

Schniederjans takes college as learning experience

Ga. Tech's Ollie Schniederjans takes college as learning experience



Photo by [Tracy Wilcox](#)

Georgia Tech's Ollie Schniederjans said that he is committed to four years of college golf.

By [Andy Zunz](#)

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Ollie Schniederjans is always trying to make an A.

After every round, the Georgia Tech junior reviews his stats and gives a letter grade to each segment of his game. His tee shots, for instance, received an A- at the Valspar Collegiate Invitational at the Floridian Golf Club in Palm City, Fla.

That's a tough grade for a guy who shot three straight rounds of 67 en route to a medalist finish. Schniederjans' 12-under performance led the Yellow Jackets to an eight-stroke victory.

"I hardly give myself an A on anything," Schniederjans said. "For me to give myself an A, it would have to be really good. I'm pretty harsh."

The 20-year-old out of Powder Springs, Ga., said that he might be a tougher grader than professors at the Georgia Institute of Technology. But things haven't always come easy for the No. 6 player in the *Golfweek*/Sagarin Rankings.

Schniederjans has won three times this year, but had to undergo a re-education during his freshman year.

"Out of junior golf, his peer group was Justin Thomas, Patrick Rodgers and even Jordan Spieth," Georgia Tech head coach Bruce Heppler said. "He feels like he's been trying to catch up a little bit with his golf."

Schniederjans said that he came into collegiate golf at the same level as Rodgers, Thomas and Spieth and was frustrated when he did not receive similar results.

"I just wasn't good enough. I wasn't as good as I thought I was. I had a lot to learn," Schniederjans said. "Seeing Spieth and Justin and Patrick kill it their freshman year, I was like, 'Man, these guys are figuring it out better than I am because I'm not even close.' It's not that I didn't believe I was as good as these guys, I was just amazed by how well they did so quick. I had to come to a point with myself where I could be OK with whatever my process was."

That frustration came at a point of personal conflict.

"In my freshman year, one of my friends passed away," Schniederjans said. "I had to really take a step back and get some perspective and grow up and realize that what I was making such a big deal, golf, wasn't such a big deal. I realized it wasn't who I am as a person. It's just what I do. Coach Heppler is a great coach. He talked me through growing up as a person and a player. All that I went through my freshman year will bode well for me and help me in the future."

Even while Spieth collected a win on the PGA Tour, Thomas turned pro and Rodgers accrued eight collegiate wins, Schniederjans stuck to his process.

"I always planned on going to school for four years, no matter how well I did," Schniederjans said. "Seeing them turn pro early, that was going to happen if they played well. For me, even if I played well, I was going to stick it out for four years. So it's been a perfect situation for me. I've learned how to deal with a slump and some adversity as a player and in some personal things in my life."

Schniederjans' strengths shone through in Florida as he played to a medalist finish among players from Oklahoma State, Texas A&M, LSU, Arkansas and SMU, to name a few. He was the only Yellow Jacket to finish in the top 10.

"This was a chance to get back on our horse after we got bucked down in Las Vegas (where the team finished 12th)," Heppler said. "We knew it was going to be windy with rain and they moved the pins to more difficult locations. So to go out and play well in difficult conditions was a big deal for our

guys.

"(Ollie's) really strong. The last hole there was playing 498 in a right-to-left crosswind and his playing partners were a little bit surprised when he grabbed his 3-wood. He hit 3-wood, 7-iron on a 500-yard par 4. He's focused the last few months (on wedge play). His wedge play is starting to be equivalent with his long game."

Said senior Seth Reeves: "What makes him such a unique player is his willingness to work hard and his willingness to learn. ... He's constantly learning."

The Yellow Jackets will need Schniederjans to learn on the fly if they return to the NCAA Championship this year. The team fell to eventual champion Alabama in the semifinals last year in match play 3-0-2.

Heppler believes Schniederjans can be the team's No. 1 player in the mold of Patrick Reed at GRU Augusta, where Reed held a 6-0 record in match play en route to winning two straight titles from 2009-11.

"If you look at the Augusta State (now known as GRU Augusta) teams, he knew he could throw Patrick Reed out there and ... beat the No. 1 guy on every team he played," Heppler said. "Now, if you think about having a guy that can go and do that, you only have to go .500 in the other four matches."

"If you look at the teams that have won the National Championship since we've changed, that guy out front has been a guy who wins every time. ... (Ollie) is certainly capable of that."

But Schniederjans has not always excelled in match play events. He was defeated by Alabama's Cory Whitsett in the semifinals of the NCAA Championship last year and he fell to Purdue's Adam Schenk in the first round of match play at the U.S. Amateur in 2012. His lone match play victory came at the Polo Golf Junior Classic as a junior.

"I've had an interesting career with match play," Schniederjans said. "I feel like I would be good in match play and I know I am, but it's different. It's shaken me a little bit as far as comfort."

"What I've learned is that you can go in and tell yourself, 'You have to go in and grind out every last shot and play as good as you possibly can just to beat the guy 1-up.'"

Heppler scheduled the Capital City Club Match Play in Milton, Ga., six days before the team will play at the ACC Championship to help prep it for match play. The event will pit Georgia Tech, Georgia, Auburn and Florida State in a morning and afternoon matches.

"It's a way for us to get some match play experience and tune up for ACC's first off and get some match play experience too," Reeves said. "We'll get two rounds of match play experience against solid teams and players."

"Last year, we had five players who had never even played in an NCAA before. To make it to the semifinals was pretty impressive. ... Now, our experience will pay dividends at Prairie Dunes."

That's what Heppler and the Yellow Jackets are counting on, along with their star junior Schniederjans. He, on the other hand, will be looking to make

all As.