

Neighbors leads Wash to district title

Written by Jim Ecker

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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.

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.

