

Death of a Champion

When Jeff Doan of Viroqua won the Wisconsin Interscholastic Athletic Association Division 2 boys state golf title last June, few people would have guessed by his reaction that he was just a sophomore.

Doan, in his first state appearance, shot 71-75-146 at University Ridge in Verona and won a two-hole playoff over Dan Woltman of Watertown Luther Prep.

Doan's performance was impressive enough. But it was what Doan did afterward that set him apart from most 16-year-olds who suddenly are thrust into the spotlight. First, Doan quietly congratulated Woltman. "There was no jumping up and down. He was very in control," said Buzz Guist, Viroqua High School golf coach.

Then Doan headed to the practice range at University Ridge and started hitting balls. "There were a couple of things he wanted to work out (on his game)," Guist said.

Doan may have realized one dream in winning a state title, but he knew he had to continue to improve to reach his next set of goals – winning more junior titles, playing college golf and someday maybe playing the PGA Tour.

Tragically, Doan never will be able to realize his potential. Doan died Jan. 15 in Viroqua when he collapsed in the locker room between periods of a high school hockey game. Unbeknownst to him, Doan had an enlarged heart. Teammates and Doan's hockey coach said he looked and acted normal before collapsing.

A doctor tried to resuscitate Doan, 17, and a defibrillator was used on him at the hockey arena, but he was pronounced dead at a local hospital.

Hundreds of people attended Doan's funeral, among them Woltman, the Wisconsin State Golf Association junior boys player of the year. After winning the WIAA title, Doan had become somewhat of a local hero in Viroqua, a Vernon County city about 40 miles southeast of La Crosse. His hockey jersey was retired at a ceremony in February.



Jeff Doan

Doan was a co-captain on Viroqua's hockey team, but everyone in Viroqua knew his first love was golf, since about age 6. He was the Coulee Conference golf champion and player of the year his freshman and sophomore years. He missed going to state as a freshman by two shots.

After winning the WIAA title, he played last August in the WSGA Junior Boys Championship at Rock River Hills in Horicon and tied for 13th (shooting 74-72-71-217). He finished 22nd in the WSGA junior player of the year standings.

Doan already had visited the UW-Madison campus and more than likely would have been offered some type of Badger golf scholarship, according to B.J. Endicott, assistant UW men's coach. "He definitely had the ability to play at the Division I level. We wanted him to be part of the program,"

Endicott said.

Endicott also is a Viroqua native who played at state in 1996 under the tutelage of Guist. Endicott knew Doan for years and helped mentor him as a young player. "I kind of took him under my wing. You could tell when he was 12 he had tons of ability. He had some of the best hands I've ever seen around the green, and he really hit it well too – long and straight."

Last year Doan set the course record at Viroqua Hills GC, a 7-under-par 64, while playing with club pro Ron Bronk. Doan's swing coach for three years, PGA pro Tom Gees of La Crosse, referred to him as a 1 in 25 million talent, Guist said.

Doan was a fixture at Viroqua Hills. He rode his bike there early on summer mornings, worked and played all day and didn't leave until the carts were lined up at dusk. "The dedication – I've never seen it before. Jeff was deadly serious about his golf game," Guist said. "Sometimes when we'd come back from tournaments, Jeff was already lining up in the van who was going to go out and play with him until dark."

- Jerry Poling