

Steve Jones wins Medal Play title

By DAVE NELSON
News Staff

COLORADO SPRINGS — The whole town was talking about the Jones boys here Sunday after a stirring final round duel in the annual State Medal Play golf championship.

When it was over, runner-up Gregg Jones of Colorado Springs was almost speechless after four-putting the 16th hole. And champion Steve Jones of Yuma didn't know quite what to say about the sudden turn of events.

"I'm really sorry about what happened to Gregg," Steve Jones said of his friendly — but unrelated — rival. "I didn't think he would do what he did. That kind of destroys it for me."

It had been a hard fought and tightly contested battle between these two young men with matching frames and matching surnames before Gregg Jones' sudden collapse which dropped him into a tie for second place with Chris Nordling, a former State Medal Play and State Match Play champion from Aurora.

Gregg Jones took a one-shot lead to the 15th tee. But the lanky, rail-thin 24-year-old hometown favorite bogeyed the 15th when he flew a 6-iron approach into a sand bunker and then buckled under the mounting pressure when he four-putted the 16th green for a double-bogey six.

Meanwhile, Steve Jones, playing immediately in front of his closest rivals who were grouped in the final threesome, was preparing himself for his second sudden death playoff in as many weeks.

"I was getting myself geared up for a playoff," Steve Jones admitted. "Then my dad (Glenn Jones of Yuma) told me what had happened as I was walking down the 18th fairway."

A week ago, Steve Jones had lost to veteran touring pro Dave Hill on the first hole of the first sudden death playoff in the 18-year history of the Colorado Open.

The 22-year-old recent graduate of the University of Colorado allowed a three-shot lead to slip from his grasp while carding a 76 in the final round of the Colorado Open. But he had the low round of the day Sunday with a one-under 70 to finish with a 72-hole total of 289. That left him with a two-shot bulge over Gregg Jones, who managed a 75 Sunday, and Nordling, who closed out with a respectable 72.

Nordling, who was only one shot behind the Jones boys after 10 holes Sunday, double bogeyed the 12th hole when he drove his tee shot out of bounds and was never again a serious contender. "I didn't think at the time it would kill



Steve Jones

me," Nordling said. "As it turned out, it did." Nordling bounced back with a birdie on the 13th hole, but couldn't sustain the momentum when he parred the last five holes.

"It felt like I was playing in a little weekend tournament," Jones said of his four-day battle with the state's top amateur players and the demanding Country Club of Colorado course. "Last week, there was a lot of pressure with thousands of people and some great players."

Although the pressure was not quite as intense, Jones admitted that the Country Club of Colorado greens were every bit as difficult as the Hiwan Golf Club putting surfaces had been the previous week.

"The greens here are twice as hard as they are at Hiwan," Jones said of the slick, big-breaking Country Club of Colorado greens. "The first two days I lost my confidence as far as making any birdies were concerned," Jones explained. "I was two-putting most of them OK, just not one-putting."

Meanwhile, the undulating greens were exercising a bit of reverse psychology on Gregg Jones, who had won the Colorado Springs city championship earlier this month. Gregg required only 29 putts in the opening round on Thursday. He needed 32 putts Friday and used up 35 putts Saturday before collapsing with his four-putt job on the 16th hole Sunday.

"Oh yeah, I'm getting used to those things," the soft-spoken and deeply disappointed Jones said of his disastrous four-putt green. "I did it last year in the Broadmoor (Invitational). It's the worst feeling in the world."

Jones positioned his approach 25 feet from the pin on the hole, but left himself with a delicate three-footer when he was short with his first putt. Jones charged the second putt boldly but it caught the lip of the cup and spun sharply to the left and downhill, coming to rest about 3½ feet from the hole. He also missed that one and then tapped in for his six.

"I knew I had to hit the second one hard," Jones said of the uphill twister. "If I had hit it any softer, it would have broke at least six inches. All day, I had been putting them firm but the green (No. 16) was just too slick."

Despite his late misfortune, Gregg Jones insisted another double bogey, this one on the ninth hole, was even more costly. He held a two-shot lead at the time but dumped his approach into a ditch fronting the green. "I'd rather have that shot back than any of them," he observed. "I'd been going over the green all week, so I eased up on a 9-iron and hit it fat."

Meanwhile, Steve Jones started quickly with birdie putts of two and 10 feet on the first two holes. He bogeyed the third hole and then parred the last 15 holes.

The victory snapped a frustrating jinx in the State Medal Play tournament for the lean country boy from Yuma. He won the State Match Play title last year but had finished second twice, third once and 11th in his four previous Medal Play events.