

FJT TEAM Championships

The Florida State Golf Association

August 3 & 4, 2019

This past weekend 12 top juniors from the NFJG TOUR representing four teams headed south to Palm Beach Gardens, Florida to compete in the Florida Junior Tour's "**FJT Team Championships**". The "Home of the Honda Classic" **The PGA National Resort and Spa** was the venue for this year's competition and what a great place it is. Worthy of a trip south.

In the field were 42 teams, 168 players from South Florida, North Florida and as far west as Panama City. Friendships were made here and bonds were strengthened. A truly special trip to witness first hand.

The players would depend on each other all weekend and give it their all. Representing the NFJG TOUR were for the Boys 16-18 Moses Compaan, Connor Holcroft, and Adam Vermut. For the Girls 16-18 were Thanya Arasu, Elizabeth Kondal and Kaitlyn Richards. The Boys 13-15 was led by Chase Carroll, Jackson Klauk and Brody Stevenson and our Girls 13-15 sported Alexandra Gazzoli, Anaika Richards and Tyler Ann Whiting.

Players earned their way onto the teams via the **NFJG TOUR Web.com Junior Players Tour** points list, **Player of the Year** Points List or were selected by NFJG TOUR Staff. Each player representing the NFJG Foundation and TOUR received a fully paid entry, provided lodging expenses and coordinated with team uniforms.

A special reflection back in time.

Prior to the start of the first tee time, while standing on the hill overlooking the 18th green PGA TOUR Player Jeff Klauk (father to Jackson) recalled a moment at PGA National while playing in the 2009 Honda Classic. Klauk said he played well that tournament and was in the final group on Sunday in contention for the lead after making consecutive birdies in round three on every hole at the "BEAR TRAP" Holes 15-16 and 17. Not accomplished by many. He finished in solo fourth place, but said it was a wild and emotional tournament with a personal congratulations by Jack Nicklaus.

At the start the **Boys 16-18** would be the first on the tee with the steady (Mr. Par) Moses Compaan leading the way, Connor Holcroft would follow and Adam Vermut would bring up the rear. All would start out steady on the **Champion's Course** and like Jeff Klauk each would have a memory of PGA National. Vermut would have a story to recall as he would start his day with a birdie-birdie start and three birdies in his first six holes. Holcroft would add to the team score by making four birdie on a 5-hole stretch and Compaan would steadily tap in for par. In round one the boys would finish 71, 74, 76 for a team score of 145 one stroke behind **Eagle Junior Golfers Club** out of Orlando led by Logan Jerrell's who use to play on the NFJG TOUR, but moved to Orlando. Jerrells shot a 6-under par 66 to lead in the individual and catapulted his team in taking a one stroke lead in the team results with 144.

In round two with the course extremely wet from all the rain and with the threat of a shortened event the boys playing with the leaders attacked early. Combined they posted six birdies in their opening nine holes to turn with a team score of 4-under par 68. With the wind blowing and adding difficulty coming in the scores would climb and the end result would be a solid team score of 146. Vermut would post 72 to go with his opening round 71 and Holcroft would match his opening round of 74 for a team winning score of 146.

Vermut with his scores of 71-72 would claim rights and be named the individual medalist. Jerrells could not compliment is fine first round score of 66.

In round one of the **Boys 13-15** I think all of the boys would admit they just didn't have their "A" Game as they had hoped, but what they did have was TRUE GRIT, skill and the will to never give up. Chase Carroll would have three birdies on the day to lead the team with a not-so-bad 76. Brody Stevenson would follow close behind with a respectable 78 to give the team a total score of 144 to find themselves tied for second place with two teams tied in first at 143. Thinking they were out of it and after finding out they were still in it after a mediocre round on the course the boys found life which created a spark.

That spark, led to four birdies by Stevenson and an eagle by Klauk in round two to best their round one team score by three strokes at 151. The team effort by all three players would lead to victory by one stroke over the team from **Gold Coast Junior Golf Foundation**.

The Girls with their sparkling attitudes, hot pink garb and bright smiles made the coaches tense day a little less tense, but what really relieved the tension was the fine play by the **13-15 girls**.

At the end of the day all three girls would have two birdies to their credit and after so-so starts would end their round in birdie fashion. All three players would birdie the par-5 18th. Those birdies would vault the team into a four stroke lead after round one with a 150 total. Both Alexandra Gazzoli and Anika Richards shot 75 while Tyler Ann Whiting who was a little under the weather posted 85.

As was told to the girls at the team dinner, four shots is a lead, but it's really not a comfortable lead, so play hard, stay away from BIG numbers and hit to your "Money Shot" especially when in trouble.

Round two would find the girls, on both sides fighting for every stroke and it only took 9-holes for the match to be even as the team from Broward County evened things up with fine play by the turn. At the end that four shot lead would result in a tie forcing a sudden death playoff.

Playing the **Squire Course** for the playoff, the opening hole, a straight away par-5 would be inviting. The six players would be divided into a twosome and foursome to determine the championship. Tyler Ann Whiting would be the first called to the tee and with fire she would pop out of the crowd, tee it up and pound it right down the middle to give the following girls relief and encouragement. Whiting had bogeyed the hole both rounds prior. She was out for revenge. Her opponent would drive it some 50 yards farther, but nonetheless Whiting would hit her approach shot to the "Money Spot" and flip a wedge to 15 feet for a potential birdie. Her opposition would hit her approach to the back of the green leaving a delicate chip. She would bogey the hole. Whiting would aggressively putt for birdie, burning the hole running five feet past. She would forcefully stroke the par putt to the bottom of the hole for par. To give the team the advantage.

Anika Richards and Alexandra Gazzoli placed their layup shots to a “Money Spot” as well. With the pressure on, Richards after watching their opponents stick their approach shots to 30 and 15 feet respectively would also stick it close to 15 feet. Gazzoli hitting the approach last would tighten the loose with a pitching wedge approach to eight foot. Both Broward Country Girls would make magnificent putts, but they just did not go in. Richards stroked an aggressive birdie attempt with speed missing the hole. Gazzoli stepped up to the ball and as she did, I leaned over to the parents watching on the bank and said, this is why we practice so hard, this is what it is all about. We all looked over and then Gazzoli stroked a pure putt that went into the center of the hole to claim victory. The cheers loud and plentiful were the highlight of the weekend!

Last, but not least our 16-18 Girls fought hard and although they finished in a disappointing (to them) fourth, I and coach Lynne Kirkpatrick were very proud of their play, the positive and spirited attitudes, sportsmanship and the way they represented the North Florida Junior Golf Foundation and Tour. True Champions indeed! Elizabeth Kondal led the team with scores of 77-79.

The Team Dinner sponsored by the Foundation with a group of 30 was held at ***Grimaldi's Pizzeria*** and I highly recommend this place if you are in the area. The food was delish! And the company even better!

Congratulations to all our players and special thank you to Coach Lynne Kirkpatrick and all the parents who witness this event.

See you on the links!

Jack Aschenbach, PGA