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## Defending champ in "A" position for repeat

### *Cristillo grabs 6-shot lead at Senior State Championship*

In the 2000 Florida State Senior Championship, Crystal River resident Joe Cristillo bogeyed the 53rd hole and saved par from eight feet moments later at Ocala Country Club's 18th hole.

"I told my wife I thought I let it slip away," Cristillo said.

Cristillo wound up winning his first state major title by a shot, and barring a major meltdown in today's final round at Riverwood Golf Club, the 59-year-old defending champion will not find himself in a slippery situation this time around.

In brisk, windy conditions, Cristillo followed up his 7-under-65 with a 70 Wednesday, opening a six-stroke lead on Palm City resident Jim Applegate. The two-round leader will attempt to become the third senior to repeat at the 34-year-old event and the first since Dick Goerlich in 1989. All Cristillo needs is a 78 or better in the final round to set the tournament scoring record.

Cristillo, however, knows this tournament is not over. He's just two months removed from carding an 81 at a Florida State Golf Association senior individual tournament in Tampa.

"You never know," Cristillo said. "That's why we play these things. I wasn't even playing good coming in. (Yesterday) was by far the best competitive round I've had in a while. I still don't feel that confident."

Cristillo said he fed off two-time state senior winner Bill King Tuesday for his tournament-best 65. King shot a 69 but blazed a 31 on the front side. In Wednesday's second round, Cristillo had to contend with a steady 2-club wind on his way to a three-birdie, one-bogey 70.

"I was just trying to hit it on the green today," said Cristillo, who also won the last 36-hole Presidential tournament at his home course. "We were tossing grass, backing off the shot and waiting for the wind to die down. But I'm not complacent. Par is a good score here."

Chasing Cristillo is Applegate, a long-time golf course designer who works for Boca Resorts Inc. in Boca Raton. Applegate's ace at the 162-yard par-3 13th, his second career hole in one, sprung him to a 5-under 67 in the opening round. But the Palm City resident followed with a 74 Wednesday.

"I didn't have a hole in one today, that was the problem," Applegate joked. "It was little windier and the pins were in some slopey areas.

Applegate also knows Riverwood -- with out of bounds and water on every hole -- can take strokes just as easily as it can give them.

"We're all amateurs, not pros," he said. "We're just out here trying to win a golf tournament. Three bad shots out here and you could be 6-over real fast."

Sarasota's Ron Clayton, 62, shot back-to-back 71s and stands in third place, seven shots back at 142 along with Mount Dora's Curtis Madson. Clayton chipped in for birdie at the par-5 17th. The green is surrounded by marshland, but Clayton laid up and played a pitch.

"I can't hit it as far as some of these guys," said Clayton, a six-time low amateur in the Florida Senior State Open.

Orlando resident Lee Chira, a member of Arnold Palmer's Bay Hill Club, stayed in the top 10 with a 72 for a 1-over 145. Chira was impressed with Riverwood, calling it "one of the best courses we play in the FSGA."

"I had to do the Tiger Woods punch shot into the wind," said Chira, who has not three-putted through two rounds. "You can't go wrong copying the best player in the world. It worked. But Joe shoots 65-70, so he deserves to win. He's a very good player."

In the 70-and-over Super Senior division, Riverwood member Hal Knuth finds himself one shot behind leader Moot Thomas, of Ocala, after carding a 76 Wednesday. Tampa Walter Baldwin is tied with Knuth at 153. Knuth, a former Wisconsin Senior Open winner, likes his chances today.

"I think I should have a slight advantage," Knuth said, "especially reading the greens.

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### **Florida State Senior Championship leaderboard**

Played at 6,500-yard, par 72 Riverwood Golf Club in Port Charlotte.

Final round is today.

Joe Cristillo 65-70 135

Jim Applegate 67-74 141

Curtis Madson 70-72 142

Ron Clayton 71-71 142

Bill Western 69-74 143

Bill King 69-75 144

James Brown 77-67 144

Ralph Hutchins 72-72 144

Lee Chira 73-72 145

Steve Sloan 72-74 146

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