

## 1974 U.S. Amateur

On August 26 to 31, 1974, Ridgewood Country Club hosted the seventy-fourth United States Amateur championship, the tournament returning to the New York Metropolitan area for the first time in twenty-eight years. An outstanding field of two hundred competed over the 6,754-yard East-West course in hot, muggy weather that turned damp for the semifinals.

Veteran amateurs such as Bill Campbell, Dick Siderowf, Gary Cowan, Vinnie Giles, Jerry Courville, and New Jersey's own Chet Sanok – at age fifty-six playing in his ninth amateur – faced off against future Tour stars like nineteen-year-old NCAA champion Curtis Strange, Jay Haas, Andy Bean, Gary Koch and Bill Rogers. Defending champion Craig Stadler was co-favorite with Long Island's George Burns, but was eliminated in the first round by an unheralded twenty-three-year-old iron worker named Larry Lis.

The man of the hour proved to be twenty-year-old Jerry Pate of Pensacola, Florida, a coming senior at the University of Alabama. Pate was playing in his first (and last) U.S. Amateur, just twenty-two months before his famous 5-iron from the rough won him the U.S. Open title at the Atlanta Athletic Club.



After eliminating veteran Ed Tutwiler in an early round, Pate faced his first major confrontation in a fifth-round match against Burns. Pate won the match 2&1 after Burns sealed his own fate by hooking out of bounds on the seventeenth hole (8 West). He had taken the lead with a ten-foot birdie putt on the sixteenth green. Perhaps the key blow in that match was a Pate chip-in to win the ninth hole and even the match. Pate's victim in the quarterfinals was Bill Campbell, who was playing in his thirty-second Amateur. Pate won by a count of 4&2 after being shaken early in the match when warned about slow play.

Some details from the early rounds follow, as printed in the New York Times:



*With water to the right of them and out of bounds to the left, 144 golfers teed off on the first hole at Ridgewood Country Club's East course today in the 74th annual United States Amateur championship. When the shooting subsided after the first round of match play, the defending champion, Craig Stadler, was on the casualty list.*

*Stadler, a stocky senior from the University of Southern California, held a 2 up lead after 12 holes but lost the next three holes and was upset by Larry Lis, a 23-year-old ironworker from Avella, Pa., 1 up. – August 27, 1974*

*Today Campbell needed every bit of his durability as he was forced to the 25th hole before beating Warren Choate, a 21-year-old Pennsylvanian playing in his first national championship. A stunning birdie 3 on the seventh extra hole at The Ridgewood Country Club gave Campbell his triumph in the second round. Campbell's triumph came on a hot, muggy day when a man half his age might have had difficulty just walking 25 holes, let alone playing that many. – August 28, 1974*

*Only three of golf's young pro prospects remained in the 74th United States Amateur championship today when the field was cut to the eight quarterfinalists at The Ridgewood Country Club. The three were Curtis Strange, 19-year-old National Collegiate champion from Wake Forest; Gary Koch, the national junior champion from the University of Florida; and Jerry Pate, 20, (see*

*image to left) a University of Alabama senior, who turned in the day's biggest upset by eliminating George Burns of Port Washington, L.I. Pate was the big surprise this morning when he took on the long-hitting Burns. The score was 2 and 1 in a match that ended on the 17th hole when Burns booked his tee shot out of bounds. Pate and Burns came to the ninth hole tied. When Pate's approach dropped short on the fringe, some 35 feet from the pin, Burns seemed assured of at least making the turn still even or possibly 1 up. But Pate, who first took out his putter for his third stroke, exchanged it for a 6-iron and chipped the ball into the cup for a winning birdie. – August 30, 1974*

Meanwhile, John Grace, a twenty-six-year-old real estate broker from Fort Worth, who considered himself a weekend golfer, had a rather easy trip to the finals. His 3&1 victory in the semifinals over Koch was only the second time the Gary Player look-alike was forced beyond the fifteenth hole. Also in the semifinals, Pate sent Curtis Strange to the sidelines, the turning point coming when he holed a 41-foot birdie putt on 2 West. The match ended 2&1.

Details from the quarter-finals and semi-finals follow from the New York Times:

*Pate added Bill Campbell, the 51-year-old Amateur champion of 1964, and Curtis Strange, the recent National Collegiate champion, to his list of victims today. Grace picked apart Dick Sucher and Gary Koch, one of the pre-tournament favorites. Pate, who has been cutting classes at the University of Alabama since last Friday in order to play here, shot three under par from the eighth hole, which he won, to the 16th where Campbell was forced to concede a birdie and the match. Pate sank a 41-foot putt for a birdie 3 at 11 to overcome a 260-yard drive down the middle by Strange. That was one of the few big, straight drives by the National Collegiate champion, whose tee shots were straying all afternoon. – August 31, 1974*

The championship match proved to be an interesting contrast in styles, pitting Grace's short but straight game against the exceptionally long, but often erratic Pate. Grace often found himself 60 to 70 yards behind Pate off the tee, but also found himself 3-up following birdies on the first two holes after lunch. Grace's par 72 round in the morning included just one missed fairway. Some thought the turning point came when Grace uncharacteristically pushed his second shot on 3 East into the trees, allowing Pate to get one hole back. Nevertheless, Grace held firm, and Pate remained 2-down with eight holes to play.

After regaining one hole at 2 West, Pate evened the match with a regulation par at 5 West when Grace hit perhaps his best fairway wood of the week – over the green – and bogied. Then Pate hit a 7-iron to within 4 feet at 6 West to set up a birdie that gave him the lead. Finally, a miraculous wedge shot from the right rough at 7 West, over a tree and a greenside bunker, followed by a 27-foot birdie putt, gave him a two-hole advantage. Pate won the match, and the championship, by halving the next hole. No one was more surprised at the final outcome than Pate himself whose reaction was: "How can I be the United States Amateur champion? I'm just a hacker."

He was quick to admit that he "just didn't drive the ball well." In fact, he missed fifteen of twenty-seven fairways, and five of eight par-3 greens, during his match with Grace. What won him the title was his ability to escape, Houdini-like, from serious trouble in Ridgewood's trees, and his knack for sinking the crucial putts. Pate played one-under-par golf in the afternoon, after a 75 in the morning round. The tournament demonstrated that the stroke-hole ratings for East and West were just about perfectly aligned. The toughest hole proved to be the long 7 East, which played to the par 4.5 members consider it. Only the short 6 West averaged below par figures.

The tournament was considered a great success for the club, both artistically and in terms of attendance and member enthusiasm.