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Veghte is cast in a familiar role

By GREG LARSON
Times-Union Sports Writer

Through the years, Jack Veghte has grown to enjoy and thrive on being a front-runner.

The 44-year-old Clearwater insurance agent will carry another lead into the final round of the Florida State Golf Association's State Amateur tournament today at Sawgrass. He toured Sawgrass, set up at 6,850 yards under near-perfect conditions, in 2-under-par 70 Saturday to take a one-stroke lead through 54 holes.

Veghte's total of 73-70-70 — 213 is good for a one-shot edge over North Palm Beach's Jay Schrader, who has 75-70-69 — 214. David Peoples of Orlando shot 72 Saturday and is third at 215 and Tampa's Bob Cornett missed a three-foot putt on the last hole and finished with 71 for 216, which ties him at the even-par figure with Palatka's Billy Tuten, who had 73 Saturday.

Jacksonville's Mark Arnette shot 69 Saturday and moved into contention along with Orlando's Craig Scott (73) at 219. Wes Paxson Jr. of Jacksonville, who was one stroke off the lead after 36 holes, slipped to 78 Saturday and is at 222. Palatka's Ron Tumlin (75 — 220) is another area player in contention.

This is Veghte's 18th consecutive FSGA State Am. His first experience with the lead was in 1965 when he blew a 3-stroke lead over Bob Murphy with two holes to play at Hay Hill in Orlando. The next year Murphy beat him in a playoff by rolling in an 85-foot birdie putt.

In later years, he held up with leads of several strokes and now covets the top spot. A victory today would give Veghte four FSGA State Am titles.

"I'm better at it (front-running) than I used to be," he said. "I used to not like to play out front. There's no way I can

nurse a one-stroke lead, though. I'm going to have to play to win it."

Veghte's 70 included an eagle on the 512-yard No. 8 when he reached the green with a driver and 3-wood and rolled in a 20-foot putt. He drove in the water on the par-5 No. 18, but holed a 40-yard sand wedge shot for a birdie four.

The 17-year-old Schrader, a high school teammate of Jack Nicklaus II, is a protege of some of the biggest names in golf. He has taken much advice from Jack Nicklaus, his present teacher is renowned clubmaker Toney Penna and he also studies under Dr. Gary Wiren, one of the foremost golf strategists.

"Mr. Nicklaus helps me anytime I ask him," Schrader said after posting his 69. "He's always glad to help. All I have to do is ask."

Peoples, the 19-year-old Valencia Community College graduate, had a round

similar to his opening 70 when he one-putted the last nine greens. He didn't strike the ball well but putted extremely well.

"I only hit eight greens all day but I had just 11 putts on the last nine and it seemed like each one was about eight feet," he said.

Cornett came into No. 9, his finishing hole Saturday, at 2-under for the day and void of bogeys. He was in agony when his three-foot par-putt jumped out of the hole.

"My God!" he shrieked. "I don't know how that stayed out."

The top five going into today's round features two veterans — the 44-year-old Veghte and the 40-year-old Cornett — and three youngsters — Schrader and Tuten, both 17, and Peoples, 19.



— WALTER STRICKLIN/Staff

Front-runner Veghte follows flight of ball en route to State Amateur lead

Jackie Nicklaus gets best advice

Gary Player's son Wayne is making noise at the British Amateur. See story Page C-4.

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Monday night at the Jack Nicklaus home in North Palm Beach, father told eldest son how to play Sawgrass.

Tuesday morning, Jack Nicklaus II drove to Sawgrass with a group of friends. Later in the day, Jackie tested his father's advice during a State Amateur practice round at Sawgrass and toured the course again Wednesday in preparation for today's first round of the 62nd annual event.

"My dad and I went hole by hole and he told me how he played it, what clubs I should hit off what tees and what to expect on certain shots," the 17-year-old Nicklaus said. "I followed his advice. I wouldn't argue with him, I'd say he has pretty good credentials."

The 6-foot-3, 170-pound Nicklaus is more than a golfer. A senior-to-be at the Benjamin School in North Palm Beach, he played tight end on the school's Class A state runnerup football team and was a forward on the basketball team, which was ranked in the top eight.

"I really don't know yet if playing football and basketball affects my golf game one way or the other," he said. "I just wish I could gain some weight."

Jackie plans to spend most of the summer at Muirfield Village, the Nicklaus-designed and controlled course near Columbus, Ohio. That's where he will launch his attempt to qualify for the U.S. Amateur.

"Sawgrass is a pretty hard course, but I don't think it's as hard as Muirfield," he said. "But then, we haven't played this course (Sawgrass) in the wind yet."

Nicklaus will visit a number of colleges this summer, but has no firm future plans as to where he'll attend college or what, if any, sports he'll pursue.

Schooled well by his father in the art of communication, the younger Nicklaus comes across as a very well-spoken and well-mannered young man.

"You expect him to be a little arrogant," said Sawgrass pro Bob Usher, "but he's as nice and polite as he can be. It seems like he makes a real effort not to be arrogant."

Nicklaus admitted that the comparisons to his father and the "There's Jack Nicklaus' kid" become tiresome, but added that it's a hurdle he's conquered.

"I sure hope I have, anyway," he said. "People are always making comparisons and other things. I have to be careful, though, because anything I do reflects on my dad."

Other than victories in several local tournaments in North Palm and Columbus, the younger Nicklaus has yet to distinguish himself in golf. He played No. 3 on Benjamin's strong golf team, which finished fourth in the state all-classifications meet.

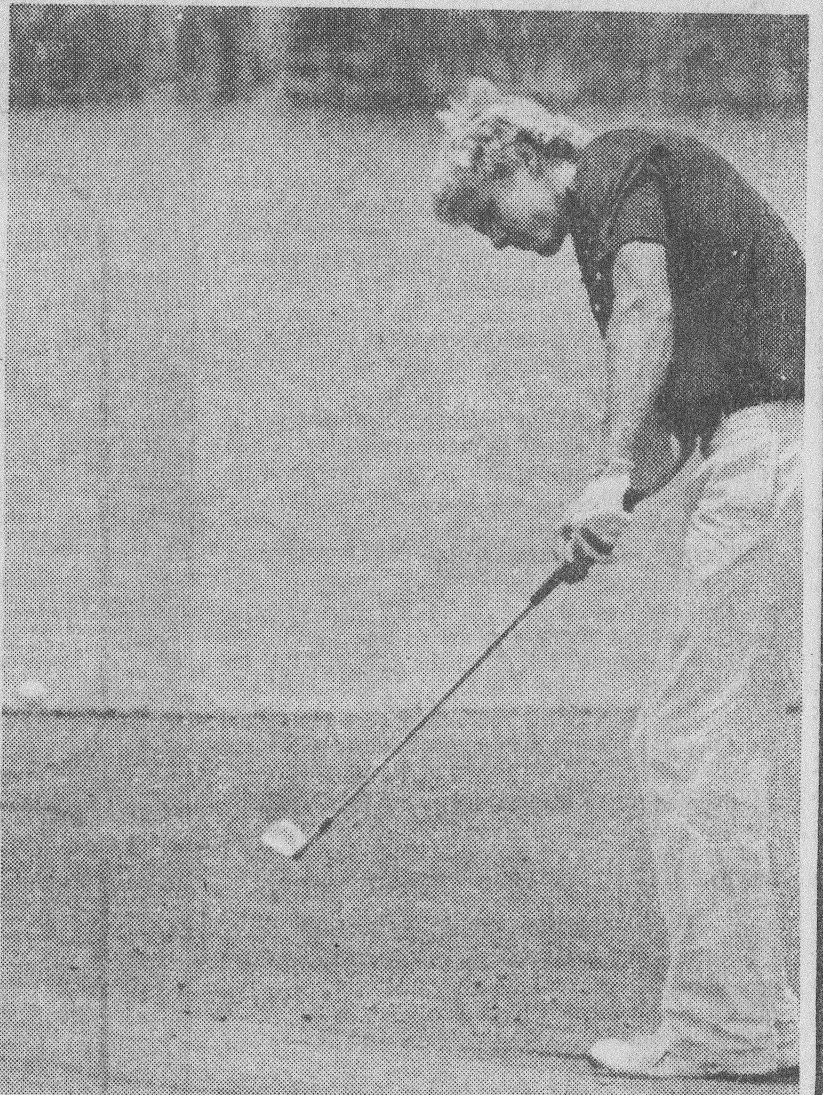
Nicklaus tees off No. 1 at 9:28 in today's first round and has ideas of winning the tournament.

"I'm not hitting it that well right now, I just finished playing in the County Amateur back home and I played terrible," he said. "I really haven't done well in a tournament in a long time."

A top-10 finish, then, would be a realistic goal.

"I'd prefer to win," he repeated.

The tournament will run through Sunday at Sawgrass. The 128-man field, headed by defending champion Rick Pearson, a University of Florida golfer from Bradenton, will be flighted after Friday's second round. The top 32 players and ties will comprise the championship flight and the remainder of the field will be flighted in groups of 16. Spectators, at no charge, are welcome.



— RAY STAFFORD/Staff

Nicklaus chips to green during practice round