

James claims 3rd City Am title

Written by Jim Ecker

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Chris James joined some elite company Sunday when he captured his third City Amateur golf tournament at Ellis Park.

Dave Aossey won three City Am titles in 1954, 1956 and 1960 in the early years of the annual event, putting James on the same line with one of the historic names in local golf.

Sam Aossey and Bob Kollsmith are the only four-time champs in the City Am, which gives James something to shoot for next year and in the future.

James is only 28 years old, and the only thing that might stop him from winning more amateur titles would be a possible pro career.

He's flirted with the idea of trying some pro events, but nothing is imminent.

"It would be nice at some point," he said after winning the 61st annual City Am title by five shots with a 54-hole total of 9-under-par 207. "I'm not going out looking for sponsorships, but if people want to I wouldn't

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be opposed to it.

"I love my job and what I do, but if there were an opportunity to play golf for a living, that would be my dream."

Zach Johnson won the Cedar Rapids City Am crown in 1996 and has done fairly well for himself on the PGA tour.

Steve Koepke, a two-time winner, and Ryan Schrimper tied for second place Sunday at 4-under 212 under ideal conditions at Ellis Park.

James is a third-grade teacher at the Indian Creek Elementary School in the Linn-Mar district. He's also the co-head boys golf coach and the assistant girls golf coach at Washington High School, as well as the sophomore girls basketball coach at Washington.

James won his previous City Am titles in 2008 and 2010.

James graduated from Washington High School in 2004 and played golf at Kirkwood Community College and St. Ambrose University. He got his teaching degree from the University of Northern Iowa in 2013.

"I love playing in this event," he said. "Steve Koepke and I always talk about how it's like winning the green jacket in Cedar Rapids. It's like winning the Masters here. That's how we feel as amateurs who play the city courses."

"I think I'll play in it as long as I'm still an amateur," he said. "I'll still have that burning desire to compete and win."

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James has not taken any steps toward a pro career, but does not rule it out.

"Right now I'm pretty content," he said. "But like I said, if somebody wants to throw me some money for a sponsorship, that would be great."

Paul James, the football coach and athletic director at Washington High School, caddied for his son again this year, just like he did when Chris James won titles in 2008 and 2010.

"He's great to be out here with me," Chris James said. "He calms me down. He keeps me focused on what I need to do and not looking too far ahead of things.

"He's been in pressure situations before, so I think I'm just really lucky to have him out there."

All of the golfers began their rounds Sunday on the back-9 holes at Ellis Park for logistical reasons. James was clinging to a one-shot lead over Schrimper, one of his playing partners, when he caught fire and collected three straight birdies on the 3rd, 4th and 5th holes (the 12th, 13th and 14th holes in his round).

That gave James some breathing room and he finished the day at 4-under 68. He began the tournament by shooting a 1-under 71 at Gardner Friday and a 4-under 68 at Gardner Saturday.

Koepke collected eight birdies Sunday during his round of 4-under 68 to pull into a second-place tie with Schrimper. Schrimper began the day tied with James, but finished with a 1-over 73.

61st MEN'S CITY AMATEUR

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54-Hole Totals

Par-216

1. Chris James 71-68-68=207
2. Steve Koepke 68-76-68=212
3. Ryan Schrimper 69-70-73=212
4. Scot Glasford 73-68-72=213
5. Justin Pansegrau 74-69-71=214
6. Jeff Wenthe 67-75-76=218
7. Eric Cress 74-75-72=221
8. Brigham Stewart 71-73-77=221
9. Davis Sutton 73-73-76=222
10. Mitch Jacobi 75-68-80=223