



Colorado golf teams find permanent home in Erie

Colorado National Golf Club will be Buffs' home course

By Kyle Ringo

Monday, March 2, 2009

ERIE, Colo. — In the final days of his life in 2005 as cancer overwhelmed him, making it difficult just to speak, Mark's Simpson's passion for golf and the program he led at Colorado lifted his spirits and gave him the strength to discuss a future he wouldn't be around to see.

Simpson spoke in whispers from his bed in hospice care and his longtime friend and former student, Steve Kerr, was there recording every detail of a dream Simpson had throughout his 29 years as CU men's golf coach.

He wanted a home course for his Buffs, a permanent place where his team could practice every day and occasionally host tournaments. Standard stuff at most major schools around the nation, but not at Colorado. Not yet anyway.

It was a dream Simpson inherited from his predecessor, Les Fowler, who coached the Buffs through the 29 years before Simpson took over. Fowler and his son, Mark, used to talk about the possibility of a course near campus. It never came to pass.

Kerr (pronounced Care) gave his word to his dying friend that he would make the dream a reality. He followed through with the final steps Monday as the school announced it had found a permanent home for its golf teams at long last.

"It really is a transformational effort for Colorado's athletic programs because it creates a home for men's and women's golf," athletic director Mike Bohn said in the clubhouse at Colorado National Golf Club, formerly Vista Ridge.

Kerr purchased the club within the past year and signed a 30-year partnership with his alma mater to serve as the Buffs' permanent home. A licensing agreement between the club and school will allow the two to work together on projects such as providing an indoor training area for golfers to use during the winter months. In the past CU golfers have been forced to train in 25-degree weather or worse, just to keep up with the competition around the nation.

Pat Grady, a senior on this year's men's team, joked that the new facility came five years too late. He said he believes it will have a big effect toward keeping some of the best in-state prep golfers home for college and attract others, who might otherwise shy away from coming to Colorado to golf.

Grady said he has played the 7,700-yard course at least 100 times already.

"It's just as tough as any other place that we play," he said.

The club will remain open to the public. A round of golf in peak season costs \$70 on week days and \$80 on weekends. Discounts will be given to CU faculty, staff, alumni and students. The course is routinely cited as one of the 10 best in Colorado.

The course already looks the part with sandstone décor matching the general look of the campus 20 minutes to the west. Golf carts, doorways and large slabs of sandstone already featured the CU logo Monday. Plaques honoring the best golfers of CU's past are hung in the clubhouse where CU and Nike equipment and apparel is sold.

"This a remarkable day for CU and the golf programs," CU women's coach Anne Kelly said. "To see a dream come true is always truly amazing."

Kerr and Bohn made it clear Monday they don't see the partnership as one that will exclusively benefit the athletic department. Simpson's and Fowler's dream was broader and included the entire university and all current and former Buffs.

"There are Buffaloes all across the country, and they all come to Boulder at one time or another," Kerr said. "We want to create a place where they can all come together."

Colorado's current head coaches, Roy Edwards and Kelly, couldn't be happier to have the Buffs' first permanent home course in CU history.

"I think it's huge," Edwards said. "That they can say, 'Hey, we have a home base.' It's a great golf course. It's a great practice facility. They can come out and feel like it's home. It's kind of different when it's your home place."

Simpson's wife, Valorie, was on hand Monday to see her husband's dream come true more than three years after she kissed him goodbye. It was an emotional day.

"This was Mark's dream, literally from the first time I met him to the day he died," she said.

Mark Fowler, who lettered for CU in golf in 1973 and 1974 and graduated with a degree in business, said he knows his father would be happy for the long-overdue agreement. As a former CU golfer, Fowler understands what it's like to float between golf courses depending on the time of year and availability.

"I think this will finally give us a focal point for the golf program," Fowler said.

Play suspended

at SJSU Invitational

SAN JOSE, Calif. -- Heavy rain and windy conditions in northern California forced suspension of play at the Julie Inkster San Jose Spartan Invitational women's tournament on Monday.

Teams will try to complete what will be the event's first and only round on today, starting at 9:30 a.m.

CU is one of 16 schools competing in the tournament, which was supposed to include 54 holes spread

out over two days of competition.



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Colorado gets new home for golfers

Erie course will be boost for CU athletes, university events

By Patrick Ridgell
Longmont Times-Call

ERIE — The Colorado men's and women's golf programs have a home.

Former CU golfer Steve Kerr, 55, has bought the Vista Ridge Golf Club in Erie and has entered a 30-year licensing agreement with the university to create the Colorado National Golf Club. It'll serve as the first home facility for both of CU's teams, and will also be a site for CU to host tournaments and fund-raising events for the school.

"This will be a launching pad for us to engage constituents we haven't previously engaged," CU athletic director Mike Bohn said.

"It'll be cool to have this as our home."

All six Big 12 South programs have their own home courses, along with Iowa State and Kansas State in the North. Men's coach Roy Edwards said 19 of the top 20 programs in the nation also have their own courses.

Private practice areas will be built for the CU teams that they can tailor as they wish. Edwards said the areas will be apart from the rest of the course, which will remain open for public play as well as tournament play, both amateur and for charity. The practice area won't get overworked, Edwards said.

"It'll give our team a tremendous presence to have our own course," Edwards said.

Matt Schalk will remain as the club's director of golf, and Jason Dumler will remain its head pro. Seventy-one new golf carts that'll bear the CU logo have been ordered. Plans for a clubhouse, offices and study hall on the site for the CU golfers are being made.

Kerr said he wants to take golf at CU from a non-revenue to a revenue-generating sport. Bohn said that'll happen because CU will save money on fees it had to pay for its golfers to play at courses all over Boulder.

He also said the university normally hosts five or six tournaments a year to raise money for all parts of the university. They cost \$15,000 each, he said. Those costs will also be gone.

In addition, Kerr said the course will try to draw LPGA and Nationwide tour events in future years, as well as an NCAA regional.

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