

## Neighbors leads Wash to district title

Written by Jim Ecker

Tuesday, 06 October 2015 19:12 - Last Updated Thursday, 08 October 2015 23:26

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Connor Neighbors will be one of the youngest golfers at the state tournament this weekend at Elmcrest Country Club, but that's perfectly OK with him.

The freshman from Cedar Rapids Washington is accustomed to being one of the youngest kids on the course.

"I probably started when I was 3," the soft-spoken ninth grader said Tuesday, "and I probably took it seriously when I was about 8. I started playing in tournaments at that age.

"It took me awhile to get going," he said, "but I enjoy it a lot now."

Neighbors fired a 2-over-par 73 and led Washington to the district title Tuesday at the Finkbine Golf Course in Iowa City. The next step for Neighbors and the Warriors will be the state tournament on their "home" course at Elmcrest on Friday and Saturday.

Five of the six golfers on the Washington team -- including Neighbors -- are members of Elmcrest and know all the nooks and crannies.

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"That's my home course. I play there a lot," Neighbors said. "It's a good course.

"I'm sure the greens are going to be very fast. They will be really tough. It's not super-long, so that will be good for me because I'm not a huge hitter."

There were some anxious moments at Finkbine as the results were methodically posted on the big scoreboard, with spectators trying to do the math in their heads, knowing only three teams would advance to the state meet.

Washington finished with 307 strokes, nipping Burlington (309) and Xavier (310) for the title. Cedar Falls (311) went home disappointed as four good teams finished within four shots of each other.

Neighbors paced the Warriors in a little triangular meet earlier this season, but he had not led his team in a major tournament all year. "It's good to do it here," he agreed.

Remarkably, six different golfers have led the Warriors in meets this year with Frank Lindwall, Alex Slattery, Joe Slattery, Jabe Gonder, Logan Bracey and now Neighbors all taking their turns. It could have been seven, but Will Jackson was sidelined earlier in the year with an injury.

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That depth and balance have sparked Washington all season. Lindwall shot a 77 Tuesday despite being assessed a two-shot penalty when he inadvertently hit somebody else's golf ball. Bracey finished with a 78, Alex Slattery and Jabe Gonder had 79's and Joe Slattery shot an 81.



Neighbors, Lindwall, Bracey and Alex Slattery are all underclassmen, so the Warriors should be strong again next season. For now, they're happy with the district title.

"It's been our goal pretty much the whole year and it's good to finally get there and achieve it," Neighbors said.

Neighbors was happy to win a major title as a rookie.

"It feels good. It shows me that I'm capable of doing things when I'm older, too," he remarked.

Neighbors, who shoots left-handed, won the novice division of the Pribyl tournament this summer and finally took his turn at the top of his team's leaderboard in a major event.

"We've had so many different heroes," Washington coach Dennis Goettel said. "The last third of the season, he's been as good as any of our guys."

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Neighbors had three birdies and five bogeys.

"My short game was really good," he said. "I didn't really hit the ball very good. My putting and chipping were good."

Jace Mueller of Burlington ran away with the district title with a 3-under-par 68 for a five-shot victory over Neighbors. Luke Winker of Xavier placed third with a 75. There was a five-way tie for fourth place at 76, with all five of them advancing to the state tournament. That group included Iowa City West star JD Goodfellow.

Mitch King and Matt Neumeyer shot 77's for Xavier and Brody Robinson had an 81. Xavier coach Tim O'Brien knew his golfers needed to have a strong finish over the final three holes with a trip to the state tournament hanging in the balance.

"And that's exactly what they did," he said. "I couldn't be more pleased.

"I'm very proud of them," O'Brien said. "They've worked hard all year. They've been pretty solid."

Goettel knows there will be stiff competition at the state meet from the Des Moines schools, Linn-Mar, Burlington, Xavier and others, but he likes playing the state meet at Elmcrest where his golfers will feel at home.

"They should know the course. No doubt about it," he said.

Goettel thinks his club can make a run for the top. "I certainly hope so," he said. "We feel like

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we have not shot our best round yet this year."

O'Brien thinks his team has a shot at high honors as well.

"Our goal is going after one of the top-4 spots," he said. "If we can do that, it would be a sensational year."

## TEAM STANDINGS

Top 3 Teams To State Meet

1. Washington 307, 2. Burlington 309, 3. Xavier 310, 4. Cedar Falls 311, 5. (tie) Muscatine 319, Ottumwa 319, Prairie 319, 8. Iowa City West 326, 9. Kennedy 340, 10. Jefferson 346, 11. Waterloo West 355, 12. Iowa City High 358, 13. Waterloo East 440.

## INDIVIDUAL RESULTS

Top 4 and ties advance to State Meet

Finkbine, Par 71

1. Jace Mueller, Burlington 68

2. Connor Neighbors, Washington 73

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3. Luke Winker, Xavier 75

4. Joe Dean, Cedar Falls 76

JD Goodfellow, Iowa City West 76

Ben Linderman, Muscatine 76

Trey Thomas, Ottumwa 76

Jared Hoelzen, Burlington 76

WASHINGTON - Connor Neighbors 73, Frank Lindwall 77, Logan Bracey 78, Alex Slattery 79, Jabe Gonder 79, Joe Slattery 81.

XAVIER - Luke Winker 75, Mitch King 77, Matt Neumeyer 77, Brody Robinson 81, Tyler Breitbach 82, Sam Martin 86.

PRAIRIE - Cooper Reitinger 77, Sam Lockhart 80, Ian Johnston 81, Griffen Clark 81, Matt Lorenz 81, Cal Clark 82.

KENNEDY - Jonah Beman 83, Jake Corkery 84, Jordan Weiss 86, Cameron Stump 87, Parker Kalb 90, Luke Martin 91.

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JEFFERSON - Nile Happel 84, Adam Van Oort 85, Carter Schmitz 87, Lucas Brown 90, Austin Schmitz 94, Connor Hammons 99.