

C2 Wednesday, June 15, 1994

SPORTS

The

Amateur rules Atlanta Open

Blanton defeats Keppler by two

By Joe Strauss
STAFF WRITER

Braselton, Ga. — Little-known but no longer lightly regarded Kevin Blanton, a Moultrie native and fifth-year senior who had to audition for a half-scholarship at Troy State, on Tuesday became the first amateur since 1987 to win the Bridgestone Atlanta Open.

Facing down one of the state's most respected talents, Blanton, 22, backed up Monday's 68 with a second-day 69 for a 7-under-par total and two-shot upset of Summit Chase head professional and former Walker Cup player Stephen Keppler, the 1993 Georgia PGA Player of the Year.

Amateur Chris Witcher finished four shots behind Blanton for third place. Seven-time Georgia Player of the Year Gregg Wolf, Atlanta Athletic Club professional Tommy Brannen and Tim Carey tied for fourth at 1 under.

However, it was the slight, soft-spoken Blanton who com-

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manded the buzz at Chateau Elan's rolling Legends course.

"Standing on the first tee I thought I had the advantage," said Keppler, a teammate of PGA Tour players Jeff Sluman, Paul Azinger and Nolan Henke at Florida State. "As the round progressed, it became obvious [Blanton] wasn't going to make any mistakes. He wasn't going to fall. He got my respect."

The Atlanta Open is considered the second-most competitive tournament for state golfers, ranking only behind the Georgia Open. Blanton's upset was equally massive.

Playing with Keppler and Savannah amateur Tim O'Neal in the final threesome, Blanton birdied four holes on the front nine to build a four-shot lead over Keppler. O'Neal, a long-hitting sophomore at Jackson State, eliminated himself from contention with a troubled start. After wavering with a bogey at No. 14, Blanton never allowed Keppler to get closer than two strokes.

As an amateur, Blanton had to be satisfied with a silver trophy and a swarm of attention as the state's latest player of influ-

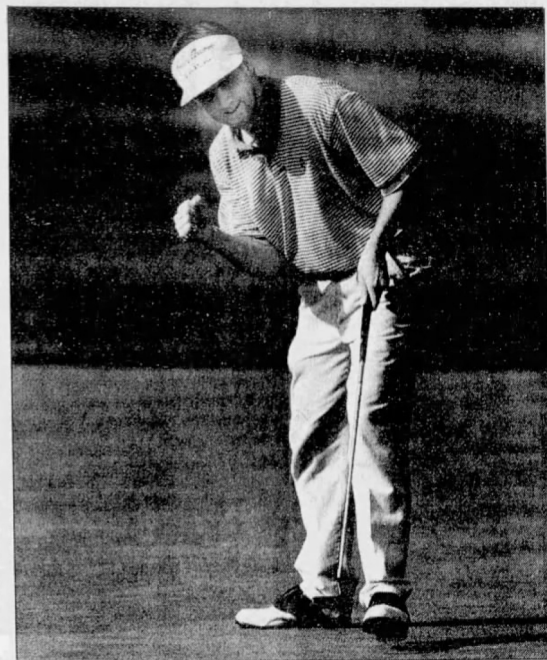
ence. Keppler received first-place money of \$4,000. "It was a win and it wasn't a win," the native Brit joked.

After high school, Blanton's game was considered too immature to merit scholarship consideration from nearby Valdosta State. Only after forwarding tapes and a resumé to Troy State was he awarded half his out-of-state tuition. He was redshirted as a freshman but emerged this spring to win the East Coast Conference individual championship. The news traveled slowly.

"I was sitting up here yesterday and this guy walked up," Blanton recalled. "He wanted to know if there were any good rounds. Somebody told him, 'Yeah, a 68 by Kevin Blanton.' The guy asked, 'Who's he?' It's funny. Hopefully, more people will recognize me now. But it's not that important."

Briefly . . .

Amber Marsh of Jamestown, N.C., shot a 1-over-par 73 to take a one-stroke lead after the first round of the Women's Eastern Amateur Championship on the Highlands course at Atlanta Athletic Club. Georgia players near the top of the leaderboard included **Carolyn Peek**



RICH MAHAN / Staff

Kevin Blanton of Moultrie reacts to a birdie putt on the 11th green during the Bridgestone Atlanta Open.

of Cedartown (75), **Lee Kaney** of Newnan (76), **Wendy Patterson** of Atlanta (77), **Kelly Doohan** of Athens (79) and **Brenda Pictor** of Marietta (79). The 54-hole tournament continues through Thursday.

GOLF

Georgia PGA

Bridgestone Atlanta Open

Tuesday, at The Legends
at Chateau Eian, Braselton

FINAL RESULTS

a-Kevin Blanton	137
Stephen Keppler	139
a-Chris Witcher	141
Gregg Wolff	143
Tommy Brannen	143
Tim D. Carey	143
a-Tim O'Neal	143
Rae Allen	144
Jason Griffith	146
Danny Elkins	146
Gregg D. Hemann	147
Wyatt E. Detmer	147
Richard Hatcher	147
Frank B. Hines, Jr.	148
Craig Stevens	148
Bob Burk	148
Ed Everett	148
Guy Reid	148
Edward W. Gibson	148
a-Rusty Strawn	148
Mike Gill	148

a — denotes amateur.