

Titleist Invitational

Tournament Story

St. Johns Golf Club

April 22 & 23, 2017

Ninety-eight NFJG TOUR Players competed in this years "**Titleist Invitational**" at the **St. Johns Golf Club** in Elkton, Florida. The course was in fine form and in splendid condition which invited players to take the challenge for the last time on this outstanding golf course, as the next time we play the St. Johns Golf Club it will have a new look. A serious makeover and some serious renovations are being planned for the near future.



Remembering our late Northern Chapter PGA Professional Tom Stecker was the theme of the weekend. Many of our TOUR players, family members and staff wore RED to celebrate his life and honor his dedication to the game for our juniors in golf. Lynn Stecker, wife of Tom was on hand to review the TOM STECKERT trophy and to present it to this year's champion. The three and half foot trophy sits proudly displayed in the main hallway of the clubhouse along with the Tom Stecker Story Book to let folks know who Tom was and about his fight against ALS.

This year our overall winner and the first Champion of the Tom Stecker Award would come from the Boys 10-12 Division. **Reed Lotter** from Savannah, Georgia would post rounds of 75-70 for a 145 total to earn the right to have his name engraved on this prestigious award for a life time.

Andrew Davis, in the **Boys 10-12 Division** would also fire a 145 total to force a sudden death play-off for the division championship. Lotter would be the victor and would be in the running for the Stecker Award, but only time would tell. Lotter having to head back to Savannah would take a chance leaving early, but being the first division in he could not wait for the final results. Luckily for him it all worked out.

During the opening round there was tension in the air as all the boys started their walks to the first tee and down the first fairway and it reflected in some of the scores. Andrew Davis would be the exception on this day as he nearly posted a perfect scorecard. Davis could have taken a serious lead into the final round. Playing with great concentration and outstanding command of his game Davis posted three

birdies and 14 pars on the day to shoot an even par round of 71. Only one hole (the par-5 16th) would cost him a commanding lead. A triple bogey at the risk reward par-5 16th hole would sting a little, but a par-par finish would be the signs of a true fighter and champion player. Lotter would be next in line four strokes back with a four over par 75, followed by Brody Stevenson with a 76.

Round two would pair the leaders and Lotter would come out slugging away. Two under par after three holes of play would put Lotter just one back of the leader Davis and the game was on! Davis would strike back with birdies on the 4th and 6th holes to once again take a comfortable lead, but Lotter was now working on the perfect scorecard, not giving an inch or giving into any pressure. A bogey at the 8th and a double bogey at the 13th hole by Davis would now put the lead tie with Lotter. Lotter would make one bogey all day at the 17th hole to shoot one under par 70 to force Davis into a sudden death play-off.

Nolan Harper would finish four back of the leaders, but he poked in five birdies on his way to an even par round of 71, joining Chase Carroll and Brody Stevenson. Stevenson applied some pressure on the leaders with his four birdies, but a quad of bogeys would keep him out of the race for the championship. Although his one under par on the back nine would keep him in the hunt for the third spot. Stevenson would eventually win the scorecard play-off with Carroll and Harper. What a STRONG DIVISION of players!

Round one of the **Boys 16-18 Division** put three players tied at the top of the leaderboard. Drew Neilen, Jay Adams and Parker Miller all fired some impressive three over par 74's from the tips. Colin Sirbaugh would be one back at 75, followed by (welcome back) Nicholas Sanson with 76.

During the opening round the front nine would appear to be full of nerves as only three birdies would be had by the top five players, but my god on the back nine the boys threw birdies in from everywhere. Neilen would have four birdies in his last six holes, Adams would have three and Sirbaugh would birdie two of his last three. Now that's making a statement and a move towards the top of the leaderboard.

Round two, with the three 74's paired together would start out with a BANG! As Neilen would throw in a deuce at the very first hole. Two under par after one, SWEET! Sirbaugh, a group ahead birdied the first. Jay Adams would birdie the second hole. Neilen would bogey the second hole and then doubled the fourth hole, but his demise came at the par-5 12th hole as he posted a 12. Not to give up Neilen jarred another deuce at the par-4 15th hole. He's now known as Drew "**The Deuce**" Neilen.

Here's another story of almost. Colin Sirbaugh two under par after 17 holes of play would be sporting a perfect scorecard, but a duck got in his way on the drive off the tee. No, not a Mallard, a duck-hook that went directly into the left hazard. An unfortunate end to a great round, a triple bogey seven. Still Sirbaugh's outstanding play earned him the championship, as the other two leaders faded.

Drew Neilen, disappointed because of one bad hole also had two good holes amongst many to be excited for. Two EAGLES in one round is pretty special! Neilen would be seven shots back to take the Runner-up Cameo Trophy while Jay Adams would beat out Parker Miller in a scorecard playoff for the third spot.

Timuquana's Chloe Schiavone (73) returned to the NFJG TOUR this week dominating the **Girls 13-18** field in round one by 7 strokes over Marissa Cardenas (80). During round one Schiavone had two birdies and an EAGLE at the drivable par-4 15th to vault her into the lead at 73.

Five time champion Lisa Colee would have a very unusual and bad opening round, but she would prove to be a force to be reckoned with during round two. Monon Donche Gay from Reunion, Florida had much of the same, a tough opening round, but also found her game for round two. Both Gay and Colee would tie for the low score during the 2nd round firing 73 apiece. Schiavone would struggle a little with a final round 76 to capture the Girls 13-18 Division title and two AJGA PBE Stars and one FJT exemption to her credit. Gay would finish in the runner up position with a total 157 score while Marissa Cardenas would hang in there to secure the Third Place Spot at 158.

Carter Lewis, Lucas Slayden and Todd Roy would lead the field of 20 players in the **Elite Tour 13-15 Division** with 71, 72 and 73 respectively. Carter would bag two birdies early and another at the par-5 15th hole to take the one stroke lead over Slayden who birdied 13, 14 and 16 to shoot a nice two under par 33 on his back nine to catch the leader Lewis.

Jason Duff would stay in the mix with a nice EAGLE three on the par-5 12th hole at 75. Roy would double bogey his first hole, birdie the third and the 13th to stay just two back.

In round two, Will McGriff would have the low round of the day with 72 making a strong push to the top of the leaderboard, but the round one nine over par 80 would leave him on the outside looking in one stroke back from reaching the awards podium.

James Ballato and Sam Nicholson would both shoot 73. Nicholson would birdie three and EAGLE the Par-5 16th hole to climb into the picture, but would come up one stroke short. With Lewis and Slayden leaking oil, Ballato and Jason Duff would sneak right in there. Ballato's two over par 73 with 16 pars was enough to take home the championship trophy, but not before going into a sudden death playoff with Jason Duff. Both players tied at 145. In the playoff Ballato would prevail. Duff would settle for the Runner-up Award and Lucas Slayden would hang on to capture the third spot.

The **Rising Tour Boys 13-15 Division** had 19 players in the field this week. Much was at stake for a couple of the players as Andrew Riley and Alexander Whitmore were in a race for the **Player of the Spring Tournament Series Award**, separated by just 700 points.

During round one Riley would step right out there shooting a five over par 76 to take a two stroke lead over the **University of Florida Invitational Champion** Jack Barned. Barned playing well these days would open his front nine with a 38 to post a total round of 78 to keep pace with Riley. Connor Holcroft would be just three back.

During the second round Holcroft would birdie three holes on the front side, but three triple bogeys would keep him from threatening the leaders, but in the end those three birdies and a never give up attitude would be enough to take home the third place trophy.

Riley would open his second round confident and striking the ball well. He would par seven of his first eight holes and then a double bogey at the ninth hole which created a landslide of bogeys and opened the door for one Jack Barned who would shoot both barrels of 38's to take his second win in the last two events. Riley would receive the Runner-up Award.

In our **Foundation Boys Division** Matthew French was back in rare form. The young player posted a nice 37 on his opening round to take home a four stroke lead over Richard Hayden Ruth. French would have two birdies on the day.

When you take a look at this leaderboard (regardless of score) these names resemble and sound like some great golf names, but only the future will tell. All unique in their own way. French would add to his four stroke lead during round two, finishing with a 41, two better than Ruth on the nine and six strokes better overall. Ruth would be presented the Runner-up Award while Emmet Kuhlenkamp would take home the Third Place Trophy.

Our **Girls Foundation Division** found no stranger to the winners circle. Alyzabeth Morgan would post the two lowest scores of the event. She would also post the only birdie as she took a commanding seven stroke lead to victory lane. Leah Shatley would take the Runner-up award and Alexa Fallis would take home Third Place. Keep it going girls I see improvements every tournament.

May thanks to the outstanding staff at St. Johns Golf Club. It's always a treat and a joy to return to this club for such a historic event.

See you on the links!

Jack Aschenbach, PGA

Executive Director

North Florida Junior Golf Foundation

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