

WITH A BANG: Local favorites, top seeds fall on Cotton States' first day

Match play began at the W.E. Cole Cotton States golf tournament Thursday after a year off for construction at Bayou DeSiard last summer, and Day 1 provided its share of drama.

Three of the top four seeds fell on the first day, including local favorite and top overall seed Matt Harvey. The former Louisiana Tech golfer entered the day after shooting a tournament-best 138 in Tuesday and Wednesday's qualifying rounds and won his way through the first round Thursday morning. But he couldn't keep the momentum after lunch, falling on his last hole in the afternoon to University of Houston redshirt freshman Jes Schneider.

"I knew going in it was going to be a tough one," Harvey said. "I played with him this morning and saw what he was doing." The former Bulldog took an early lead and fended off Schneider until hole No. 13 when the young Texan bounced back to tie the match. The pair continued to battle until Schneider clinched his third-round position by sinking a putt for par on the final hole.

"I hit the ball real well, put it in the fairways, put it on the greens, and that's what you had to do today," he said. "He hit a heck of a shot to make a bogey (on No. 18), and I had to two-putt. It was a quick putt, and I rolled it down there, and I almost thought I'd made it. It just rolled by the hole about 2 1/2 feet. It was a little tester." Schneider's performance earned him a date today with former high school teammate Tyler Gann, now at Wichita State. The two Houston natives made the trip to Monroe together and will make an interesting ride together to this morning's match.

"That'll be fun — really fun," Schneider said. "He's going to pick me up, and after that it's all business." One pair of teammates missed out on a similar matchup when Oklahoma University golfers Ben Klaus and William Kropp, the second seed, fell Thursday afternoon.

Jamey Taylor and Cameron Hollek beat Klaus and Kropp, respectively, each leading by four holes with only three remaining, and will now face one other in the third round.

The only top-four seed to advance Thursday was 18-year-old Ian Phillips, a soon-to-be TCU freshman golfer from Marietta, Ga. who will meet Matt Johnson in the next round.

"I played really well on the front nine and was three up at the turn, then I bogeyed the first three holes on the back and went one down," Phillips said. "It was like back to the beginning. I knew I'd played good in the beginning, so I just didn't worry about it."

The future Horned Frog is one of the tournament's youngest participants, but along with Purdue's Nakintra "Boom" Ratanakul has also become one of the most talked about.

Louisiana Tech senior Clinton Shepard, Ratanakul's afternoon opponent, fell behind early and could never climb back into the match, which the Boilermaker eventually closed out with a six-hole lead.

"I started off birdie, par, birdie, and then after that, it was just a rollercoaster ride back and forth between birdies and bogeys, and I never could get anything going," Shepard said. "Once you get behind a player like him, he's so solid he's not going to make any mistakes. I tried to force the issue, but I just really didn't have my best swing today."

Ratanakul will now face LSU junior Austin Gutgsell, one of two Tigers to advance to the second day.

LSU senior Ken Looper, a transfer from the University of New Orleans, will compete against Troy Anderson.

Mason Jacobs and Matthew Stephens, Josh Jones and Joel Thelen and Haden Stephens and Barrett Edens complete this morning's pairings.

The eight third-round winners will play today and narrow the field to two semifinal matches Saturday. The last two golfers standing will compete Saturday afternoon for this year's crown.