



Even NU has place at new CU golf course

Irwin, Jones help dedicate Colorado National Golf Club

By Gary Baines
Sunday, May 3, 2009

ERIE, Colo. — In an event where black and gold were the colors of the day, it was something painted red and white that signified "University of Colorado" more than anything.

At Saturday's dedication festivities for Colorado National Golf Club -- the new home for CU's golf teams -- parked on the side of the putting green was a range-ball picking vehicle colored red and white, with a Nebraska football helmet on the roof and an "N" emblazoned on the front.

Keep in mind that range-ball pickers are often the target of people hitting balls on the practice range, and what better target for a CU fan than a symbol of the NU football team, long a dreaded nemesis of the Buffs.

And guess whose idea it was to decorate this bull's-eye of sorts with Husker symbols? None other than CU football coach Dan Hawkins, who attended Saturday's function.

And so it went Saturday at Colorado National's official grand opening, attended by a who's who of CU athletics, past and present. Despite a cold, overcast morning, several hundred CU faithful turned out for dedication ceremonies complete with the singing of the school fight song.

"I was stunned" by the turnout given the weather, said Steve Kerr, the former CU golfer who purchased Vista Ridge Golf Club late last year, renamed it Colorado National Golf Club, and made it home for the CU golf teams and a site for many other CU functions. "This shows a cohesion we haven't had in the past."

The attendees included winners of four U.S. Opens (between former CU golfers Hale Irwin and Steve Jones), three U.S. Women's Opens (Hollis Stacy, who hopes to lure an LPGA event to CNGC) and two U.S. Senior Opens (Irwin).

"Thanks to Steve Kerr and his family for making the longtime dreams of so many -- including (former coaches) Les Fowler and Mark Simpson -- become reality," Irwin said while signing autographs and posing for photos Saturday.

In keeping with the CU-through-and-through theme, Kerr said Irwin and son Steve, another former CU golfer, will design the short-game facility that is part of a list of long-term upgrades that will benefit the golf teams. Also on that list is an indoor training complex that will include hitting bays, team rooms, etc.

As part of Saturday's dedication, CU brought out Ralphie the buffalo, Chip the mascot, and many of its big-wigs to CNGC. But the headliners were Kerr and the two CU golfers who have gone on to the most

professional success. Irwin, the 1967 NCAA champion, owns 20 victories on the PGA Tour (including three U.S. Opens), a record 45 wins on the Champions Tour, and a spot in the World Golf Hall of Fame. Jones' résumé includes eight PGA Tour titles, with the 1996 U.S. Open victory chief among them.

Jones, whose career has been on hold for almost two years because of elbow problems, was a CU golfer from 1977 to '81, meaning his freshman year was Kerr's senior season.

"He was a character," Jones said of Kerr, who was known as a fun-loving type during his CU days.

"He taught me a lot in college," Jones added with a chuckle.

"Jones said I taught him how to drink," Kerr noted later. "Actually, I think I just taught him the difference between 3.2 and regular beer."

One favorite story about Kerr during his college days, which he confirms, is that he and some CU teammates were once stuck at the Dallas airport, unable to get back to Denver because of the weather. Seeing basketball star Julius Erving in the airport, and knowing he and his team were headed to Denver for a game against the Nuggets, Kerr asked Erving in a rather animated way, "Dr. J, can you get us to Denver?" The good Doctor, not surprisingly, took a pass.

But after graduating from CU -- he's the first member of his family to earn a college degree -- Kerr hit it big financially as a Phoenix-based merchant banker who helped take companies public. And by virtue of being a self-described "nostalgic kind of person" and with both he and daughter Erin having played golf for CU, Kerr made good on his promise to Simpson to get the Buffs a course to call home.

To celebrate those dreams coming to fruition, the CNGC clubhouse on Saturday was decked out with all sorts of past and present CU memorabilia and awards. Outside, lined up on one side of the putting green, were 12 carts, each painted with the colors and logo of a different team from the Big 12 Conference.

It's considerably different from how things were with the CU golf program in the 1960s, noted Irwin, who hit the ceremonial first tee shot Saturday. "Les (Fowler) would hand me and Larry McAtee balls, and we were kind of on our own," Irwin said. Nowadays, Irwin added, "I couldn't be more proud to be a Buff."



© 2006 Daily Camera and Boulder Publishing, LLC.