



Josh Leeson DOWN THE FAIRWAY

Steven steps up for Vic Amateur

STEVEN Slappendel has seven club championships in his trophy cabinet but today finds out if he has the game to compete at a much higher level.

The 20-year-old Newcastle and Shortland Waters champion will tee off in the Victorian Amateur Championships event this morning at the Woodlands Golf Club in Melbourne after successfully qualifying for his first state event on Sunday at the Port Phillip Amateur.

Slappendel finished 21st at the 72-hole strokeplay event, where Toronto's Gellan O'Reilly also made the cut in 25th spot.

The left-handed Slappendel was well off the pace after carding rounds of five-over 77 and 78 at Kingston Heath but improved in the final two rounds at the Commonwealth Golf Club with 76 and 74 to break into the top 32.

O'Reilly also made a slow start with rounds of 84, 75 and 78 but a tournament-high score of 70 on Sunday secured the 19-year-old a spot in today's matchplay event.

"I'm just going to go out and see how far I can go, hopefully I can win a few matches and finish fairly high," Slappendel said.

"It's a much bigger step up in quality - the competition will be far tougher."

Slappendel played on the sandbelt Woodlands course for the first time yesterday for a practice round before his opening matchplay tie with The Lakes' Dani Papadatos, formerly of the Toukley club, this morning.

O'Reilly will face Melbourne's Nathan Holmar.

The second round will be played this afternoon followed by the quarter-finals and semi-finals tomorrow and the final on Thursday.



HIPS DON'T LIE: Aaron Townsend in action during the Australian PGA at Coolangub.

- Picture by Getty Images

Aaron back in swing after hip adjustment

AARON Townsend said the secret to his success at the Australian PGA Championship was realigned hips.

The Charlestown touring professional finished equal sixth yesterday after returning to finish the last eight holes of his fourth round on day five of the event.

Sunday's fourth round was partially washed out after torrential rains drenched the Coolangub course.

Townsend was nine under, three strokes behind leader Peter Senior, when he began

the day from the 11th tee. Senior hung on to beat Geoff Ogilvy in a play-off for the title after both finished at 12 under, two shots ahead of Townsend's 228-681-87, 70, 73.

The \$46,500 pay-day was the biggest on Australian soil for Townsend, the 2008 NSW Open and 2008 NSW PGA Championship winner.

Despite finding the greens with ease Townsend was unable to take advantage with his putter.

He only sank one birdie on the par-three 14th yesterday

in his remaining 10 holes and missed a 15-metre putt on the 18th to make par.

"Now I've had time to think about it, it's funny because I had so many opportunities it really could have been a very different result," Townsend said yesterday.

"Even this morning I had a lot of opportunities to make a bit of impact on it, but the putts kept falling by."

The 29-year-old lost his card for the Japan Golf Tour the week before Coolangub and suffered back stiffness while

playing in the qualifiers at the Central Golf Club in Baragol.

However, a visit to a chiropractor last Wednesday at Coolangub instantly improved his game.

"He basically told me my hips were out of alignment and that was causing my hips and back to do extra work and that was why I had trouble turning," he said.

"I didn't realise because I wasn't in any pain, but I was tight so I didn't take it too seriously and just tried to stretch it out."

"Once I saw him I felt fantastic and it showed with how I played these last couple of days because I felt so freed up."

The sixth place at Coolangub rocketed Townsend from outside the top 100 to 32nd on the OneAsia Tour rankings. The tour will be his focus next year.

Townsend plans to contest all 13 events on the tour, which includes tournaments in Indonesia, Thailand, China, South Korea and Australia.

Shark-designed Vintage swimming with big fish in national ratings

POKOLBIN'S The Vintage has moved up three places to break into the top 20 public access golf courses in Australia.

The Greg Norman-designed course is 20th on Golf Australia's latest rankings, making it the top-rated course in the Hunter and second best in NSW.

Golf Digest ranked The Vintage 44th in Australia and 10th in NSW this year, making it the highest ranked of any of the Hunter's residential golf courses.

The Vintage has been home to the NSW Open for the past four years.



but the event will move to another course next year.

Pacific Dunes at Medlowah was the Hunter's next best course, ranked at 38th, followed by Belmont at 60th and Pokolbin's Cypress Lakes at 72nd.

Belmont has always been one of Newcastle's golf's breeding grounds and the club strengthened that reputation

last week with four of its juniors playing in the Australian PGA Championship.

Nick Flanagan, Corey Hale, Brendan Smith and Rudi Bezuidenhout played at Coolangub on the Sunshine Coast, in the \$1.5 million event.

Hale was the best of the foursome, missing the cut by one stroke after carding rounds of 71 and 74.

Bezuidenhout (71, 73), Flanagan (71, 76) and Smith (73, 74) were never in contention.

"I couldn't imagine there would be too many clubs who could boast previous juniors in the same pro-

fessional tournament," Belmont professional Graeme Stockley said.

New Belmont general manager Greg Pearce, who clocked in for his first day at work yesterday, will have a busy introduction to his role.

The course will host the Lake Macquarie Women's Amateur from January 19-16 followed by the men's amateur four days later.

Pearce joins Belmont from Esperanza Golf Country Club, in Brisbane, in place of Wayne Lambert.

Secretary manager Chris Boyce has been the temporary general

manager for the past four months.

Merewether will face Belmont and Newcastle will challenge Murree in the semi-finals of the Newcastle district B-grade pennants.

Final standings were decided on Sunday.

Merewether defeated Waratah 45-1 at Waratah to cement top spot and Newcastle finished second after a 3-25 win over Shortland Waters.

The semi-finals will be held on January 2 and the final has been set for January 9. Venues for the finals are yet to be decided.