

# The Titleist Invitational

St. Johns County Golf Club

Elkton, Florida

April 21 & 22, 2018



Tom Stecker (center) and fellow PGA Professionals

What another great event on the NFJG TOUR!

This past weekend 83 players from the NFJG TOUR and guests from around Florida and Georgia area gathered for the annual Web.com Junior Players Tour "**Titleist Invitational**" at St. Johns County Golf Club in Elkton, Florida. This event sponsored by Titleist and dedicated to the late PGA Professional Tom Stecker was once again the end of the NFJG TOUR's "*Spring Tournament Series*" and the highlight of the Spring Tournament Series among many outstanding junior tour events.

As many are aware Tom Stecker died after his long fight against ALS. Tom was a friend to many and a junior advocate and one who could always be found motivating junior players and growing the game for our younger generation. As a friend of Tom's I know he would have been very proud of all of the junior players who participated in this event.

The call for action prior to the event was to "WEAR RED" for Tom and to support the fight against ALS. Many players and parents/family members could be seen wearing the colors in support. Simply an Awesome sight!

Many thanks to the Wes Tucker, Director of Golf and PGA Professional Tommy Acock for their outstanding support of this prestigious event.

The weather, hampering many of this season's events was once again a threat and knocking on our back door. In the early morning as the staff drove into neighborhood, it was evident the forecasted rains had pounded the Elkton area overnight saturating the community and golf course. With a stroke of good luck the threatening rain pushed north allowing the tournament to kick off as scheduled. Many players were concerned, calling in for confirmation of play. One player in particular, Logan Underwood had called in to withdraw, but was persuaded to play. A comforting text message went out to all the registered players that the sun was shining and the threat of rain had moved on. I'm happy to report no one withdrew prior to round one and the field was set.

At 9:08 AM with the winds beginning to whip to 20 mph we kicked off the 2018 Titleist Invitational. Leading the field of 83 in the opening round would be Timuquana'a Colin Sirbaugh and Bent Creek's Ryan Poblacion. The final grouping was announced off the tee a 1:24 PM.

Playing in the **Boys 13-18 Division** and the **Boys 16-18 flight** Logan Underwood playing with Sam Harrell and Ryan Philip would tee it up at 9:48 and would be the sixth group out. No doubt still questioning his call to play after the drenching rains Underwood would soon be pleased with his outstanding decision to play. A birdie at the first hole of play would set the stage for another birdie at the second hole and then another at the third hole for a score of three under after three holes played. He would add another at the sixth hole and cap off the front nine with an eagle at the par-5 ninth hole for an opening nine of four under par 32. Underwood would add one more birdie at the sixth hole to shoot a two under par 69 on the day. Hmmmm, thinking of withdrawing, don't! This is why.

St. Johns member Jason Duff would be another story in the Boys 13-18 division his perfect opening nine holes of play would lead to three birdies on the front nine and just one stroke back of Underwood. Duff would continue his perfect play and added another birdie at the par-5 16<sup>th</sup> hole, but would post his first bogey at the finishing hole to card a three under par 68 to take the overnight lead.

Next in line for the low scores of the day would come from the **Boys 10-12 division**. Nolan Harper would be the man with four birdies during his round to record an even par round of 71. He would birdie at the seventh, 10<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> holes to take a three stroke lead over Colton Swartz who had five birdies on the day. Two back of that would Jackson Klauk.

In the **Girls 13-18 Divisions** Marissa Cardenas would shoot a fine round of 76 to take a two shot advantage over Kylie Turner in the **Girls Elite Flight**. In the **Girls Rising Flight** Thanya Arusa would fire a score of 84 to take home a one stroke lead over Mackenzie McCormick.

Round two in the Rising Girls would start out with a BANG! Vanessa Hatch was the one knocking at the door on the first hole as she slammed home an EAGLE two from 140 yards on the very first hole. Only two back at the start she was now tied for the lead. In her own words after congratulating her on her eagle she said, "Thanks, but it went downhill from there. I mean downhill." Looking at the round two open 9-hole scores it was easy to see everyone was having troubles, but it was Saint Johns Mackenzie McCormick who would right the ship with five pars on her inward nine to make her mark and claim the 2018 championship. McCormick's low round of 82 for round two would outshine the round one leader

by four strokes. Thanya Arasu would hang in there to secure the runner-up award. Hatch would finish third.

In the **Boys 13-15 Flights** James Clay Tucker would lead the **Elite** field of 19 with a three over par 74. One back would be Carson Brewer at 75. In the **Rising Boys 13-15** Zachary Philip would sneak up on the field and shoot a nice five over par 76 to take a three shot lead over Fleming Islands Jameson Adams.

Round two of the Elite Boys 13-15 would find Ponte Vedra's Carter Lewis making a charge for the championship. Lewis would birdie three holes on the day to shoot an even par round of 71 to force the leaders to avoid major mistakes during their rounds.

Three bogeys in a row at the 10<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> holes by Tucker would narrow the gap and create some hope for Lewis, but James Clay Tucker would post up two birdies on his final nine to claim victory by three strokes over Runner-up Carter Lewis.

On the Rising side of the Boys 13-15 Flight Zachary Philip would have a rough go of it with four double bogeys on the day fading from the lead. Cody Tucker, four back after round one would surge towards the top of the leader board with his mastery of the short game, getting up-and-down for par on his last five finishing holes to shoot the low round of the day for the group at 79. Tuckers short game would be the difference as he edged out Jameson Adams by two strokes to take the championship.

Finishing up the **Elite Girls 13-18** contest it was clearly anyone's championship to be had as only a few strokes separating first place from last. The same was true for round two, but Kylie Turner would play the steadiest in relation to round one scores. Marissa Cardenas the round one leader would have a few too many bogeys on the scorecard and no birdies to offset the score. Turner making her move by birding the first two holes of play would set the stage and take the lead, but a nine at the par-5 12<sup>th</sup> could have been more than disastrous had she not kept her composure to follow up with three pars and birdie to close out her round. Turner would be all smiles and deservedly so, as she claimed the title as the "Titleist Invitational" Champion. Cardenas would hang on to the Runner-up spot edging out Lacey Tucker by one stroke.

#### **Now back to the story of the tournament.**

After round one with 19 talented players in the Boys 16-18 flight half the field was still in the battle. Anyone could go low to claim victory and all the pressure was on the two leaders to keep their lead freeing up those making a charge. To lead the charge John David Cobb from Milton, Florida and Jacksonville's Colin Sirbaugh would birdie two holes on their open nine to card a one under par score of 35, but the leaders Duff and Underwood would do the same. By the 14<sup>th</sup> hole things were tightening up a little more as Underwood bogey'd two holes and Duff doubled and bogey'd a hole, but they would both settle down to regain control. Sirbaugh and Cobb, both needing a couple final birdies to put some pressure on the leaders could not create the magic, this time.

Now, the battle was down to two players and with a two stoke lead going into the final hole Duff needed just par to capture the Boys 16-18 Trophy and the etch his name on the Tom Stecker Award and Underwood needing some Duff misfortune. A great drive to the center of the fairway by both players would leave just one opportunity for a great shot. Duff with honors would hit his shot first and a well struck approach shot not helped by the wind from 170 out would unfortunately end up in the left bunker. Duff a great bunker player had no worries until he walked up to the green to find his ball

completely buried in the sand. Underwood would hit his approach, a champions shot to just five feet of the pin. After the shot Duff, showing his sportsmanship would walk over to Underwood (more than 50 yards) and gave him a high five for his outstanding shot. A move of a true champion.

Duff surveying his buried ball, just needed to somehow just get it up and down, but the blast out would blow the ball over the green into the right greenside bunker. He would then slap the ball out to six feet while Underwood waited his turn. Still away Duff would need to make the putt to have hope of a win or tie. Dead center and a fist pump for a proud recovery. A bogey, but still in it.

Underwood would read his putt of five feet from all angles and knew he needed to make the putt to tie and force a play-off. He too would drain the putt and the end result was a tie for both the Overall and the Boys 16-18 Flight title. After the official scores were in, to #1 we went.

A tie at the first and they would go to the 18<sup>th</sup> hole. A tie at the 18<sup>th</sup> and they were back to the 1<sup>st</sup>. Yep, tie, back to the 18<sup>th</sup>. Again they would approach the green. Nearing dark, Duff would hit it first from the fairway and this time would steer right of the bunker leaving a 25 footer for birdie. Underwood would once again hit it to five feet.

Duff first up would go for broke pounding the ball over the right lip to six feet past the hole. He would still be away and miss the comeback. Underwood would make the putt for the win and claim the Boys 16-18 title and the Tom Stecker Award. I'm guessing Logan thinks twice about withdrawing from an event due to rain or wet conditions.

Outstanding job fella's we are all proud of your efforts! To all who participated, great job on a great weekend!

It just doesn't get better than this!

See you on the links!

Jack Aschenbach, PGA