

Waters drives into final

By JOHN RUYZAM

Maura Waters of Montclair still isn't satisfied with the way she's hitting her drives, but she has been improving the last few days.

Yesterday, in the semifinals of the Women's Metropolitan Golf Association 91st Match-Play Championship at Knickerbocker in Tenafly, the 29-year-old resident of Hoboken hit them well enough to beat 1993 champion Lee Ann Vogel of New York's Southward Ho, 2 and 1, and move into today's 36-hole final against clubmate Helen Aitken.

Aitken, three-time winner of the Garden State Women's Golf Association Elizabeth Goss Round Robin, advanced by ousting another Montclair member, Robin Rombough, 2 and 1.

"I'll be going to the range to work on my drives tonight," said Waters, the 1992 state Amateur champion and the '88 GSWGA Stroke-Play winner. "I'm still spraying them at times. This course is very tight, so there's no room to do that.

"So far, I've won my three matches 2-up, 2 and 1, and 2 and 1. I should've won them easier than I did.

Today, I putted well—making them from six feet and under. If I start driving well, watch out. The championship round could be a short one."

Waters, the men's golf coach at Rutgers, played a tough competitor in the semifinals. The 30-year-old Vogel claimed the Long Island stroke-play crown twice, the match-play title once and the mixed Pinehurst two times.

Waters got off to a fast start and led by three after four holes, winning the first with par, the second with bogey and the fourth with par. However, she lost the seventh after spraying her drive.

“I was very upset and lost my cool because I usually hit the ball far and accurately off the tee. That gives me an advantage,” said Waters, who was the runnerup to Karen Noble, now on the LPGA Tour, in the 1988 state Amateur. “I also lost the eighth to Lee Ann and was just one up at the turn. I just have to accept bad shots.”

Waters assumed a two-hole advantage with a par on the 11th, but dropped the 12th when another poor drive resulted in a bogey. She went two up again with par on the 13th, but gave it back with another sprayed tee shot on the 15th for bogey. But the holes ran out for Vogel and Waters wrapped up the match when she claimed the 192-yard, par-four 17th with two putts for a birdie.

Aitken, who recently moved to Hilton Head, S.C., made some major changes in her game and the results have been paying off. Last season, she putted side-saddle, but returned to the conventional approach this spring.

She has worked on her swing and is now turning her hands and wrists over, getting more club-head speed and striking the ball solidly.

"Now, all I have to do is improve on my confidence," Aitken said. "Maura is more confident than me going into the final. This is the first final I've been in. I usually figure out how to lose things.

"But my confidence is growing because I'm playing well and feel good about my game."

After losing the first hole to Rom-bough with a bogey, Aitken won the second with a 15-foot birdie putt, but gave it right back on the ensuing hole when she failed to connect on a two-footer for bogey. She was victorious on the fourth with a 10-foot birdie and moved in front with a par on the fifth, retaining the lead at the turn.

Aitken won the 10th with par and the 12th with a birdie thanks to a wedge that nestled three inches from the cup for a three-hole lead. But that edge dwindled to one when she hit a greenside bunker and bogeyed the 14th and made "five ugly shots after a decent drive" for a double bogey on the 16th.

She recovered and won the 17th with two putts from the fringe for a birdie to close out the match.