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6-year-old cards 1-under 26 on par-3 course

By Eric Pinkela
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It isn't clear where Ethan Chung picked up his intense competitiveness, his prodigious talent or his fiery temper. What is clear is that Ethan — who is 6 — is one of the most gifted golfers in the Bay Area, if not the country.

"He's quite the young phenom," said Terry Sullivan, the PGA pro at Santa Teresa Golf Course in San Jose. Sullivan helps instruct Ethan and watched in awe as the pint-size golfer shot a 1-under-par 26 at Santa Teresa's short course recently.

Ethan, who lives in Los Altos, also dominated his age group at a U.S. Kids Golf regional event last month, shooting an 8-under 28 on a 1,400-yard layout. He lost the two-day event in a playoff, but it was the lowest under-par round in the history of U.S. Kids Golf.

Ethan's dad, Ming Chung, said Ethan picked up the game after following him out to the golf course about three years ago. The next day, Ming bought Ethan a Nike 3-wood for kids and his son was hooked.

"Now he watches the Golf Channel all the time," said Ming, who emigrated from Taiwan with his wife before Ethan was born.

The source of Ethan's gifts is a mystery even to his father. Ming said that neither he nor his wife, Lee, has any extraordinary athletic talent and he has no explanation for his son's picture-perfect swing or

effortless putting stroke.

As odd as it sounds for a first-grader, it's probably Ethan's work ethic that has guided his success. Ming said his son can practice one shot for hours. For Ethan, all the work on the range and the course helps him with his simple goal.

"I have to practice to get better at golf," Ethan said. "I like to win trophies."

Ethan has his father close at hand in his pursuit for perfection. Ming is now Ethan's full-time caddie at competitive events because Ethan can get so upset over a bad shot, a bad hole or even a simple par that it affects him for several holes.

"He cannot accept par; he wants birdies," Ming said. "We thought about not letting him play golf."

In the end, Ethan's parents talked with golf professionals and other parents and decided it was best to work on the problem rather than eliminate golf. Ming said their decision was based, in part, on the fact that Ethan is so closely connected to the game. He enjoys all its aspects and is especially fond of large galleries when he plays.

Ethan wants to practice or play golf constantly. Fortunately, Ming said, his job allows him time in the afternoons to take his son to the course. But that doesn't mean the Chungs are letting priorities get out of whack.

"We play every day," Ming said. "But he has to finish his homework first."

Carlos Briones of Hayward became the youngest men's winner in the history of the San Francisco City Championship when he defeated Jamie Core of Cal 3 and 2 in the 36-hole final last week at Harding Park. Briones, a freshman at Moreau Catholic High, turned

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15 four days after his victory.

Bonnie Hu of Fremont won the women's division with a 4-and-3 victory over Jordan Ontiveros of Alamo. Hu, 17, is a junior at Mission San Jose High.

Hu followed up that win with a title at the Northern California Golf Association's Junior Tour season opener Sunday in Stockton. Hu shot a 2-over-par 146 at Brookside Country Club to win the girls division by two strokes over Livermore's Casie Cathrea. Bryson Dechambeau of Clovis won the boys division by three strokes after shooting a 4-under 140.

Tap-ins

Shotaro Ban of San Jose shot a 1-under 143 at the California Junior Tour's Del Monte Golf Club event in Monterey recently to win by one stroke over Stephen Jahncke of San Jose. ... Stanford sophomore Steve Ziegler was named the Pacific-10 Conference player of the month for February after recording his first collegiate victory at the USC Collegiate Invitational. . .. Santa Clara sophomore Miki Ueoka was selected as the West Coast Conference women's golfer of the month for February after winning the Fresno State Invitational.

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