

## Wayne County Men's Amateur: Father-son duo came close to historical finish

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There was a moment during this year's Wayne County Men's Amateur championship when it looked like something special could happen.

Heading into Sunday's final round at Goldsboro Municipal Golf Course, atop the leaderboard in both the Open and Senior Divisions were the same last name -- Adams.

Nick led the Open field.

His father, Stan, held the advantage in Senior play.

They seemed poised to become the first-ever father-son duo to win WCMA titles in the same year. But a family reunion didn't take place in the four-player championship photo.

Stan won. Nick finished runner-up for the second straight year.

The tantalizing great memory that could be shared at the dinner table and family reunions for years to come didn't materialize. Still, it was an impressive finish for the father and son, who developed a strong relationship while hitting a small white ball around golf courses throughout North Carolina and the southeast region.

The lessons started in the front yard.

"A lot of times when Nick was young, I'd be out shooting golf balls," Stan said. "We had some golf clubs for him, so he'd be chipping every chance he got. I would take him into the yard and he'd just practice chipping, putting divots in the grass."

Originally, Nick followed the path of most young athletes. He could be more regularly found on the baseball and soccer fields as a little kid. He always knew what his priorities were, however.

"I always remember playing golf," Nick said. "I remember being out there as a toddler. Even before he would let me play, I would go out there and tag along. Sometimes he would let me drop a ball here or there."

Dad's memory of his son's golf beginnings are a bit more blurry. He remembers Nick playing some par-4 holes and dropping his ball 100 yards closer to the pin to start.

At 11 years old, Nick walked off the baseball field for the last time and declared he wanted to concentrate on golf. Stan doesn't remember -- conveniently, it seems -- the first time he lost to his son.

Nick does.

"Oh yeah, I remember that," Nick said of the battle at Lane Tree. "I might have been 11 years old. I remember him not saying anything because he knew how close I was. I clipped him by one shot and made such a big deal about it.

"Over the last couple years, though, he's beat me a couple times. We both want to beat each other, we both want bragging rights. And when he does beat me, he'll let me hear it."

Sometimes memories fade.

But Stan recalled one conversation.

"I remember once, we were at Lane Tree playing when he was 12 or 13 years old," Stan said. "He was on the fairway hitting a wood to the green while I was using an iron. He asked me why he was using wood while I used iron and all I said was, 'soon this is going to be the other way around.'"

Sure enough, it wasn't long before Nick ditched his fairway wood for

irons of his own. An impressive amateur golfer, Nick got the attention of University of Mount Olive coach Chip Spiron, who recruited him to come play for the Trojans.

"I've known (Stan) for years because he was a good player himself," Spiron said. "Nick and his dad would play 9 almost every afternoon at Lane Tree and since we practice there, I would see him almost everyday.

"Nick was shy in the beginning. We probably didn't discuss UMO until his junior or senior year. Fortunately for me, Nick wanted to stay close to home."

Now a sophomore at UMO, Nick is thriving as one of the best players in a golf program that's been perennially ranked in the top-30 over the last five years. Not only does he get to play competitive golf at a high level, but he does it less than 30 miles from home.

"I'm glad he went to UMO because I can see him play," Stan said. "I think he really enjoys it there. Watching him play -- moreso when he was younger -- is when I'm most nervous."

Some parents, especially the ones that share a sport with their kids, often feel the need to be the dominant coaching voice in their life. That's not the case with Stan, who, according to Nick, has been nothing but positive since day one.

"He was never an overbearing coach," Nick said. "He taught me a lot of patience. It's one of my stronger skills from a golf aspect. He never gave me a lot of instruction."

There was never any pressure passed down from father to son because that's all the relationship ever was. It was never a coach talking to a student. Whenever the two hit the links, it was always just about playing a round with family.

"I've always loved it," Stan said, "because it's something I can still do with him. I can do it with him for a long time, too. I've loved watching him grow up on the golf course."

And though the clean sweep at the WCMA didn't happen this year, both are confident it will eventually. Like Stan bringing Nick out in the front yard for chipping, or Nick beating finally beating Stan, there's a first time for everything.

"I wanted to do it this year," Nick said. "I put more pressure on myself once I saw that he had his (win) in the bag. But he's got some good years left, and I think I've got a few good years left, too.

"We'll get it done soon."

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