



A Bond Rooted in the Game

Western Virginia junior golfers **Jack Adkins** and **Dylan Jensen** have formed an enduring friendship through golf **BY RANDY KING**

FOR THE PAST 10 YEARS, VSGA MEMBERS Jack Adkins and Dylan Jensen have never worried about finding a golf game at Chatmoss Country Club.

The pair of Martinsville teenagers have always had a guaranteed fellow-competitor. They've always had each other.

Through the strong bond of golf, Adkins and Jensen have basically been all but inseparable the past decade. See one at Chatmoss, and it's a virtual lock you'll see the other, too.

"We've been going to the same school since preschool," Adkins says. "We started playing golf together in the second grade. We've teed it up countless times."

Jensen confirmed those facts, adding more detail.

"We've pretty much played every day since second grade," he says. "I would say five times a week since then. Almost every day, as long as there wasn't snow on the ground. Jack was always there."

"He was kind of my drive to get better. I caught up with him a little bit in middle school, but until then he just waxed me. I think we've been good for each other. We've made each other better players."

Not to mention better people.

GROWTH SPURT

Ask Keith Decker, the longtime reigning amateur king of Virginia golf. On Aug. 1, the 50-year-old Decker teamed with the pair of 18-year-olds to lead Chatmoss to victory in the 68th VSGA Club Championship at

Through the years, **Jack Adkins** (foreground) and **Dylan Jensen** and have been classmates, fellow-competitors, caddie and player, and above all, close friends.

Heritage Country Club's Manakin Course.

Decker said the triumph held special significance in his book, since he's watched the "two youngins" mature through the years.

"I have seen Jack and Dylan since they were 3 feet tall," Decker says. "Now they're like 6-3 or 6-4. The picture they took with those two and me up there holding the trophy ... I'm a midget anyway, but I looked like more of a midget standing next to them."

"It has been a lot of fun watching those two grow up. They grew up at the golf course. There's not a better place for any young man or young woman to grow up than on the golf course or in the golf shop. You learn all about life very quickly because you're dealing with policemen, judges, attorneys, salesmen. You're dealing with all walks of life and you grow up fast."

In addition to each being 4.0 students, Adkins and Jensen served as dual linchpins on a Carlisle School golf team that has won five consecutive Virginia Independent Conference state titles. Each won the conference's individual title twice, swapping the trophy back and forth every other year the past four falls. Each time, the one who didn't win finished second.

"An awesome deal," Jensen says.

Only figures. After all, we're talking about two peas in a pod here.

SURROGATE FATHER

Adkins and Jensen spent almost all of their childhood days hanging out at Chatmoss. Perhaps nobody knows them better than the club's longtime head PGA professional Robert Weinerth, who taught them the game and has watched them grow into classy young men.

"I've taught both of them since they were 8 or 9," the 55-year-old Weinerth says. "They both have different swings. It was the kids that did it. If I had told them to go stand on one foot and swing left-handed, they would do it. They would ... and they would do it all night."

"During the summer months, they would get here about 9 in the morning and at 9 at night they'd still be going. They'd say, 'C'mon pro, let's go play.' They

can beat me, but they can't beat me all the time.

"It was a lot of fun for me and they've kept me young all these years. I have children, but I never had a boy. So they've always been close to me. Jack used to live beside me and Dylan has pretty much spent most of his time with me. They have worked for me from the time they were 12 years old to right now. They've worked all my tournaments. They've done pretty much everything that I taught them to do."

Weinerth, who has been at Chatmoss for 26 years, also coaches Carlisle's golf team. Led by the Adkins-Jensen combination, the squad compiled a staggering 70-1 record the past five years.

"Jack and Dylan always pushed each other to get better," Weinerth says. "They got along, so there was never any animosity there."



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—Dylan Jensen (right) with Adkins

It made Dylan a better player, and it made Jack a better player, too.

"It showed this year. Dylan won the [VSGA Junior] Match Play and Jack came in [a tie for] second in the stroke play [VSGA Junior Amateur at Roanoke Country Club]."

"Dylan has really shown his colors this summer. He's won three tournaments – the Junior Match Play, the Haley Memorial and the Deep Spring Junior Invitational."

LOYAL LOOPER

Last year, both players made it to the semifinals of the VSGA Junior Match Play Championship at Roanoke Country Club. As match play unfolded, Adkins and Jensen were forced to go head-to-head in the event's semifinals. Imagine that.

After Jensen drained a 5-foot birdie putt on No. 18 to square the match, Adkins one-upped his good friend, rolling in a 30-foot birdie putt on the first extra hole.

"Probably our most competitive match on the biggest stage," says Adkins, who is seven months older than Jensen. "That was really a tough match; a memorable one for sure. Then I made a long putt that I had no business making for a birdie on the first extra hole to win. I wasn't thinking about making it – I was thinking about two-putting it and keeping the match alive – and it just went in and that was the match."

Recalling the Adkins' dagger to his back, Jensen laughed and quips, "Man, I couldn't believe my good friend would do that to me."

So what did Jensen do? He put his clubs down and picked up Adkins' bag, and caddied for his close pal in the final.

"Yeah, and he never tipped me. I guess I didn't help him enough," cracks Jensen, referring to Adkins' 3 and 2 loss to three-time winner Mikey Moyers of Stanardsville in the deciding encounter.

Adkins eliminated his close friend from last year's VSGA Junior Match Play, but Jensen turned around and caddied for him in the championship final the same day. "I would definitely say that proves how tight we are," Adkins says.



Photo by Keith Decker

"I think Dylan is still waiting for a tip," Adkins responds in deadpan fashion. "I would definitely say that proves how tight we are, though."

Decker, who had made the hour drive from Martinsville to Roanoke to watch "his boys" play, was thoroughly impressed.

"Those two are a great team together," Decker notes. "You talk about friendship. It hit Dylan pretty hard there right at first when he lost, but within five minutes he was ready to go and he caddied for Jack."

"Dylan got his behind whipped earlier in the day, then caddied for Jack and didn't get a tip, but you know what? He's a true friend. And not many people have a lot of true friends, but these guys sure are."

FAMILY CONNECTION

As are their families. Stoked by the relationship of their sons, their fathers have become tight, too. Jensen said his father, Rob, a 3-handicap, and Jack's father, Jeff, basically a scratch golfer, used to hook up in team matches with the boys when they were young.

"It would always be Jeff and me against Jack and my dad," Jensen recalls. "We had good matches. I guess Jack got the best of it because he'd always say he was the difference between the two teams. It was always pretty close, though."

Of course, Dylan did one-up his friend in late June when he took home his first VSGA title by winning the Junior Match Play.

"Jack didn't caddie for me because he lost in the quarterfinals the previous day," Jensen says. "But as soon as he found out



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— Keith Decker (center), with Jensen (left) and Adkins at this year's VSGA Club Championship.

that I won, he was one of the first people who called and congratulated me."

NEW PATHS

Now everything is about to change for the Adkins-Jensen connection. Both have received college golf scholarships, but it's not a package deal. They're headed to different schools. Jack is bound for Elon (N.C.) University, where Decker starred decades ago, while Dylan is ticketed for Longwood University in Farmville, Va.

It's almost akin to a longtime married couple getting a divorce. Well, maybe not.

"I'm not sure we've ever had an argument ... Jack and I both are pretty laid-back," Jensen says.

"Frankly, I don't know how it's going to work. I think we're going to be playing in a couple of tournaments against each other this fall because our schools will both be there. And once we're back home on break, I'm sure we'll be playing golf again together. But it's going to be weird not playing with him almost every day."

"I'm sure I will be getting some late-night text messages from Jack. He always sends me something ridiculous. Jack is so ridiculous; he's more out there than me."

That comment drew a chuckle from the more reserved Adkins, who conceded life is about to change drastically for both parties.

"It's one of those things that you don't know what's going to happen until it actually happens," he says. "So it's going to be interesting to just kind of see how it pans out."

The rising young golfers may not know, but the savvy veteran does.

"Dylan is a little more outgoing and Jack is a little more serious about it," Decker says. "But they complement each other very, very well. I can't say enough how delightful they are to be around. They're a natural-type funny, they're quick-witted. They are going to do well not only in college golf, but in life. And they're both going to deserve it, because they have worked hard for it."

Author Randy King is a sports reporter for The Roanoke Times and a frequent contributor to Virginia Golfer.