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golf extra

Kensler: Praise is heaped on Erie's Colorado National Golf Club

By Tom Kensler
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ERIE — Colorado National Golf Club is hosting an NCAA men's regional for the first time, and if Mountain West Conference associate commissioner Javan Hedlund has a say in it, look for the course to become a regular in the rotation.

Hedlund does have a say in it. As one of six members of the NCAA men's golf committee, Hedlund is observing this regional in an official capacity. His evaluation of Colorado National will be important when it bids for future men's regionals, or perhaps even an NCAA championship.

So far, Colorado National warrants a big thumbs up, Hedlund said.

"Any place can host a tournament, but the question becomes, how engaged are you in the tournament?" Hedlund said Wednesday after watching 13 teams brave blustery conditions for a practice round. "They've done a tremendous job here, from the volunteers, to the golf course, the University of Colorado staff, everybody."

Serving as host, CU spent \$2,000 in signage alone. Greeting teams on the practice tee are the logos of all schools represented. The NCAA

logo was painted into two hillsides near the clubhouse.

"I've never seen that done before," Hedlund said. "It just shows how much everybody has invested themselves in this."

That's what former CU golfer Steve Kerr envisioned two years ago when he purchased the former Vista Ridge Golf Club and renamed it Colorado National, decorating the clubhouse with a painting of buffaloes and various memorabilia of the school's sports teams. A buffalo head hangs over the fireplace in the grill.

Colorado National will host an NCAA women's regional in 2012.

"That's why we did this," said Kerr, who uses the traditional Irish pronunciation of "Care" for his last name. "We want high school golfers in this area to realize they can stay here in Colorado and play in top events. We want to create a regional and national presence for the University of Colorado for golf. And we want to be involved in helping to grow the game in this area."

Although admission is free, college golf tournaments typically do not attract large galleries. But no one knows whom this might touch. Colorado women's golf coach Anne Kelly



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recalled that she decided to make golf her career goal after watching men's and women's pro tour events with her father while growing up in Tucson.

CU men's coach Roy Edwards determined, at age 15, that he wanted to play college golf while watching the 1992 Big Eight Conference men's championship at Prairie Dunes, his hometown course in Hutchinson, Kan.

"I thought that was the coolest thing ever," Edwards recalled.

In addition to seeking college events, Kerr already is looking into applying for a Nationwide Tour event, an LPGA event and various USGA championships.

Footnotes.

The top five teams from each of six regionals advance to the NCAA championship. There is added pressure here on top-ranked Oklahoma State to get through because the Cowboys are host of the tournament final, May 31-June 5 at K arsten Creek in Stillwater. . . . At 7,753 yards, Colorado National is the longest course ever used for the NCAA championships. "But with the elevation, it's playing at about 7,100, about like back home — amazing," Chattanooga coach Mark Guhne said.



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