

Brooky's prayers answered

By RUSSELL GRAY

WELLINGTON golfer Lynnette Brooky asked for help from above to help her win the Goteborg Open in Sweden yesterday in a playoff.

Brooky, who went into the final round with a three-shot lead, had to sink a 12-foot par putt on the final hole to force a playoff after Sweden's Malin Burstrom came out of the chasing pack with a last round five-under-par 66.

"I said 'God, I swear this is the only time you are going to have to help me, but I need this'," Brooky said from London hours after her win.

"I can't explain the relief when it went in."

The first playoff hole was halved in pars and Brooky won the second with a birdie to take the trophy.

"I couldn't believe it when I got to the 18th tee and saw that Malin had shot 66. You aren't supposed to do that in the last round," Brooky said.

"I tried to birdie the last to save having a playoff but put my three-wood second into a bunker and finished up having to make the 12-footer.

"Having lost the German Open in a playoff last year I wasn't looking forward to it but I was proud of the way I got through."

It was Brooky's first win in Europe, and while the tournament was on the second-tier tour there were several European Tour players in the field using it as preparation for the rich Evian Masters in France later this week.

Brooky said the key to winning was being relaxed and the way she putted. Over the 54 holes she had only 83 putts.

Brooky and Burstrom finished on 207, six-under-par, five shots ahead of another Swede, Mette Hageman.

Legend Lopez fails to qualify for US Open

NANCY LOPEZ is a Hall of Famer, the winner of 48 tournaments and the player who probably did more to popularise women's golf than any other.

It was not enough to land her a spot in the United States Women's Open.

Trying to play her way in, Lopez shot a dismal six-over-par 78 yesterday at a sectional qualifying tournament north of Atlanta.

Then she wept.

"I would like to be there," said Lopez, who broke down in tears while talking to reporters. "I'll just have to find something else to do."

Lopez, 44, decided to take part in sectional qualifying - comprised mostly of little-known players, with a sprinkling of LPGA regulars - when the US Golf Association declined to give her an exemption for the third year in succession.

Lopez has not won a tournament since 1997 and the USGA decided this year to grant only one exemption: Liselotte Neumann, a former open champion.

The top 14 in the 111-player field earned spots in the open, which begins on May 31 in Southern Pines, North Carolina. Lopez did not come close, missing the cut-off by four strokes.

"It does hurt," she said. "I really wanted to play well today. I'm disappointed about not playing well as much as anything."

Lopez played in her first open as a 17-year-old amateur in 1974. After turning professional in 1978, she was in the field every year but four, all related to the birth of her three children. Lopez has never won the open, but has been runner-up three times, most recently in 1997. — AP



REUTERS

Nancy Lopez during the 1997 US Open

Excellent effort by Brooky earns place

RUSSELL GRAY

WHILE women's golfing legend Nancy Lopez was shedding tears after failing to qualify for the United States Open yesterday, Wellington professional Lynnette Brooky had a big smile on her face.

Brooky earned one of 14 spots available in the prestigious tournament that starts on May 31 at Southern Pines, North Carolina, by shooting a one-over-par 73 at a qualifying event in Atlanta.

It was a fine effort by Brooky, who had arrived in Atlanta from London only two days before the qualifier and had not been able to play the course the next

day because it was fully booked.

Gail Allport, who will caddy for Brooky at the US Open, said Brooky told her in a telephone call yesterday that she had hit the ball pretty well on a course she described as tricky, with rock hard greens and "really mean pin placements".

It will be Brooky's second appearance in a US Open, compared to Lopez's record of having missed only four, through the birth of her children, since turning professional in 1978.

Brooky returns to Europe this week and will play in the Italian Open at Tuscan from May 17-20.