

Fujimoto keeps his poise

By Tom Kensler

Denver Post Sports Writer

THORNTON — Jeff Fujimoto isn't sure he could stand the strain of a Colorado Golf Association Match Play Championship finale that goes the full 36 holes.

Fortunately for this mild-mannered 19-year-old, it didn't.

Fujimoto, a former state junior champion from Arvada, needed only 32 holes to defeat Steve Wash of Westminster 5 and 4 yesterday at Thorncreek Golf Course.

The match ended early when Fujimoto buried an 18-foot birdie putt on the 14th hole of the afternoon round. The 44-year-old Wash, a member of The Ranch Country Club, never led.

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"I was nervous," said Fujimoto, an Arvada West grad who attends Scottsdale (Ariz.) Community College on a golf scholarship. "Before the round, I was real quiet. I didn't know what to say. I was a little jittery. I don't think I got relaxed until I was 5-up with five to go."

That's understandable. Fujimoto was trying to join some rather familiar names who have won the state match-play championship, now in its 93rd year. PGA Tour-type names like Hale Irwin (1966), Steve Jones (1980) and Brandt Jobe (1984, '85 and '88).

And although Fujimoto, who plays out of Indian Tree Golf Course, won the 1992 state junior stroke-play title, he was ousted in the first round last year in this event.

"The great thing about winning is now I can tell my friends that I won a regular tournament," Fujimoto said.

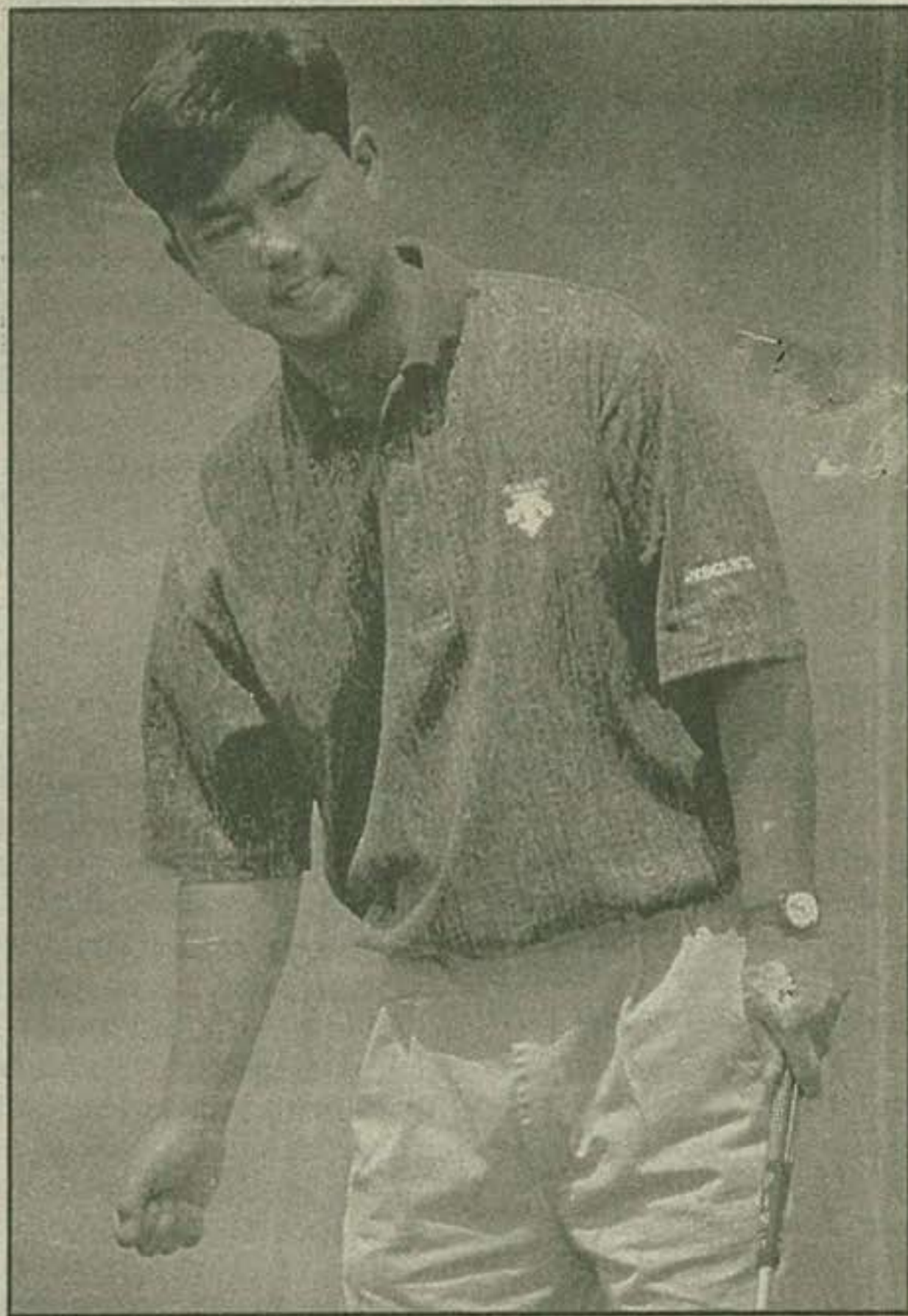
Fujimoto went 3-up in the morning round when Wash three-putted Nos. 5 and 6. Wash pulled back to within two, but Fujimoto made it 3-up at the break by rolling in a 25-footer for a birdie 3 on the 474-yard No. 18.

Wash had opportunities to reverse the momentum when he hit the first four fairways of the afternoon round and Fujimoto missed all of them. But Wash only could make pars, and Fujimoto scrambled successfully to halve the holes.

Wash also left afternoon birdie putts on Nos. 6 and 7 dead toward the cup but each 2 inches shy.

"Missing putts early took away my aggressiveness," said Wash, an inventor who has devised an alignment aid for putting. "You cannot be short in match play."

Fujimoto's best shot of the day — a "hard" wedge



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THE MAN: Jeff Fujimoto, a 19-year-old from Arvada, defeated Steve Wash at Thorncreek.

with the wind on the 178-yard No. 8 in the afternoon round — stopped 1½ feet from the pin. The tap-in birdie gave him a 5-up lead and breathing room.

On the day, Fujimoto hit 19 of 32 greens. He played the morning round in 1-over-par 73 and stood 1-over for the afternoon when the match ended. Wash, who had never entered a state tournament, was 10-over on the day.

Fujimoto needed wins on the last three holes of his first-round match against Kenji Tanaka of Heather-Ridge to avoid a replay of his early exit last year.

"I wanted that last putt today," Fujimoto said of the 18-footer on No. 14. "I didn't want the match to go any longer."