

Father knows best (on course)

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Craig and Alan Kliewer hold a one-shot lead going into final round at Lanco Susquehanna Bank Better Ball championship at Meadia Heights.

It wasn't that long ago that Alan Kliewer was your typical teenage boy.

"Back in his younger years," Craig Kliewer said of his son with a smile, "Dad didn't know anything."

Apparently, in Alan Kliewer's mind, that even applied when the two played golf together, despite his father's success in the sport.

"When I was 14 I was so naive," Alan Kliewer said. "I thought I knew everything. Obviously ... he knows the game and plays it well. And if I can learn from somebody who's better than me, I'm going to take the opportunity."

The father-son duo took advantage of plenty of opportunities Saturday afternoon at Meadia Heights Golf Club, where they posted 6-under 65 on their home course to take the first-round lead in the Lanco Susquehanna Bank Better Ball championship.

Gregg Hostetter and Connor Lefever are one-shot back after an opening-round 66, along with the Meadia Heights team of Corey Gast and KJ Stutz.

Defending champions Andy Zook and Aaron Fricke are two off the lead after carding 4-under 67.

The final round gets underway today at 9:45 a.m. back at Meadia, where the Kliewers will tee off in the final pairing with Lefever and Hostetter at 2:15 p.m.

That the Kliewers are in that final group shouldn't be a major surprise, especially at Meadia, where Craig has been a member since 1980 and where Alan began playing junior golf at the age of six.

The father-son duo, competing in their sixth straight Lanco Better Ball, already have a couple of Golf Association of Philadelphia fatherson events to their credit, and the father-son competition at Meadia.

Interestingly enough, Craig Kliewer won the 2008 Lanco Better Ball with Gast, who will be stalking him in the second-to-last group today.

"It might add a little more pressure," Alan Kliewer, a 26-year-old cost accountant, said of holding the overnight lead. "Being at home at a course you know so well benefits us, but we still have to play well. We still have to hit the shots."

The tandem took a while to get in that groove Saturday, when they were 1-under at the turn with the more difficult of Meadia's nines still to play.

“We sort of just lollygagged through the front,” said Craig Kliewer, 54, who works in sales.

That changed in a hurry, starting with Alan’s sand wedge to four feet, which led to a birdie at the par-4 10th.

The elder Kliewer took over for a while from there, draining birdie putts of three, five and 18 feet on Nos. 12-14 to get the team to 5-under.

Perhaps the biggest of Craig Kliewer’s putts on the back nine, though, came on the next two holes.

After practically rolling his tee shot at the par-4 15th, Craig eventually rolled in an 18-footer to save par, before sinking another 12-foot parsaver at the par-4 16th.

“There’s a confidence level that we both have with each other, and we’re both very competitive,” Craig Kliewer said of keeping the round intact down the stretch. “We’re competitive to the nth degree.”

As Alan — despite being quiet for a few holes — showed at the par-3 18th, where he hit a 5-iron 28 feet left of the hole and drained a bending birdie putt to get his team to 6-under.

The Kliewers, who didn’t record a single bogey Saturday, needed only 11 putts to get through the back nine.

Doing it as a father-son team made it all the more rewarding.

“It’s always fun playing with your dad,” Alan Kliewer said. “My dad knows my game best. And when I’m having a bad hole, he knows the right things to say and he knows how to correct my swing more than anyone else.”

Guess he did know a few things, after all.

LANCO Better Ball

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Andy Zook’s approach to the game is much less complicated, as he explained after the first round of last year’s Lanco Susquehanna Bank Better Ball championship.

“Go out, hit it, find it, hit it again, and hope to make a couple of putts,” Zook said. “Keep it simple.” Apparently, that philosophy works too.

Despite an epic charge by eventual runners-up Gregg Hostetter and Connor Lefever — who fired a final-round, 11-under 61 — Zook and Aaron Fricke posted back-to-back 64s last year at Crossgates Golf Club to win the Lanco Better Ball by a shot at 16 under.

The duo will begin defense of that crown today at Meadia Heights Golf Club, where the first round gets underway at 10 a.m. Zook and Fricke will go off No. 1 in the day’s second pairing at 10:10 a.m.

A quick look at the field suggests defending might not be easy for Zook and Frick, who might even get a push from the guys in their own 10:10 pairing, which also includes Bent Creek Country Club's Ron Weaver and Robby Rowe.

Weaver, who was part of three previous winning Lanco Better Ball teams, is an assistant men's golf coach at Millersville University, where Rowe was second on the team in scoring average last season as a sophomore.

Still, on paper, Hostetter and Lefever could be seen as the field's biggest threat, having won the Lanco Better Ball in 2012 before pulling off last year's miraculous final round at Crossgates that left them in second by a single shot.

Following is a look at some other notable pairings in this year's event, which concludes with Sunday's 10 a.m. final round back at Meadia Heights.

n Deryl Denlinger and David Denlinger: The father-son team tees off at 10:20 a.m. Deryl is a two-time Lanco Amateur champion who won last year's Lanco Mid-Am. His son, David, who recently completed a successful golf career at Division I Charleston Southern University, drained a 10-foot birdie putt on the last hole to win his first Lanco Amateur last month. David Denlinger is also the 2011 Lanco Open and the 2010 Lanco Match Play champion.

n Derek McCarty and Corey Wenger: The 2010 Lanco Better Ball champs, McCarty and Wenger (10:40 a.m. starting time) are a consistent threat in this format, evidenced by their tied-for-third showing last year at Crossgates.

n Corey Gast and KJ Stutz: In his three Lanco Better Ball wins in a four-year span with Pete Toole from 1999-2002, Stutz was the housekeeper, so to speak, with his consistent ability to make par allowing Toole to go after pins at will.

All of which seems to be a perfect fit for a guy like Gast, who birdied seven of his first 12 holes in the semifinals of last year's Lanco Match Play at Lancaster Country Club before claiming that event for the third time in five years that same day.

Gast, who won the Lanco Better Ball with Craig Kliewer in 2008, tied for ninth last month at the Lanco Amateur.

Keep in mind that Gast and Stutz, who are paired with McCarty and Wenger at 10:40 a.m., will be playing their home course.

n More father-son duos: At 1:10 p.m., Ken Phillips will tee off with his son Reid, along with Craig Kliewer and his son Alan.

Ken Phillips has three Lanco Amateur and three Lanco Open titles to his credit, along with a victory at the 2006 Lanco Mid-Am. Ken Phillips also won Lanco Better Ball titles with Dan Burton in 1996 and Dan Kinney in 1982.

Craig Kliewer, who will also be playing his home course, is a two-time Lanco Senior champ who tied for seventh at last month's Lanco Amateur. Craig Kliewer won the 2008 Lanco Better Ball with Corey Gast.

n The veterans: An interesting foursome from Lancaster Country Club goes off at 1:40 p.m.

John Sweeney, the 1996 and 2002 Lanco Open champ, is paired with Rob Campbell, who won the Lanco Better Ball with Jarred Texter in 2005.

Also in that group is the team of Brian Groff and John Barry, who paired to win this event in 1984 and '94, and tied for sixth last year at Crossgates.

Groff, who also teamed with Terry Hertzog to win the 1987 Lanco Better Ball, has two Lanco Open titles and one Lanco Amateur crown to his credit.