

Montclair's Aitken keeps title in sight

By **KEVIN T. CZERWINSKI**

Staff Writer

WHITE PLAINS, N.Y. — Montclair's Helen Aitken, admittedly, didn't play her best golf Tuesday afternoon at Ridgeway.

Just being on the course for the Women's Metropolitan Golf Association Match Play Championship is quite an accomplishment for her, though. Aitken's three weeks removed from a procedure to reattach a detached retina in her left eye and there was some question as to whether she would even keep her sight in the eye.

Needless to say, the procedure was successful and Aitken has set about defending the title she won last year at Knickerbocker. She scored a pair of victories in the first two rounds, topping Metuchen's Carolyn Marchuk, 7 and 6, in the morning before dropping Fenway's Kathy Baker, 5 and 4, in the afternoon.

Aitken will square off against Spring Lake's Mary Eichhorn in today's semifinal beginning at 8:35 a.m. Eichhorn defeated Kile Keever of Woodway, 4 and 3, in the quarterfinals.

Newton's Diana D'Alessio, the qualifying low medalist, also scored a pair of decisive victories and will face Springdale's Donna Young in the other semifinal. Young defeated Alpine's Helen Bernstein in the quarters, 2 and 1.

## GOLF

"Mentally, my mind was wandering in the afternoon," Aitken said. "I hit a couple of poor shots in my practice round. It started traveling to my fairway woods and my irons and my longer shots just started getting ugly in the afternoon.

"The competition is only going to get tougher. I can't expect to hit like this tomorrow and expect to win. I tried to be too careful today and I don't play well when I do that. It's always much uglier than when I just get up there and whale away."

Aitken struggled at times in the afternoon, as did Baker. The pair were even after four holes before Aitken began to pull away. But after hitting her second shot out of bounds left on the ninth hole, Aitken appeared to give Baker an opening.

Though the defending champ ended up losing the ninth hole, she rallied to start the back nine, winning 10, 11, and 12. Baker stopped the bleeding by halving 13, but Aitken parred 14 to win the hole and the match.

Eichhorn, who is close friends with Aitken, is looking forward to another battle with the defending champ.

"She's one of the best ball strikers around and one of my best friends," Eichhorn said. "Our games are really very opposite. She's very steady off the tee and I have a great short game. Her tee problems today weren't the way she normally plays.

"It will be tough playing against one of my best friends, but I've had plenty of practice at it."

D'Alessio, who many considered the favorite to take Aitken's title, tired somewhat as she finished off Evans, but remained confident heading into the semis.

"I was dragging a little and now I'm exhausted, but I played fairly well," D'Alessio said. "I hit the ball well, made my putts in the morning and kept them within gimme range in the afternoon.

"I need to concentrate a little more in the next round, though. I was a little nervous before each match today, and it took me a little while to get my mind into it today."

At Ridgeway CC, White Plains, N.Y.

#### CHAMPIONSHIP FLIGHT

##### Opening round

Helen Aitken, Montclair, def. Carolyn Marchuk, Metuchen, 7 and 6; Kathy Baker, Fenway, def. Sheila Verglith, St. George's, 6 and 5; Mary Eichhorn, Spring Lake, def. Vicki Sala, Montclair, 7 and 6; Diana D'Alessio, Newton, def. Joyce Curran, Ridgewood, 6 and 5; Donna Young, Springdale, def. Lyn Cook, Round Hill, 6 and 5; Kile Keever, Woodway, def. Tina Kaplan, Bonnie Briar, 1-up;

Lisa Evans, Meadow Brook, def. Martine Bioul, Tamarack, 4 and 3; Helen Bernstein, Alpine, def. Wanda Flora, Basking Ridge, 2 and 1.

##### Quarterfinals

Aitken def. Baker, 5 and 4; D'Alessio def. Evans, 6 and 4; Young def. Bernstein, 2 and 1; Eichhorn def. Keever, 4 and 3.

