

State Junior

The State Junior champion and the State Amateur champion both attend the same college — Huntington College in Montgomery, Ala., renowned for its recent domination of NAIA golf.

Said Nicky Martin, the State Amateur champ, of Rusty Stocker, the State Junior champ: "He's going to be a really fine golfer. He has a whole lot of talent."

Going into the State Junior at The Plantation Golf & Country Club in Venice, Stocker was as unknown quantity. But he was playing in his hometown, and he was playing a course he knew very well. In addition, his golf game had improved dramatically under the direction of former tour player Dave Ragan.

"I was playing well, so I just decided to play stroke by stroke and do the best I could," said Stocker.

The result was a 72 in the first round, and a 71 in the second. "It was as steady as I could play," Stocker said.

The 143 total was good for a one-stroke victory over Bobby Collins of Atlantis. Three golfers — Briny Baird of Miami, Charles Walters Jr. of Sarasota and Danny Albert of Altamonte Springs — tied for third at 145.

"I had no idea how I stood in the final round," said Stocker.

As it turned out, Collins shot a 31 on the front nine but faded to a 38 on the back nine.

The most prominent winner of the State Junior was Gary Koch, who won three consecutive titles in 1967-68-69. Many of the winners, like Stocker, have been relative unknowns. Some of them have ultimately become pros, and many have gone on to solid amateur careers.

"I just want to do the best I can in school and in golf," said Stocker. "It's tough to study and practice, but I'm doing the best I can."

That's what junior golf is all about — academic achievement and golfing growth, running parallel with each other. ■