

# Tidewater Tour offers championship golf for amateurs

**D**o you enjoy playing great golf courses, but have trouble getting tee times on the weekend? Then Lyle Joyner has a deal for you.



**ROBIN  
BRINKLEY**

Joyner is tour director of the Tidewater Amateur Golf Tour. Don't be intimidated by the "T" word.

There's some great competition, but you don't have to be

able to hit a 1-iron 200 yards, up hill, all carry, into the wind, to win.

The tour, which starts its fifth season in March, boasts five flights for players with handicaps from 0 to 20 and above. Membership is open to men, women and juniors, and has mushroomed from 45 in 2004 to 103 last year to "150, maybe 200," this year, Joyner said.

Joyner, a 26-year-old graphic artist, lives in Norfolk's Azalea Acres neighborhood. He played at Booker T. Washington High, which he graduated in 1998, and Chowan College, which he graduated in 2002. He credits most of the growth to word-of-mouth advertising.

"New players tell their friends it's neat, so they go out and bring a buddy," he said. "If everybody does that membership doubles, and that seems to be what is happening."

The tour's Web site, [www.tidewatertour.com](http://www.tidewatertour.com), is filled with endorsements.

"Where else can you find guaranteed weekend tee times, at least twice a month, on some of the best courses in the area?" says George White, Jr., a championship flight player from Suffolk.

"I feel the tour is one of the best things going," says Bryan West, a C flight player from Chesapeake.

The tour fills a gaping hole on the golf landscape. It's gross stroke play under championship rules - no four-ball silliness here - and last year paid

out more than \$25,000 in prizes and gift cards.

The Tidewater Tour is a division of the Amateur Golf Tour, which stretches from Wisconsin to Florida. The Top 10 points leaders in each flight qualify for the Tour Championship Oct. 28 and 29 at Wild Wing Plantation in Myrtle Beach, S.C.

Tidewater finished fifth among 35 divisions last fall, and three of its members placed in the Top 10. Hickory High senior Jonathan Wilson was eighth in the Championship Flight, while Pat Cosgrove tied for fourth and Dave Mullis tied for 10th in the 'A' Flight.

Roy Patterson, who lives in Chesapeake, is the Tidewater Tour's Tiger Woods. He won six of 17 events and took home more than \$900 in gift cards last year.

That was a handsome return of his \$70 membership fee. Golfers also pay entry fees from \$60 to \$145 per event.

There are three major championships - two-day tournaments worth double points. They are May 21 and 22 at Golden Horseshoe in Williamsburg, Aug. 5 and 6 at Royal New Kent in Providence Forge, and Oct. 7 and 8 at Heron's Ridge in Virginia Beach.

Joyner hasn't completed the schedule, but other stops include TPC and Oceana in Virginia Beach, Riverfront and Nansmond River in Suffolk, Cahoon Plantation in Chesapeake, Sewells Point in Norfolk and Bide-A-Wee in Portsmouth.

The September tournament at Williamsburg National will be one of the first events on the new course there.

Golfers can join the Tidewater Tour anytime.

"Last year we had a man join after he read in the paper that a guy won his flight with a 98," Joyner said. "He said, 'Shoot, I can shoot a 98.'"

If you're reading this, then the odds are you can, too.

For information, call 321-1657 or visit [www.tidewatertour.com](http://www.tidewatertour.com).

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