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Rittberger leads local qualifier for U.S. Open

May 12, 2009 by MARK HERRMANN / mark.herrmann@newsday.com

Bob Rittberger decided to sign up for the U.S. Open local qualifier Tuesday at Laurel Links Country Club, way out on the North Fork, even though there is another one today at [Cherry Valley](#) in [Garden City](#), which is practically a 9-iron from his workplace as head pro at Garden City Golf Club.

"I just really felt that strongly about this golf course," he said. "I felt that it suited my game and that I could play well here."

He was right on target, and now he is that much closer to being in the Open at Bethpage. Rittberger shot 4-under par 67, a competitive course record at Laurel Links and was first among the five qualifiers for sectional qualifying June 8 in Purchase.

"It's hard," he said of the East End club that is known for its stiff breezes, "and I play harder golf courses better. I'm not a 10- or 12-under kind of guy. I'd rather play the harder course. I just felt like it was to my advantage . . . You have to be very patient out here because you hit a lot of good shots and you get a lot of funny results. Again, I felt that was to my advantage."

Patience kept him balanced after he went 2 over through his first three holes. He chipped in on No. 15 (his sixth) and really got going on his second nine, making three consecutive birdies down the stretch. Rittberger was the only one in a field of 78 to break par, despite the fact there was little wind.

Laurel is difficult because of the undulations and fast greens that characterize links golf. Anyone can get those "funny results." Rittberger knows better than most.

It was anything but funny the last time he made it to sectional qualifying at the Century Country Club (where he will return June 8). He hit an apparently perfect shot on the final hole and seemed destined for a birdie or at least a par, and a sure trip to the Open at Oakmont. But his shot was so good, it bounced off the flagstick and tumbled onto a sprinkler head. He didn't notice the metal piece under his ball, wound up making double bogey and missed the Open by a shot.

Montauk Downs assistant pro Paul Dickinson shot 72 yesterday. "I played all winter through all the bad weather . . . so today was like a walk in the park," he said.

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Baiting Hollow Club pro Larry Scortichini, who shot 71, said he will go to the regional qualifier in [Tennessee](#) because many [PGA](#) Tour pros will be playing, so the USGA will probably make more Open slots available there than in Purchase. Other qualifiers were Creek Club pro Sean Farren and 16-year-old [Connecticut](#) amateur Cameron Wilson, who each shot 72.

But the headliner was Rittberger. "Now," he said, "I get another shot at that sprinkler head."

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