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First pro victory a timely one for Baker

By The Associated Press

SPRINGFIELD, N.J. — Kathy Baker arrived at the practice range just 20 minutes before her tee-off time for the final round of the U.S. Women's Open, soft drink in one hand, sandwich in the other and obviously late.

It was the only thing that went wrong all day as Baker mastered the tough Baltusrol Golf Club on Sunday, firing a 2-under-par 70 for a three-stroke victory over Judy Clark in the 40th U.S. Women's Open.

Nancy Lopez, who led the tournament the opening two rounds and was one shot back heading into the final round, bogeyed three of the first four holes and never was in the hunt in the final round as she again failed to add the Open to her long list of triumphs.

Janet Coles of Carmel, who at one point during Friday's second round

was the sole leader, slipped off the pace early Sunday and after nine holes found herself even par, five strokes behind Baker. Coles, the 1972 Watsonville High grad who grew up in Aptos, finished with a 76 to tie with Lopez for fourth place. It was still a good showing for Coles, a two-time pro tour winner who missed most of last season after suffering bronchial pneumonia.

Baker, meanwhile, made the Open her first triumph as a professional. And it came in impressive fashion. Her 72-hole total of 8-under-par 280 was just one shot off the Open record of 9-under set by Pat Bradley in 1981.

"I don't think it's quite hit yet," Baker said. "It was really something coming up 18 with the people applauding. I just can't describe it."

Baker entered the final round at six under par with a one-stroke lead over Clark and Lopez and a two-shot edge over Janet Coles and Vicki

Alvarez. She never lost the edge and after seven holes it came down to a battle between Baker and Clark.

Baker took the lead for good with consecutive birdies on the seventh and eighth holes and made the biggest shot of the tournament on No. 16, hitting a seven iron to within three feet of the cup for a birdie. Clark bogeyed the same hole to fall four shots off the pace with but two to play.

"I just kept trying to concentrate on each shot, even when I was on the green on 18," Baker said. "I knew we still had some work to do and I didn't want to relax."

Baker said she was detained getting to the course Sunday and had to park in a lot on a hillside away from the clubhouse. Then she had to run back to her car because she forgot something.

"Then people stopped me for my autograph and finally I had to take a

back route to get into the clubhouse," she said. "People still wanted my autograph and I felt bad saying no, but I had only 20 minutes to get ready."

Baker bogeyed the second hole to fall into a tie for the lead with Clark, while Lopez was taking herself out of contention with bogeys on the first, second and fourth holes.

A 32-time winner on the Ladies Professional Golf Association tour, Lopez was looking to guarantee herself a spot in the LPGA Hall of Fame by winning her second different major.

But it wasn't to be. The 28-year-old wife of New York Mets third baseman Ray Knight finished her round at 5-over-par 77, her first over-par round of the tournament. She did not have a birdie all day.

"I should have never bogeyed the first hole," Lopez said. "I struggled the rest of the day because my putts

just would not drop. I was disgusted, humiliated and embarrassed starting with two bogeys in a row. It made me sick."

Clark, who played with Baker in the final twosome and was also seeking her first pro victory, twice drew within one stroke. The first time was after Baker bogeyed the 10th hole, but the lead was at two again when Baker birdied No. 11. It was down to one after a Baker bogie at 14, but the birdies at 15 and 16 settled it.

"I feel really good about how I played, but Kathy played great when she had to," said Clark. "Her birdies on 15 and 16 were really big."

Alvarez claimed third at 1-under-par 287, one shot ahead of Lopez and Coles. Alvarez, seeking her first professional victory, had a 75.

Baker was the 1982 NCAA champion and was the low amateur in the Open in both 1981 and 1982. She earned \$41,975 with the victory.



Kathy Baker