



Grady, Tolan hope to make the grade

Grady, Tolan look to lead CU at NCAA West Regional

By Gary Baines

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BOULDER, Colo. — Golfers don't generally rank very high on the food chain of college sports, but you'd never know that by the headlines Pat Grady and Derek Tolan have garnered just in the last month.

The two University of Colorado seniors have less than three weeks left in their college sports careers, and the awards and honors have flowed in recently.

They were both named to the All-Big 12 team, and Grady was one of just four players in the conference to gain that honor along with all-academic first-team status (Grady just received a degree in both finance and accounting).

At one recent CU event, Tolan was presented the Clancy A. Herbst, Jr., Student-Athlete Achievement Award, given to an athlete who overcame significant adversity to succeed academically and athletically. At the same function, Grady received one of CU's two Big 12 medals for completing his eligibility with an outstanding record in sports and the classroom.

But the most telling gauge of the twosome's status in the bigger scheme of athletics came at the CU Sports Performers of the Year banquet. Out of all the intercollegiate athletes at CU, Tolan and Grady shared the Male Athlete of the Year Award. Tolan also received the Male Career Athletic Achievement Award.

The parade of honors has become almost numbing, but it puts into perspective the mark the two Colorado natives have made at CU.

"I'm excited when I think about the impact these two have had as golfers, students and leaders on the team," coach Roy Edwards said.

And now it's down to the most important orders of business for a college golfer: the NCAA tournaments. The two seniors will lead the Buffs into the NCAA West Regional, which takes place Thursday through Saturday in Daly City, Calif. The top five finishers out of the 13-team field will advance to the NCAA Championship Finals May 26-30 in Toledo, Ohio. CU, seeded eighth this year, hasn't sent a team to the Finals since 2002.

"I think Pat and I both have a good chance, and so does the team," Tolan said this week before leaving for the regional.

Tolan and Grady have each won two tournaments this season and are both ranked among the top 25 college players in the nation by Golfstat.com (Tolan is 21st and Grady 23rd). In every tournament in

which the two have competed this season, one or the other has been CU's top performer, with Grady finishing on top seven times and Tolan five. Overall, Tolan holds a slight lead in stroke average for the season, 71.89 to 71.97, with those numbers representing two of the best three averages in program history.

Suffice it to say that a healthy competitiveness between the two has driven each to new heights.

"We play (a casual round) and it's like life and death," said Grady, a Broomfield resident. "Even in practice we care about beating each other so much. Whether we're qualifying (for a tournament) or chipping and putting, we're grinding like it's the U.S. Open."

That's fitting for two players who have won the Colorado Golf Association's amateur Player of the Year award three of the last four years (Grady in 2007 and '08, and Tolan in 2005).

"If he beats me, he lets me know it, and if I beat him I make sure he doesn't forget it," Tolan said. "But on Friday or Saturday we're the first to call each other and hang out."

The bottom line is that it's an ideal situation for a coach, as Edwards will attest after seeing Tolan and Grady lead the team to more and more success. The Buffs are ranked among the top 40 teams in the nation by Golfweek magazine and have finished first or second in tournaments five times this season. CU's recent string of three straight runner-up showings was capped by the team's best performance ever at the Big 12 Championships, where they trailed only perennial power Oklahoma State.

"I once had a discussion with Oklahoma State coach Mike McGraw, and we were talking about a little guy with a lot of heart and competitiveness. Mike said, 'Don't you wish you could put heart like that into all of your guys?' I think about that when I reflect on how much love Derek and Pat have for CU, the state, and their teammates."

Both players expect to turn pro in the coming months, leaving behind outstanding amateur careers. Tolan has qualified for 10 USGA championships, including the 2002 U.S. Open, where he played as a 16-year-old, and he won the CGA Public Links title last year. Grady is the only player in history to have won arguably the CGA's top three tournaments -- the Stroke Play, Match Play and Publinks -- and last year he was low amateur in the HealthOne Colorado Open and reached the round of 16 at the U.S. Publinks.

And now Tolan and Grady are on the verge of leaving CU after strong senior years. Only Hale Irwin and Kane Webber (with three each) have won more major tournaments in a single season in CU history than the soon-departing duo.

"I'm a huge believer that where there's one really good player there's usually two," Edwards said. "What's awesome about college golf is that you try to beat each other every day, but it's a friendly rivalry. Both Pat and Derek are legitimately excited when the other plays well."



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