**Champions for Kids finds home at historic black club**

By MARK LESLIE

**G ARNER, N.C. — Champions for Kids, a 6-year-old program that had a head start on the bumper crop of youth golf initiatives being fostered around the country, is about to get a “headquarters” Junior Golf Academy and support from major industry organizations.**

Meadowbrook Country Club here, one of the country’s first black-owned private golf clubs, is allowing the program to use its facilities as its headquarters as well as build a new nine holes and rebuild the existing nine to be youth-friendly. The resulting 18-hole executive track will play to a par-64 for adults and par-70 for youngsters.

“We have done a lot in the six years we’ve been in existence,” said Champions for Kids founder Larry Turner. “Now, in the development of this junior golf facility, we really feel we can be one of the models for the rest of the country.”

The Champions for Kids mission is to provide youths 8-14 with golf training and focused academic mentoring using golf-related instructional materials, according to Turner.

The program has gained support from some famous names in the sports world. Its national spokesperson is LaRee Sugg of the LPGA Tour. LPGA Hall of Famer Kathy Whitworth is on national advisory board. Calvin Peete and Jim Thorpe have participated, as has Dr. LeRoy Walker, past president of the U.S. Olympic Committee. In 1996 Golf Digest awarded Champions for Kids its Junior Development Award.

But the main cog in its future is the new Junior Golf Academy.

While the program normally has 200 youths participate each year, Turner said: “This will change immensely with the academy because we will be serving a much larger area — five counties. And it’s of major significance because of the enormous amount of growth here.”

The Research Triangle (Raleigh, Durham and Chapel Hill) region’s boom has seen some of the world’s wealthiest companies build headquarters here, and Champions for Kids is beginning to form partnerships with some of them.

“At the hub of this was the negotiation for the facility,” Turner said. “And that was the most important piece — having the home base and having the leverage of the golf industry to put their brand name on this project. Once companies hear the PGA Tour and USGA are involved, their affection changes completely.”

“We will be a charter member of First Tee, and the facility will be a First Tee site,” Turner said.

Turner sees the program as developing more than golf skills.

“This is a comprehensive and long-range effort, with the goal of seeing these youths go on and be successful and productive,” he said.

“I know, from my own experience, what kept me focused and motivated as a youngster, because adults valued the kids in our community. “Also, youngsters learn through sports, especially sports steeped in the values of integrity and courtesy — things you find in your home.”

In the mentoring program, college professors work with golf pros to establish the junior golf curriculum and evaluate the program. Serious youngsters have continuing opportunities to move into college-preparatory work.

“Champions for Kids has been at the head of the curve involving youths and golf. “There was no For the Good of the Game, or First Tee program in 1996,” Turner said. “So we were ahead of the game. But, it was hard for people to grasp that we were trying to establish a junior golf facility.”

Turner had worked with Meadowbrook for several years and club members “saw the opportunity to do something that otherwise would be difficult to accomplish,” he said. “Once people see that you are really doing it for the kids and that becomes your mission, they come on board.”

The reward, Turner said, is watching youngsters come into the program and develop into young men and ladies.

“How you behave on the golf course is how you behave in general,” he said. “It makes you want to work with kids. If we have expectations that they will do well, they will do well. If we’re consistent with those expectations, it’s a reward to work with kids.”

Richard Mandell of Whole In One Design in Durham, who is designing the renovations and new nine, said the project will be built in three phases on the 120-acre site:

- From March to June 15, they will rebuild the tees and bunkers and add kids’ tees to the existing 1st through 7th holes.
- Starting June 16, they will build the new nine, plus rebuild the existing 9th hole and half the 8th hole.
- Next, they will redesign the fairways and greens on the first seven holes of the existing nine.