

# STATE CHAMP!

## RBC's Totland wins TOC title with birdie on 18th hole

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Red Bank Catholic's Taylor Totland won the NJSIAA Tournament of Champions at Trump National Golf Club in Colts Neck. / KATHY JOHNSON/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

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**COLTS NECK** — In the pressurized environment of a championship tournament, contested on a difficult golf course, par is your best friend.

As the field at the NJSIAA Tournament of Champions made their way around Trump National Golf Club, Red Bank Catholic junior Taylor Totland clung tightly to that philosophy, grinding her way to 11 consecutive pars at one point.

Finally, her streak ended on the 18th hole, when her third shot on the par-5 came to rest five feet from the cup, setting her first birdie of the day.

“I didn’t really know where I stood,” admitted Totland, “but there were a lot of people standing around the 18th green so I figured it was close, and that was a big putt.”

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It turned out to be the finishing touch on a state championship.

Totland’s 1-over-par 73 put her one shot clear of defending champion Scotland Preston of Governor Livingston, who beat Totland by a shot in this event a year ago, and Ridge’s Hana Ku.

Kelsey Solan of Rancocas Valley actually led late in the round, but bogeyed the 15th and 16th holes, her final two of the day, to finish at 75, tied with Montgomery's Alice Chen.

In the team race, it was Red Bank Catholic finishing second overall with a team total of 376, as Ridge rolled to the team title for the second straight year with a total of 344. It is believed to be the highest finish by a Shore Conference team in the event.

In addition to Totland, the Caseys received strong performances by Molly McHugh (96), Claire Rochford (99) and Taylor Clark (108).

"I'm kind of speechless," said RBC coach Bill Kusch. "Taylor is our anchor, but we stressed to everyone that it's not all about her, and we got some great performances by our other players. A few weeks ago we lost to Montgomery in the sectionals by 34 shots. (Wednesday) we beat them by four shots."

Totland, a two-time Shore Conference champion, got off to a slow start. She three-putted the fifth green, and then missed the sixth green and was unable to save par, falling back to 2-over-par.

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But Totland, who has committed to play at Furman, began to play steadier, making the turn at 2-over-par, two shots behind Ha.

On the back nine, she hit only four greens but still managed to go 1-under-par. The most critical par save came on the difficult par-3, 11th hole, when her tee shot came up short and rolled to the bottom of the steep hill that guards the front of the putting surface.

She chipped to within five-feet and sank the putt, with both Ha and Ku, playing in the group behind her, failing to save par from a similar position.

Playing on her home course, Totland continued to grind her way through the back nine, as the rest of the leaders faltered.

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Like Solan, Ha bogeyed her final two holes. Preston and Ku each had birdie opportunities down the stretch but were unable to sink the putts.

“I’m just really happy right now,” said Totland. “And to do it on my home course makes it even better. Everyone has been so supportive here. And as a team, everyone played really well. We had a great season.”