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Chasing the dream

For much of his life, all signs have pointed to Kevin Kring making a run at professional golf.

That run officially started this summer.

The 22-year-old Kring cashed his first check as a pro last week. And while he won't be catching Tiger Woods on any money lists any time soon — Kring won all of \$431.25 for finishing 21st at the Metropolitan Open in St. Louis — the 2008 Central High School graduate is hoping it's the beginning of a successful career.

The kickstart to that career could come in Springfield.

One of his immediate goals, Kring said recently, is to qualify into the upcoming Price Cutter Charity Championship — a Web.com (formerly Nationwide) Tour event played at Highland Springs Country Club, his home course. The tournament is set for Aug. 9-12, with the Monday qualifier Aug. 6.

For young golfers like Kring, qualifiers held the Mondays before Web.com tournaments can help get a foot in a very heavy door. The Web.com Tour serves as the feeder circuit for the PGA Tour, similar to the Triple-A level of professional baseball.

"With Highland being my home course, and me playing there God knows how many times, I feel like that would be a really

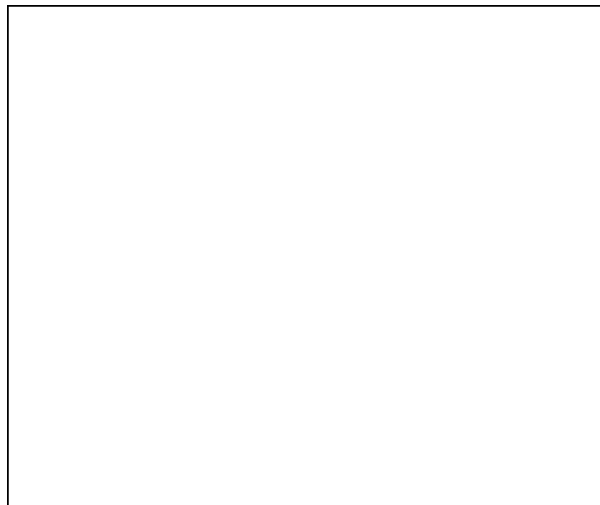
good platform for me because I know I can go there and I know I can finish in the top 10 in that tournament if I get in. I mean without a doubt," Kring said. "I know for sure I'd be about as nervous as I ever have been because of the situation of it.

"I kind of get nervous when I play anyway. It would just mean so much."

It's a lot of ifs, but should Kring qualify for the Price Cutter and play well, it could serve as a springboard for the early phase of a pro career. The top 25 finishers in each Web.com Tour tournament (generally from a field of 144 golfers) are automatically given exemptions into the next week's tournament. At the end of the season, the top 25 money winners on the Web.com Tour receive promotions to the PGA Tour.

Professional golf seems to be the obvious step in a natural progression for Kring, who has long been in the forefront of the Springfield golf scene.

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In a May 9, 2008, article in the News-Leader, long-time Springfield PGA teaching professional Rick Grayson called Kring, “the best high school golfer to ever play (in Springfield) because of some opportunities that didn’t exist for Payne (Stewart). He’s hit 63 (in the 2006 All-City Tournament at Twin Oaks). He’s contended in national junior tournaments. He shot 65 a couple of weeks ago and has been doing it since he was a freshman.”

Indeed, Kring is among the most decorated youth golfers in Springfield history, with a state championship as a senior at Central. Kring also had second, third and 13th-place finishes at state and delivered strong performances in national youth tournaments.

Central golf coach Bob Kinloch got an up-close look at Kring when he was starring for the Bulldogs.

“He’s a very special person. He’ll be successful no matter what he does,” Kinloch said. “Besides being a skilled golfer, he’s got a great head on him. He doesn’t get up too much and doesn’t get down too much. He stays in the middle, and he’s able to handle it.”

But pro golf isn’t a glamorous life — at least not for 22-year-olds who are just starting out.

Kring spends almost as much time trying to line up sponsors and figuring out ways to save money as he does working on his game. It’s one of the necessary evils for a young pro due to the myriad of expenses

encountered throughout the season.

Kring drives to his tournaments. That meant an 800-mile round trip to Evansville, Ind., a few weeks ago. There are plenty of meals at McDonald’s or Subway or anywhere else where Kring can save a few bucks. There are the stays in hotels that aren’t exactly 5-star. That’s not to mention the entry fees at every tournament that cost several hundred dollars apiece and any other golf-related expenses that pop up during the course of a season.

“He will have to receive proper outside backing to support himself,” said Sam Reynolds, Kring’s swing coach. “You’ve got to prove (to those sponsors) that they can make their money back.”

Reynolds, 82, knows what it takes to succeed as a pro. During his 40-year career as the head professional at Hickory Hills Country Club, he watched Payne Stewart grow from a child prodigy into one

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of the PGA Tour's best players. Reynolds' daughter Cathy played on the LPGA Tour from 1978 to 1994.

Reynolds himself played in the 1963 U.S. Open and played in four PGA Championships in the 1960s.

"I personally believe that he has the game that will make it. To what level, I don't know, but he'll make a run at it," Reynolds said. "He's very mature for his age, very smart, and you have to be smart to be a good player out there."

After high school, Kring put together a solid career at the University of Colorado, where he contributed as a freshman and was an anchor in the Buffaloes' lineup for the next three years.

"Like anybody, he's got things he's got to get better at, but I know he's going to work tremendously hard to do that," Colorado men's golf coach Roy Edwards said. "It's a tough life playing mini-tours, doing that thing, and just staying focused. That's not necessarily a weakness of his, it's just something that happens to a lot of those guys. It's a grind out there, but you have to stay positive, keep grinding and wait to play well at the right time."

Kring graduated from Colorado this spring with a degree in political science, but a career in that field will wait. After falling June 22 in the round of 16 in the Missouri State Amateur, Kring made pro golf his full-time job.

Three days later, he shot 63 in a Web.com

Monday qualifier for the United Leasing Championship in Evansville, Ind.

"That just really showed me I was on track," Kring said. "I was feeling really good that day and was able to get it going and got some putts to fall, and I was really happy with the way I closed my round. I never settled at being at five or six under. I was able to just keep it going."

That was good enough to qualify Kring for his first professional tournament, in which he shot 74-70 and missed the cut by a single shot. His second round included a 4-under 32 rally on the back nine at Victoria National Golf Club.

Kring's next tournament comes a week from today, when he'll play in the Colorado Open.

After that it's Web.com Tour Monday qualifiers in Omaha, Neb., Springfield, Kansas City and Knoxville, Tenn.

Reynolds is pulling for him.

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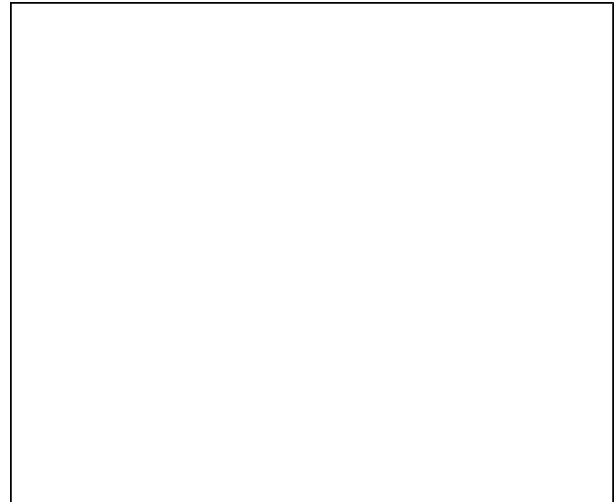


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"If anybody's going make it, I'd put my money on him," Reynolds said. "I really feel like Springfield is going to be real proud of him."

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