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Weather no handicap for area golf programs

By Tom Kensler
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CU's Patrick Grady tees off Wednesday in the Big 12 championship en route to a sixth-place finish. (Sandra J. Milburn, The Hutchinson News)

As challenging as recruiting is in football or basketball, try building a college golf program in these parts. When seeking talented prospects, golf coaches along the Front Range must deal with the W-word.

"If for one second a recruit starts talking about the weather, it's not going to be a good fit," Colorado State men's golf coach Jamie Bermel said. "It's quite obvious we get cold, wind, snow, rain. It's not Florida. It's not Arizona. It's not California."

Despite the inherent challenges, Bermel has his program ranked No. 26 nationally, according to Golfweek magazine. Also overcoming any weather stigma is the University of Denver women's team, a 14th-ranked national powerhouse. The Colorado men's team (No. 47) and women's squad (also No. 47) are on the rise too.

"We've got some really good programs in this area," CU men's coach Roy Edwards said.

The CU men finished second Wednesday in the Big 12 Conference tournament at Prairie Dunes Country Club in Hutchinson, Kan. The last time Colorado finished as high as second in a conference meet was in 1981. Pat Grady finished sixth overall and Derek Tolan seventh.

Edwards' top three players — seniors Tolan (ThunderRidge) and Grady (Broomfield) and junior Luke Symons (ThunderRidge) — are Coloradans. The level of junior boys golf in Colorado is typically above average, but there often isn't enough local talent to supply top-notch college programs.

And Front Range schools don't get all the good golfers. Stanford's Steve Ziegler, of Broomfield, is the nation's ninth-ranked player. Southern Cal's

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Tom Glissmeyer, of Colorado Springs, is ranked No. 26.

Edwards has a contributor from California, and he signed a player from Texas in November. He'd like to lure more players from temperate climates, but most are reluctant to head north, he said. Bermel's top player, Dustin Morris, is from Texas. But three CSU regulars are from Colorado and another is from Minnesota.

The DU women's team has Dawn Shockley of Estes Park, and coach Sammie Chergo lured Katie Kemp-ter from Albuquerque. On Wednesday, Chergo announced that Hawaiian Kimberly Kim has signed to play next season. Kim won the 2006 U.S. Women's Amateur seven days before her 15th birthday. Her sister, Christine Kim, plays at CU.

Area coaches try to convince recruits that their golf games would be served for the long term if they learned to play in all types of weather. On the PGA Tour, for example, Pebble Beach isn't exactly balmy in February.

"I use the example," CU's Edwards said, "that all of the major names in the history of golf, with the exception of Tiger Woods, have come from locales that don't have sunny, warm climates all the time.

"When you talk about Arnold Palmer (Latrobe, Pa.), Jack Nicklaus (Columbus, Ohio), Tom Watson (Kansas City, Mo.), Byron Nelson (Fort Worth, Texas), Sam Snead (Virginia foothills) and all those guys, they didn't grow up in Phoenix."

Colorado State's winter practice facility and those planned for CU and DU should help level the playing field when local programs recruit against warm-weather schools.

And, Edwards said, those who enroll in Front Range schools are amazed at how many good golfing days there are during the winter if they didn't grow up here.

"When I moved from Kansas, I thought the weather was going to be worse here," said Edwards, a former University of Kansas assistant. "When you look at the statistics and data, it's far from it. But it's hard to convince a 17-year-old from California that he might get to play more golf in Colorado than if he goes to Oregon."

What's so bad about a little bit of winter anyway? "When April and May come around, you're not feeling burnt out," DU's Kempter said. "You're finally picking up the momentum when you need to be picking it up."

Tom Kensler: 303-954-1280 or tkensler@denverpost.com

Top area D-I golf programs

(Golfweek rankings)

MEN

No. 26 Colorado State

No. 47 Colorado

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No. 67 Denver

WOMEN

No. 14 Denver

No. 47 Colorado

No. 62 Colorado State

Top-100 individuals

MEN

No. 43 Derek Tolan, CU

No. 47 Patrick Grady, CU

WOMEN

No. 25 Stephanie Sherlock, DU

No. 60 Emily Childs, CU

No. 63 Dawn Shockley, DU

No. 88 Katie Kempter, DU

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