

Northwest junior pads lead to five shots as boys head to final round



Split Rail Links & Golf Club offered a different look for boys competing in the city championship with its mounds and tall grasses.

Split Rail course. He was given a new truck when he turned 16 and concedes that being behind the wheel put tournament playing on the back burner.



Jordan Hoffman pitches to the 18th hole at Split Rail to within four feet and birdied the par-5 hole for an even-par 72 and moved into a five-shot lead in the city boys championship.

Defending champion Austin Berkovsky hasn't been able to find the comeback mode he had last year when he won his second consecutive title. He carded a 75 at Split Rail and is 12 shots off the lead.

Hoffman, who began playing golf with he was 2 at Willow Springs Golf Course with the guiding hand of his late father Kurt, also has to be watchful with his Type I diabetes. He said he eats and drinks a lot (a four-course meal, his mother says) while playing, and has his insulin nearby.

Jordan Hoffman, 16-year-old Northwest High junior, said he didn't get much sleep after leading the Fort Worth Boys City Junior Golf Championship after two rounds. Now, after carding an even-par 72 at Split Rail Links & Golf Club on Wednesday to pull into a five-shot lead heading into Thursday's final round at Shady Oaks Country Club, he expects another antsy night.

However, maybe the voice of Robert J. (Bob) Rotella, a golf psychologist who has published audio books, will be enough to be a calming influence. "I listen to him (on his I-Pod) a lot, especially before tournaments and practice," said Hoffman, who is playing in his first tournament this summer and who made his first trip around the 6,966-yard

The truck, though, has paid off in some unusual ways. Hoffman practiced into the dark while preparing for the tournament by turning on the truck's headlights so he could see.

The lack of being in competitive situations hasn't hampered Hoffman's game as he has carded rounds of 74 (at Meadowbrook), 66 (at Z Boaz) and 72 to stand at 1-under 212 for 54 holes. His closest challenger is Austin Struble of Aledo, who forged Wednesday's best score with a 2-under 70 on his home course. Several who had challenged after two rounds struggled over the links-designed Split Rail course in Aledo on a sunny, hot and windy day. Cody Patrick, who had Wednesday's best round of 65 to move within two shots of Hoffman, fell back with a 78 and is at 220. Shane McDonald and Gregory Yates were at 143 after two rounds, but McDonald carded a 76 and is at 219 with Andrew Presley, who had a 72. Yates fell back to 223 after an 80.

Just the fact that he hasn't had to weather tournament competition this summer would have made him a seemingly unlikely candidate to be the leader after 54 holes. He had a respectable golf season at Northwest and was selected to the 5-5A all-district first team. Hoffman said he missed by a stroke in district competition to qualify for regionals.

At Split Rail, he and others could have used a scythe on the links-designed course that is dotted with mounds covered with long grasses. Hoffman found some of the grass on the first hole when he hit his driver on the blind tee shot, ``but fortunately the ball was sitting up" and he escaped what could have been an early disaster.

Even though Hoffman said there were a couple of other blind shots, he managed to avoid any disastrous mistakes and his confidence got a quick boost when he birdied the second hole. It was his first of five birdies, and he needed them all as those were offset by bogeys. Hoffman said it could have been worse except for about four good par saves.

His longest birdie putt was about 25 feet on No. 5. One of his better par saves came when he had to punch out to the fairway on one hole and get up and down from 80 yards. On the par-3 eighth, he sank an 35-foot par putt after hacking out from tall grass. He also salvaged a bogey on the 17th after hitting into a water hazard.

When Hoffman tees off at Shady Oaks on Thursday, it will be his first time to test that course, too. He said when he plays a course that he hasn't seen, he tries to play safe. He'll also be facing the fastest greens the players have seen this week. Hoffman said he prefers slower greens, but adjusted to the faster greens at Split Rail. He expects to adjust at Shady Oaks, too. Bob Rotella will be trying to convince him he can.

In other divisions: Ford Spigener won the 7-9-year-old title with a 148 by two shots over Matthew Berkowitz; Shane Markwardt won the 10-11 title by two shots over Mason Greenberg; Tate North leads the 12-13 division by two shots over Brady Ellis and there's a six-way tie in the 16-18 division.