

## **Merrell takes shot lead after 36 holes**

While it appeared that almost everyone was in a self-destruct mode on the back nine at Ridglea Country Club on Tuesday (July 14), Jeffrey Merrell of Aledo managed to hold his game together with a friendly putter to post a 1-over-par 72 and move into first place by one shot after 36 holes in the Fort Worth City Boys Junior Golf Championship with a 36-hole 140 total.

Merrell, who tied for the day's best score, will head to Mira Vista for the third round on Wednesday holding a shot lead over first-round leader Nathan Anderson of Burleson and Gregory Yates of Mansfield. He's three ahead of 2007 city champ Jordan Hoffmann of Haslet and Colby Webb of Burleson.

Through nine holes, it appeared Yates, fresh from winning an AJGA tournament at Southern Oaks in the last week of June, was taking control after posting a 3-under-par 32 on the front. However, he stumbled to four bogeys and a double-bogey on the back in what he said was his first visit to Ridglea. He bounced back with birdies at the par-4 16th and the par-5 18th to come in with a 40 and a 73.

“I just fell apart on the back nine,” Yates said. “I think I hit, like three fairways. I've never played here before and the front nine is pretty straight forward. On the back nine, I was having to guess on a couple of holes.”

Merrell, meanwhile, was playing fairly steadily and able to recover from his mishits to post nines of 36-36. He managed two birdies, on the par-3 7th and the par-5 ninth to help offset his three bogeys.

“It was a good start,” Merrell said. “The putter was really hot. I made a lot of putts. I think I had five one putts in a row on the front. I didn't hit the ball too great, but I hit the good miss and got up-and-down a lot.”

One of his better up-and-downs came on the drivable 275-yard par-4 14th when Merrell pushed his tee into the adjoining right fairway. His second shot to the uphill green came up short near greenside trees. He threaded his third through limbs and within five feet of the hole. He sank that for his par. “That was a great par. And I got a pretty lucky kick on the sixth, I believe. I hit a house and the ball came back into the fairway.”

That hole was a disappointment for Yates and Anderson, who both bogeyed. Yates drove over the green, chipped long and took two more to get down for his bogey. Anderson was in a greenside trap with his tee shot, blasted out short and three-putted. Hoffmann recorded his first birdie after driving almost pin-high into the right fringe.

“The front side was not good at all,” Hoffmann said.

“I couldn't swing, couldn't putt -- everything,” he said trying to explain his front-nine problems, which included a double-bogey on the par-3 seventh after pulling a 5-iron into a small creek.

Hoffmann also added a birdie on the par-3 17th, but failed to birdie the 495-yard 18th after an almost perfect drive.

Anderson, who loves to chat (even it's to himself sometimes) when competing, said he had trouble adjusting to the Ridglea greens. “I putted extremely bad today..probably 36 or 35 putts.”

A couple of bogeys on birdie holes frustrated him. He bogeyed the par-5 ninth after being in a greenside bunker in two, which he also did at the 275-yard par-4 14th. “Those are birdie holes,” he said. “That cost me.”

“I'm OK. There's still a lot of golf, and I can play better.”

Webb said he had a lot of luck and bad breaks. “I made some pretty good par saves and some long birdie putts. But I had three or four three-putts from close range.”

Webb said he had taken a golf break and didn't know the tournament started Monday and was late for his tee time. Because the FWJGA doesn't disqualify late players in the first round because of its walk-on policy, Webb was worked in for a later tee time.

Besides Merrell, Austin West of Burlison and Kolton Crawford of Mansfield also carded 72s. West is at 145 and Crawford, a walk-on Monday at Rockwood, is at 146.

Division I was split into the Championship and First flights with those with a 157 total making the Championship and the 158 and above moving to the First. They will play Wednesday at Mira Vista Country Club. The Division II boys at Diamond Oaks C.C. were split into the Second and Third flights. They will play Wednesday at Shady Oaks C.C.

The other 18-hole flights played single-elimination matches at Glen Garden Golf & Country Club and Pecan Valley Hills. The winners from those flights will continue single-elimination match play Wednesday at Meadowbrook. The 7-13 boys at Sycamore also will continue single-elimination match play on Wednesday.