

Aitken defeats Waters in final

By JOHN RUYZAM

Helen Aitken of Montclair said she wasn't looking forward to playing golf this season. In the past week, especially yesterday, her outlook changed dramatically.

Aitken defeated clubmate Maura Waters, the 1992 state amateur winner, 6 and 5, to claim the 91st Women's Metropolitan Golf Association Match-Play Championship yesterday at Knickerbocker in Tenafly. The match was scheduled for 36 holes.

In the Flight A final, Diana D'Alessio of Newton won the Sanford Cup for her 7 and 6 triumph over Helen Bernstein of Alpine.

"I've been working for my father in his food service company and really haven't been playing much," explained Waters, who captured the 1988 GSWGA stroke-play crown. "My game is messed up and I had to scramble to win my other three matches this week. You can't do that for the entire tournament. The other players left the door open for me, but Helen is a great golfer and she didn't. She didn't miss any shots."

Both struggled yesterday through the first nine holes, Aitken with her short game and on the greens and Waters off the tee. They were seven-over-par and even.

Aitken won the match with her play from the 10th through the 18th holes when she played her best golf of the tournament and was two under in that span. She went four up at the lunch break. She won the 11th, 14th and 17th with birdie putts of seven, 10 and three feet and took the 18th with par.

"I hit every green from the 10th through the 18th and played lights out," Aitken explained. "I had some long first putts, but was able to get close to the hole."

Aitken lost the 19th with a bogey but got it back and regained her four-hole advantage with a 25-foot birdie on the 20th. She extended her lead to seven by winning the 22d, 24th and 25th holes with pars. Her big lead was cut to five when she dropped the 26th and 27th with bogeys, but Aitken ended the match on the 31st hole, the par-five 445-yard 13th, with a par.

Waters, several years ago, thought about turning pro but reconsidered after getting a taste of the lifestyle while competing for two winters on the Futures Tour.

"I guess I'm a homebody," said Waters, the coach of the Rutgers men's golf team. "I didn't like living out of suitcases and being in different hotels. But then my priorities were different. I wanted to be a pro and was playing all the time. Now I'm working and trying to put some money in the bank."

Aitken, a winner of the Women's Garden State Golf Association Elizabeth Goss Round Robin three times, had some difficulty with striking the ball and putting in 1993 and even tried a side-saddle approach on the greens. Early this season, she took some lessons at Montclair, went back to putting conventionally and started turning her hands and wrists over more on her swing to get more club head speed. And she's been improving.

"I hit the ball great today," said Aitken. "and struck the ball better the last four days than I have in a long, long time."

While Aitken was hitting well, Waters was having problems off the tee, spraying drives all week. Her frustration continued in the final.