in her home country — as an amateur.

"That was huge for me," she said.

Women's golf is very big in Thailand. There are six Thai players entered in this week's U.S. Women's Open at the Olympic Club. That includes sisters Ariya and Moriya Jutanugarn. Ariya has been ranked No. 1 in the world and is the only Thai golfer, male or female, to win a major.

"I think the Jutanugarn sisters are a huge motivation for many of the Thai golfers," Bunnabodee said. "We saw them on the tour, saw Ariya winning a major in the LPGA. If she can do it, why not us?"

Why not, indeed? Watching these remarkable women at the Porter Cup, you're reminded how much global talent is out there nowadays. Anything is possible in a golf tournament.

You could even come this close to pulling out and then win the thing.

Jerry Sullivan is a sports columnist with over 30 years experience in Western New York. Follow him on Twitter @ByJerrySullivan or respond via email at scoreboard@gnnewspaper.com.

8TH WOMEN'S PORTER CUP

Final Leaderboard

1 Kan Bunnabodee -	4 70 73 69 212
T2 Chelsea Dantonio -	1 76 70 69 215
T2 Sifat Sagoo -	1 73 71 71 215
T2 Ashley Chow -	1 71 72 72 215
T2 Monet Chun -	1 68 74 73 215
T6 Brigitte Thibault	E 72 72 72 216
T6 Nicole Abelar	E 75 69 72 216
8 Katie Li	+1 72 75 70 217
9 Caroline Smith	+2 73 76 69 218
10 Megan Chou	+4 73 76 71 220