

Kim wins SHO in playoff with Taylor

April 4, 2010 – Houston, Texas

BY ED FOWLER
shellhoustonopen.com

Anthony Kim lives in Dallas and wears a Texas-sized belt buckle. For a time on Sunday, it appeared he might have to answer to “The Wanderer” from now on. Instead, he can go by “Deadeye.” Or you could just call him richer.

On his 72nd hole of the 2010 Shell Houston Open, Kim thumped his tee ball into right bunker right of the fairway. From there he located a greenside bunker, blasted out, missed a six-foot putt, took bogey and fell out of sole possession of the lead for the first time all day.

The bogey, his second of the afternoon, could certainly be termed an upset but the missed fairway could not. In 56 opportunities on the week, this miss was his 33rd. A stopped clock is almost as accurate as he was on these four breezy days in April. Kim called the driving stats “a little misleading” but conceded, “It’s usually a trunk-slam if I hit it like I hit it the first couple of days.”

Kim had begun the round tied for the lead with Bryce Molder at 10-under par. He birdied No. 1 and quickly put his playing partner in his rear-view mirror. Several hombres fired and fell back. Vaughn Taylor, who had started the day two off the lead and in the next-to-last pairing, birdied the par-five 13th to duck to 12-under, one off the lead. An indifferent sand shot on No. 17 led to a bogey that appeared to unravel his chances. But Taylor wasn’t done.

He blistered his approach on the last to 12 feet and rolled in the putt to pull within a shot of the lead again. And give Kim something to ponder. Kim had already hit his tee shot when Taylor rolled in the birdie putt. “I heard the roar,” he said. He could make par or work overtime.

Kim had a spot reserved for the coming week at the Masters regardless of his SHO result. He knew, however, that Taylor, an Augusta, Ga., native, needed to win to earn a place. His incentive could hardly have been greater, but then sometimes ambition unleashed can turn and bite a man.

Whether that was the case or not, when they returned to the 18th tee this time it was Taylor who missed right, driving into the bunker. Kim took 3-wood, as he had moments before. He was unruffled. “The tournament wasn’t over,” he said. “I was disappointed; I’d be lying if I said anything else. But I had a chance to win the golf tournament. That’s why I came to Houston.”

This time, he split the fairway, leaving 213 yards to the hole. Taylor, meanwhile, had a “so-so” lie in the bunker and was close enough to the lip for a discouraging word or two to form on his lips. He hit a solid shot that cleared that lip but again missed right, taking the path Kim had followed in regulation to the greenside trap.

Kim saw his duty clearly. He chose 6-iron and gave the Sea of Sorrows on the left a wide berth. His ball settled pin-high, 28 feet right. When Taylor failed to get close from the sand, Kim looked to be two putts from glory. He cozied up to tap-in range and Taylor, perhaps wanting a place in the Masters a little too much, left his par bid short.

He said he became engrossed in reading the line and gave too little thought to distance. Coming up short, he said, was “kind of embarrassing.”

He called the result “a tough pill to swallow.”

For the 24-year-old Kim, the outcome was vindication of a more patient approach and a quiet confidence that has grown through a time of trial. In 2008 he won two tournaments and almost \$4.7 million and rose in the popular imagination to the rank of next great thing on tour. Some troubles last year, including a shoulder injury, knocked him out of orbit. He did not win and his earnings fell by well over half.

It was a more gracious and grateful player who won for the first time in 2010 on Sunday, claiming \$1,044,000. The bogey that landed him in the playoff did not knock him off stride. “Two years ago,” he said with a grin, “that bag might have been in the water. I might not have had clubs to go to the playoff. I feel calm out there now. I feel no sense of urgency. It’s something that has happened naturally and not something that’s been forced. So I’m comfortable with how I’m playing and with who I am out there. I found my identity. I’m an aggressive player. There’s no reason to be somebody else.

“I feel like I’m grown up. I’m trying to enjoy everything. I’m trying to embrace being a professional golfer and being on the PGA Tour and just getting to live my dream out here. There’s no reason to pout about a bad shot or a three-putt, especially the way the economy is right now and lots of people struggling. I don’t want to kick sand in their face by having a bad attitude out here.”

On that mellow note, the 2010 tournament settled into history. For 72 holes, Kim might have found places on the Redstone Golf Club grounds heretofore known only to the \$2 Nassau crowd, but on the 73rd his aim was true as a mother’s love.



2010 Shell Houston Open Champion Anthony Kim with members of the SHO Operating Committee (l to r) Pat Weston, Doug Kurz, Herschel Sikes, Jeff Blume, John Traina, Meg Leachman and Fred Newton.