FGCSA's best players to face 600 challengers

Three national tournament veterans, including a former champion, and one rookie will lead 20 Florida superintendents against 580 out-of-state challengers in the 40th GCSAA Golf Championship Feb. 19-20.

The tournament, begun in 1938 and held annually since 1968, is the first event of the eight-day International Golf Course Conference and Show.

As host chapter, Florida will have five foursomes vying for the team title that has never come to the Sunshine State, but this may be the year.

The Floridians are led by former GCSAA national champion David Oliver, now superintendent at Martin Downs in Stuart, who won the 1986 individual title at Palm Desert in California.

"Without a doubt, it was the biggest thrill of my golfing career," says the 34-year-old Oliver, who grew up on Forest Lakes GC in Sarasota.

The former University of Florida intramural champion will have an edge in his quest to win a second national title and to stop Dave Powell, superintendent at Myers point CC in Charlotte, N.C., from winning his fourth championship in five years: one of the two courses used for the championship flight in the 36-hole event will be the New Course at Grand Cypress Resort.

Buck Buckner
Superintendent
Orange Tree GC
Orlando
Handicap: 3
Basis: 1989 Poa Annua Classic champion
GCSAA Experience: First year
Major titles: Runner-up, 1989 National Lefty Championship
Strength: Irons
Weakness: Driving accuracy
Biggest thrill in golf: Shot 3 under par over last two days in National Lefty

Joe Ondo, CGCS
Superintendent
Winter Pines GC
Winter Park
Handicap: 3
Basis: First alternate (Low Average)
GCSAA Experience: 7 tournaments
Major titles: Florida Publinx, Crowfoot Open (2), Poa Annua Classic
Strength: Ability to keep the ball in play; can adapt game to "whatever is working today"
Weakness: Long irons
Biggest thrill in golf: Florida Publinx title

Dave Oliver
Superintendent
Martin Downs G&CC
Stuart
Handicap: 2-3
Basis: Crowfoot Open Champion
GCSAA Experience: 5 tournaments, won championship in 1986
Major titles: University of Florida Intramural championship; Poa Annua Classic, FTGA Research Tournament (2)
Strength: Getting it up and down
Weakness: Driving accuracy
Biggest thrill in golf: 1986 GCSAA championship
Oliver qualified for Florida’s “A Team” (whose entry fees are paid by the state organization) by winning the Crowfoot Open over the same Jack Nicklaus layout... in the middle of the summer.

Other members of the first team

Fred Klauk
Superintendent
TPC at Sawgrass
Ponte Vedra Beach
Handicap: 4
Basis: Low Average
GCSAA Experience: 6 tournaments
Major titles: Crowfoot Open, FTGA Research Tournament, Runner-up, Palm Beach County amateur
Strength: Middle irons, putting
Weakness: Driving
Biggest thrill in golf: Second place in the Palm Beach County Amateur against most of the best players in the state

Fred Klauk, 39-year-old superintendent of the Tournament Players Club at Sawgrass in Ponte Vedra — the PGA Tour’s home course — made the team by accumulating the lowest total score in the Florida GCSA’s three official qualifying events: Poa Annua, Crowfoot and FTGA Research Scholarship tournament.

Also a Gator intramural champ, Klauk was introduced to the game by his father and he played for his high school team in Riviera Beach.

Rounding out the top foursome is Joe Ondo, Florida GCSA’s golf chairman and multiple titleholder from previous years who made this year’s team through the back door.

With the second-lowest average for the season, Ondo moved up when FTGA champ Hal Hicks learned he could not play in the national event.

Competitors in the championship flight will be tested by two entirely different types of golf courses.

Nicklaus’ links-style New Course has nary a tree and very little water, with ball-eating lovegrass everywhere off the beaten path.

Hunters Creek, the other venue for the low handicappers, features wall-to-wall turf with more than 5,000 trees. Water comes into play on 13 holes.

Designed by Lloyd Clifton and opened in February, 1986, Hunters Creek has been host to the Florida Open, the Florida State Amateur, a U.S. Open qualifier and a PGA Tour Qualifying School sectional tournament.

The rest of the field, competing on a modified point-quota system, will test the three courses at Walt Disney World Resort, all designed by Joe Lee (See profile, page 64).