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South Carolina Open

Larick still gets excited at first tee

But former touring pro enjoys being at home

By BOB SPEAR - bspear@thestate.com

Steve Larick traded his quest to make professional golf's major league for family life six years ago, and he loves to teach the game at Lexington's Golden Hills Golf & Country Club. Still, his competitive fires burn fiercely and he started the South Carolina Open on Tuesday with excitement in his veins.

"That never goes away," he said, and his setting the Golden Hills course record with a 64 on aerified greens last week increased his anticipation for the 54-tournament at Fort Jackson Golf Club's Wildcat Course.

"I was surprised how excited I was on the first tee," he said after posting a 2-over-par 73 in the rain-delayed first round. "I hit a great drive and (after a three-hour rain delay) had a 5-iron to the green (on the 488-yard par-4). I was jacked up with adrenaline ... and hooked it 20 yards left."

He laughed and said, "I'm in the right place. My irons were Army golf all day — left, right, left, right. I couldn't get my rhythm."

He might think of what might have been on his scorecard Tuesday. He drilled his tee balls and said he drove well enough "for 67 or 68" before two late bogeys pushed him to 2-over. "The course was there for the taking; it's relatively short (at 6,700 yards for pros and top amateurs)," he said. "It was a long day, and the way I played, I might have been better off at the club checking people in (to play)."

But he doesn't regret his decision to give up the nomadic life of pro tournament golf and settle down with wife Kim, son Joshua and daughter Lyndsey.

"The Nationwide Tour was a fun time of my life," Larick said. "But Joshua started playing baseball and I coached the team, and that's where I needed to be."

An All-American at Elon, Larick worked as an assistant at several Midlands area clubs during his quest to make the PGA Tour before becoming head pro at Indian River and then moving to Golden Hills 14 months ago.

Larick and the others with morning tee times finished their rounds late in the afternoon after two rain delays that totaled more than five hours. The final group, which had an original tee time of 1:33 p.m., finally got on the course at 6:51.

Hunter Howell, a senior at North Carolina State from Raeford, N.C., set the first-round pace with a 5-under-par 66. John Faidley of Winston-Salem followed at 67 with Zachary Collins of Morrisville, N.C. at 69 and five players at 70. Four more matched par.

With half the field on the course, the first round will be completed beginning at 8 a.m. today, and the second round will start immediately. Barring more delays, tournament officials hope to finish the second round today.