

Schniederjans open to facing every Open challenge

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By [Steve Hummer](#) - The Atlanta Journal-Constitution

Ollie Schniederjans turns a gristly 22 on Monday, just in time to face the abuses of his first U.S. Open.

You may ask just how tough and world-worn can a guy be after getting all his calluses on a practice range. The Schniederjans' experience suggests a fair amount. One can pick up some considerable seasoning while completing a lustrous college golf career at Georgia Tech.



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Crowd favorite Ollie Schniederjans hits from the rough on the eighth hole during match play of the U.S Amateur Championship at [... read more](#)

The prodigy from Powder Springs has travelled the world, playing matches in England, Scotland, Australia, Abu Dhabi and Rocky Face, Ga. He has sampled life on the PGA, European and Web.com tours. He has felt the heat of being a world's No. 1 (amateur rankings). And been a little overwhelmed at times while trying to justify that number.

So, please, bring on the future, and the clarity it presents. For months Schniederjans has been wandering the middle ground between team golf and the dream of being one of those highly paid individual contractors covered up in corporate logos. Playing a tough U.S. Open setup will almost be a relief.

For the record, he said he no longer has any idea where he's ranked as an amateur, he gave that up last year (that would be 13th). "I'm something like 990th in the world in professional golf, I made that transition," he said. Update: He currently is No. 1,048 in those officially big-time rankings.

He'll remain an amateur long enough to play in this weekend's Palmer Cup (a Ryder Cup-style competition for top collegiate players) and to use his exemptions into the U.S. and British opens. Those he earned last summer with his amateur ranking. Then Schniederjans will go in search of a place to play for pay. He has a couple of sponsors' exemptions into pro events awaiting, and then the inevitable challenge to qualify full-time for the PGA Tour.

No longer splitting himself between school, college tournaments and a regular diet of offshoot events, Schniederjans will be all about trying to join the legion of Tech and Georgia players who are treating the Tour like their personal ATM.

And the Tech guys on Tour need some reinforcements to resist the horde of Bulldogs residing now on the leaderboard. "Hopefully we can get out there soon and fight them off a little bit," smiled Schniederjans' senior teammate, Anders Albertson.

"He's waited for (this next step up) patiently," Schniederjans coach at Tech, Bruce Heppler, said. "He's watched his best friends win events on Tour. It's like he has been this race horse at the Kentucky Derby who just keeps bumping into the starting gate. I think he'll be ready to run.

"He's very mature. It's what he's wanted his whole life, and he's finally getting the chance to go do it."

"I think I've been anxious all the way up until now," Schniederjans said in advance of his final outing for Tech, a disappointing NCAA championship.

"Everything going forward is really exciting now. Everything is big from here out."

It is going to be a really big start to this next phase of his golfing life. There's the Palmer Cup, in Illinois. Then straight to the Pacific Northwest for the first of his two majors played over links-style tracks. Chambers Bay and the Old Course at St. Andrews may be a world apart, but they are built along the same essential line.

There has been some gnashing of teeth about how the course on the shore of Puget Sound concerning its worthiness as a U.S. Open venue. Schniederjans has not earned the right to whine.

In fact, he, for one, is jacked about go all linksy in the next month.

"It sounds like a really good place. I love links; I love playing in the wind. It's long, it's open, it's in the wind. That's always good for me," he said.

What the upcoming summer represents is a transition into golfing manhood. And in some ways it is a chance to reboot a game that got a little confused during his senior year at Tech.

One of the major reasons Schniederjans returned for one more year of college golf was to put himself in the crucible of high expectation. To test himself against the demands of being "the man" in the amateur ranks and to deal with all that came with that.

And a lot of times that wasn't pretty — "I was pretty frustrated with my game this year for a lot of the time, having school and other obligations and distractions. I could have handled that better," he said. Even though he repeated as ACC Player of the Year, the junior Schniederjans was considerably more successful than the senior one (five tournament wins compared with one this season).

"If my head is not in the right place I have no chance, and that happened a lot this year.

"I'll handle it better next time."

The U.S. Open generally is not a venue conducive to clearing one's head. It is, in fact, the place where lucid thought gets lost in the high grass.

Bring it on, said Schniederjans, who seems quite anxious to get on with the future.