

Dillon Vaughn salvages shaky round with a 70 to move into a three-shot lead after two rounds



When Dillon Vaughn described his second-round even-par 70 at River Crest Country Club on Tuesday, he shook his head a little and said, "I didn't hit the ball very good. But my short game was amazing." The short game helped Vaughn, 16, stretch what had been a 1-shot lead after his opening 70 at Meadowbrook G.C. to three shots heading into Wednesday's third round at Shady Oaks C.C.



A good short game usually is needed at the relatively short (6,383 yards) River Crest, but tight fairways can make it a demanding challenge and it proved to be for some of the first-round challengers. Four golfers had been tied for second after 71s at Meadowbrook, but only Luke Neeley, 15, of Mansfield managed to hold his position. Neeley, a home-schooled Mansfield resident, shot a 72 and is alone in second at 143. Defending champion Kolton Crawford, 18, also of Mansfield, moved into third place by rebounding from his opening 75 to card a 71 and is alone in third at

146.

Andre Garcia, 15, of Mansfield is in fourth after stumbling somewhat with a 76. He was one of the four with 71s at Meadowbrook. Gates Lopez, 17, of Fort Worth dropped back to 148 with a 71-77 and is tied with Chris Gentry, 17, of Fort Worth (72-76). Ryan Pawlowsky, 18, of Mansfield, the other who carded an opening 71, ran into the most trouble and finished with an 81 for a 152.

The River Crest field was divided into the Championship and First flights and will move to Shady Oaks for the third round. The cut was at 157, with the 157 scores and lower comprising the Championship Flight and the 158 and higher comprising the First Flight. The boys who played at Ridglea C.C. were divided into the Second and Third flights and will play Wednesday at Mira Vista C.C. All four flights will be cut after the third round and the approximate 16 survivors in each flight going to Colonial C.C. for the final round. The Fourth through 11th flights will resume match play at Woodhaven C.C., and the 13-younger boys will continue match play at Sycamore Creek G.C.

Vaughn said he didn't hit too many greens in regulation and got off to a shaky start. He made the turn in 2-over 37, but carded two birdies on the back and salvaged a par on the 16th to move ahead by three.

"(The ball) just isn't going where I wanted it to," Vaughn said, trying to describe his ball-striking. "I made a lot of 6- and 7-footers for pars. On No. 16, I was right of the right hand-side bunker and had to flop it over." He flopped it to within six and made the putt to save his par.

Heading into the third round, Vaughn said he just will try to hit fairways and greens and stay calm. "I don't want to get mad about bad shots or too excited over a good shot," he said. The main thing, he said, is he'll just try to have fun.

He is expecting much faster greens than what the field played at River Crest, though. "I figured they (River Crest greens) would be a lot faster.....a lot like Shady Oaks' greens. They were a lot slower. But they rolled really good. Maybe that's why I made so many putts."

Neeley said he "started out really good. I was two-under after the first four holes." However, three bogeys and a double-bogey (hit in a water hazard) dropped him to three-over 38 on the front. "On the back nine, I got it back together," he said.

He birdied the 14th with a 40-foot putt and saved par on the 16th by chipping in for his par after hitting his second shot in a water hazard. He got up-and-down from the rough on 18 to salvage another par.

Looking forward to Shady Oaks, Neeley said the course "will be a lot different" from Meadowbrook or River Crest. "It's lot longer for one thing," and he has heard about the fast greens. "I hope I can score as well as I have. So far, I haven't had a three-putt and have made a lot of putts. So, I'm taking it one shot at a time and letting chips fall where they may."

Crawford, who also started slowly last year en route to winning, felt better about his game after posting a 71.

"I played more conservative today," Crawford said. "I probably hit only three drivers off the tee. I hit a lot more 3-irons."

One of the times he chose a driver was on the 300-yard, par-4 eighth hole. He was trying to drive the green, but drove it out of bounds en route to a double-bogey. "I went for it...and it didn't turn out so good." He said the driver didn't see much daylight after that.

Crawford also enjoyed more success on the greens than at Meadowbrook and hit more in regulation than the eight he hit at Meadowbrook. "I made a few more putts today, so I got the putting rolling and hope to keep it going tomorrow, and I hit most of greens."

Although he believe he has a good chance of repeating, he reminds that "there is a lot of golf left" and two tough courses -- Shady Oaks and Colonial -- to contend with.