Liggett wins senior title; Fowler 4th

By GARY BAINES
Denver Post Writer

DENVER — One shouldn’t mistake the seemingly carefree attitude of Jim Liggett for a lack of intensity. The 55-year-old dentist from Aurora is as happy-go-lucky as anyone you’d ever want to meet. Even while playing in golf tournaments, his actions convey the message that he doesn’t have a care in the world.

But on this night, it’s a different story. Liggett is as competitive and serious as most, if not more so.

And that spirit helped him rebound from a 77 Thursday in the senior stroke play championship to win his first major amateur title in the state since 1969.

To do it, Liggett pulled an upset of sorts Friday, surpassing the two favorites entering the final round — Ron Moore and Les Fowler, who led by a stroke going into the final 18, shot 77 and finished three shots back of Liggett’s winning six-over-par 119 total. Boulder’s Fowler, who was tied for the lead after two holes Friday, likewise had a less-than-auspicious finish, carding a 78 and ending up in a fourth-place tie with Roger Little at 224. Dale Einspahr, who plays out of the host Ranch Country Club, came in third at 223.

Liggett, a Denver Country Club member who led after the first day of the tournament, started the day two strokes back of Moore and one behind Fowler. But after he birdied the first hole and Moore bogeyed to make for a three-way tie for the lead, Liggett was never headed. In fact, he outscored Moore by seven shots over the first six holes and held a comfortable five-shot cushion.

“I knew that even though I was behind, I could get it together to-day,” said Liggett, whose only previous major state amateur win was in the 1969 open-division match play, “I got two shots back on the first hole and I knew my game was well under control. And my friends (Fowler and Moore) were having their troubles. I ended up with a five-shot lead after nine and started coasting.”

After getting three birdies on the front nine and scoring 34, things started going away for Liggett. He bogeyed four straight holes — Nos. 13-16 — and his lead was cut to one at Moore tapped in a four-inch birdie on 16.

“It didn’t really seem like I was playing that badly, but in reality, I guess I was choking,” said Liggett, the runnerup in the tournament to Fowler last year. “My Adams Apple was doing flip flops.”

The par-three 17th was pivotal in deciding the champion. Liggett, who had made a triple bogey on the hole Thursday, put his ball in a bunker behind the green and looked to be facing a bogey at best. Moore, meanwhile, was safely on the green, though some 33 feet from the hole. It seemed that Moore would at least even the tournament going into the final hole.

But thanks to Liggett’s sand shot holes 18, the flagstick got to of Moore’s five-three putts on the day, no such suspenseful ending was in store. Liggett sank a 12 footer for a par on 17 and took a two-shot cushion into 18, where he finished with a birdie to account for the three-stroke winning margin.

“The golf gods surfaced when I hit that flagstick,” said Liggett. “If I wouldn’t have hit it, I would have been at least 30 feet by the hole.”

Winning came as no surprise to the doctor.

“I thought into the tournament very positive about my potential for doing well,” he said. “In a practice round I shot 70. I thought to myself, ‘If I can keep my wits about me, I can have a decent score.’”

Senior Stroke Play

Championship Flight results after Friday’s final round of the state senior stroke play championship at the Ranch Country Club in Denver.

Jim Liggett, Denver CC, 79-77-72-228
Blue-Neale, Cherry Hills CC, 79-76-77-232
Del Einspahr, Ranch CC, 81-76-79-236
Les Fowler, Boulder CC, 83-77-79-240
Roger Little, Inverness CC, 87-73-79-243
Larry Boyer, Grantwood CC, 87-76-78-241
Al Gooden, Willis Case GC, 84-79-75-238
Ken Stanfield, Los Verdes, 88-76-77-241
Bill Wappler, Denver CC, 81-76-82-239
Johannes Christian, Cherry Hills CC, 84-78-77-239
Bob Karrin, Pinchot CC, 83-80-77-240
Dan Haden, Lakewood CC, 82-77-79-238
Ron Egan, CC of Colorado, 82-78-77-237
Jim Grinnell, East Pheasant, 81-78-81-240
Bill Toddy, Hadley Hills GC, 80-78-84-242
Bill Fultum, Willis Case GC, 80-78-75-243

Strokes over winning total of 228.