

Aitken, Noble

reach semis

By DAVE COATES

Today is Helen Aitken's birthday, but the 45-year-old golfer says that she doesn't expect to do much celebrating at the Morris County Golf Club in Convent Station this morning when the New Jersey State Women's Golf Committee Amateur Championship enters its semi-final round.

Yesterday, in the quarterfinals, Montclair's Aitken edged Ann Probert of Somerset Hills, 1 up, to gain a semifinal pairing with U.S. Curtis Cup team member Karen Noble of the host club. Noble defeated Carolyn Forcina of Copper Hill, 4 and 2.

In the other quarterfinal matches, Donna Young of Springdale ousted Tracy Brush of Tamarack, 6 and 4, and Maryann Hajduk of Riverton knocked off Susan DeKalb of Bamm Hollow, 1 up.

"It's my birthday and I get some present by having to play Karen," said Aitken. "I just want to go out there and play well and enjoy watching her play. I told her I wanted her to play her best round of golf."

Aitken, winner of the Elizabeth Goss Round-Robin three weeks ago, may not be giving herself much of a chance against the 22-year-old Wake Forest graduate, but if yesterday's play was any indication, Aitken will be a very worthy opponent.

In her match with Probert, a four-time winner of the Women's Met Match-Play and Stroke-Play championships, Aitken, who had to qualify in a playoff for the the state Amateur, played solidly and took a 1-up advantage after parring the 356-yard 16th while Probert made six from a greenside bunker. The two, who are close friends and play together often, halved the final two holes with a bogey and a par.

"I've been hitting the ball so well, but my putting has been horrendous at times," said Aitken, who will join Cathy Reynolds of Glenwood and Noble next week as the only New Jersey players competing in the U.S. Women's Amateur at Canoe Brook's North Course in Summit. "The holes I lost today I lost with bad putting. I'm a little more re-

laxed right now. I'm trying to get ready for next week."

Noble, on the other hand, overcame a break in her concentration to defeat Forcina. Noble jumped to a 4-up lead after seven holes, playing those holes two under par, but Forcina captured the eighth, ninth and 11th holes with pars to cut Noble's lead to 1 up.

"I started to think too many swing thoughts and not about picking out a target and hitting at it," said the 5-5 blond Noble, who was the runner-up in the 1988 U.S. Amateur and won the state Amateur in 1987 and '88.

But Noble, who won both her singles matches last week at Somerset Hills in helping the U.S. to a 14-4 Curtis Cup victory over Great Britain/Ireland, regrouped and chipped in from 45 feet for a birdie at the 13th and won the 14th with a par to increase her lead to 3 up. Both women birdied the 15th from inside five feet, but Noble closed out the match with a par four at the 16th.

“You have to be able to pull out a victory even when you’re not playing well,” said Noble, who, by her own admission, did that in Tuesday’s opening round in defeating Natalie Scarpa of North Jersey, 4 and 3. “This week is good preparation for next week at Canoe Brook. If I can win here, it will give me confidence and momentum to keep playing well.”

Hajduk and DeKalb provided an exciting match. DeKalb won the 10th with a birdie and the 11th with a par to draw even.

The match was all square going into the 164-yard 17th hole, but DeKalb lost a ball when she pulled a five wood left of the green and into the woods and Hajduk safely hit the green to win the hole with a par. The two parred the 18th.

“It was a seesaw match all the way around,” said Hajduk, who lives in South Jersey and says she doesn’t play in the northern part of the state too often. “The 17th hole was the difference.”

Young played “steady golf” and was even par when she won her match with the 18-year-old Brush on the 14th.

“I’m just trying to hit fairways and greens and hope for the best,” said the 30-year-old, who was a semifinalist last year before falling to eventual-champion Laura D’Alessandro. “Steady golf is usually what wins in match play—you just make pars and force the other girls to go out and make birdies to beat you.”