

Piar Is Individual Champ: Messenger, Kenney Lead Way, Alton Girls Golf Team Finishes Fourth In Metro-East Shootout

by Colin Feeney, Contributing Sports Writer
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CASEYVILLE - Alton senior golfer Natalie Messinger continued her very good play by shooting a six-over-par 78 to tie for fifth place with Edwardsville's Grace Daech, while Riley Kenney shot an 86 to help lead Alton to a fourth-place finish in the Metro-East Shootout on Tuesday afternoon at Fair Oaks Golf Course in Caseyville. Marquette Catholic, who saw junior Gracie Piar win the individual crown with a three-under-par 69, came in third at 332.

Piar's 69 gave her the individual championship, finishing two strokes ahead of the Tigers' Nicole Johnson, who had a 71.

O'Fallon was the team champion, shooting a 307 on the day to finish 10 shots ahead of runner-up Edwardsville, who shot a 317, with the Redbirds claiming fourth place with a 353 score. Collinsville and Belleville East tied for fifth with identical 370s, Triad was seventh with a score of 375, Belleville West was eighth with a score of 384, Mascoutah came in ninth with a 402, Highland was 10th with a 410, Nashville was 11th, shooting a team score of 420, and Belleville Althoff Catholic was 12th with a score of 425.

The Panthers' Dylan Kirchoff was third with a 73, with teammate Chloe Johnson fourth at 77. O'Fallon teammates Reagan Martin and Maddie Vanderheyden tied for seventh with scores of 79, and Triad's Emma Hill tied for ninth with the Explorers' Audrey Cain, who both shot 80.

The Redbirds overcame the withdrawals of Josie Giertz and Lexi Paulin to finish in the fourth spot, and the remaining golfers played very well on the day.

"It went really well," said Alton head coach Carey Cappel. "We had a couple of girls who had to withdraw, so we had to start with four, and it hampered us a bit, when you're allowed to bring six golfers, and end up with only four. It's a bit of a disadvantage, but the girls stepped up when they had to, shot some good scores, and put us in fourth. It was a good team effort today."

Messinger especially had a good day on the course, overcoming a bad start and putting together a good round that allowed her to finish in the fifth-place tie.

"Natalie did have a good day," Cappel said. "She started out with a string of bogeys, but once she settled in on the greens, she had a really good day."

Besides Messinger and Kenney, the Redbirds got an 87 from Na'liah Simmons and a 102 from Olivia Boyd to finish fourth. The Explorers also got good scores from Clancy Maag, who shot a 91, Ava Bartosiak, who carded a 92, and Lilly Montague, who fired a 101. Cat Hollis withdrew from the tournament.

The Kahoks' leading golfer was Maya Clark, who shot an 85, followed by Ricki Merlak's 86, Abby Fister, who shot a 99, Carstyn Jones, who shot an even 100, and Kiley Belobraydic, who had an 115. Sammi Qualls withdrew before play started on the day.

Hill led the way for the Knights, with Anja Mills shooting a 94, Jessica Sager carding a 98, and Makenna Keith, Paige Hawks and Makenna Jensen all shooting identical 103s.

On the previous day, the Illinois High School Association announced that they would not hold a statewide postseason series this year, instead opting for a regional tournament in the local COVID-19 districts that were designed by the organization to limit travel during the pandemic.

"It does have its advantages, but it's disappointing that we're not going to get a chance to play against some of the best teams in the state," Cappel said. "But I can't complain that we're going to have some type of postseason."

The Redbirds next tournament comes up Tuesday, when they play the first round of the Southwestern Conference tournament at Belk Park Golf Course in Wood River. The Redbirds will be working on plenty of things in preparation for the opening round.

"We're going to practice, fine tune some things, and have the start of the conference tournament at Belk Park," Cappel said. "We're playing well, playing together and playing as a team. The girls are working hard. and I can't ask for much more than that."

[Chris Rhodes also contributed to this story.](#)