



Baines: U.S. Amateur will be proving ground for Buffs' Baird

By Gary Baines
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As an aspiring tour player, University of Colorado golfer Michael Baird knows certain measuring sticks are better than others when considering his future.

That's why he's focused so intently on his immediate task at hand — the last before the senior begins his final season at CU.

Baird and former CU teammate Ryan Anderson, along with Drew Stoltz of Fort Collins, Aaron Weston of Lone Tree and Zachary Zaremba of Pueblo West, are the five Coloradans who qualified for next week's U.S. Amateur at the Olympic Club in San Francisco.

All of them know full well that many of the greatest players in the history of the game have competed in the event, with Bobby Jones (five wins), Tiger Woods (three), Jack Nicklaus (two), Arnold Palmer and Phil Mickelson included in the list of champions.

"This will be by far the biggest tournament I've played in," said Baird, a transfer from Pepperdine who led the Buffs in stroke average last season. "I've played in things like the Big 12s and other big amateur events, but(315) of the best (amateur) players in the world will be there. This gives me a chance to prove that I can play with anyone."

Two rounds of stroke-play qualifying — one round each at the Lake and Ocean courses — will be held Monday and Tuesday, with the field being whittled down to 64 for the match play that begins Wednesday and concludes on Aug. 26.

Baird had a small-scale taste of the U.S. Amateur when he played in the 2002 U.S. Junior Amateur, where he advanced to match play and lost in the first round. He expects no less than that same level of success next week.

"I feel like I can get to match play," said the 22-year-old from Castle Rock. "I'm playing well enough and I've been working hard on my game. From there, match play is a different beast. If you catch a hot streak, it's not too far out of the realm of possibility to get through some matches."

Baird believes his game is rounding into form at the ideal time. Just last week he shot the lowest round of his life, an 8-under-par 63 at Denver's Wellshire Golf Course that included 10 birdies.

"I'm starting to make a lot more putts; that's been the biggest improvement in my game," Baird said.

Baird has been among the top amateurs in the state the last several years, but has fallen just short of tournament titles quite a few times. In his junior and senior years at Douglas County High School, he

twice finished as the runnerup in the state tournament. Then just since last August, he's lost in playoffs to CU teammate Pat Grady in both the 2006 State Amateur Stroke Play at Boulder Country Club, and the 2007 State Public Links Championship in Windsor.

Baird also finished sixth in the prestigious Southwest Amateur in June.

Ideally, Baird would like a strong showing in the U.S. Amateur to enter his final collegiate season on a high note. The Buffs' first tournament of the fall is scheduled for Sept. 10-11 in Monterey, Calif.

"I look at this season as a good opportunity to do some damage," he said. "Hopefully, I'll be an All-American — first, second or third team. That would give me a good jump-start."

A jump-start for a pro career, that is. Baird anticipates going pro sometime next summer.

"That's the only thing I know how to do and that I like to do," he said.

CU-CSU Challenge

needs golfers

The 13th annual CU-CSU Golf Challenge will be played Aug. 29 at Riverdale Dunes Golf Course in Brighton, but the field is not yet full for the 8:30 a.m. shotgun start. Golfers play on behalf of their favorite school, with two-person teams competing. The event benefits the golf programs at both schools. The entry fee is \$400 per two-man team, or \$200 per individual. For more information, call 303-492-4653 (CU) or 970-491-2946 (CSU).

CSU has won the competition the last five straight years.

Three Colorado

courses honored

Golf magazine recently announced its rankings of the top 100 courses in the U.S., and three Colorado courses are on the list. Ballyneal in Holyoke checked in at No. 46, while Cherry Hills south of Denver came in at No. 63, and Castle Pines Golf Club in Castle Rock was No. 85.

The top five U.S. courses on the list, in order, are Pine Valley (N.J.), Cypress Point (Calif.), Augusta National (Ga.), Pebble Beach (Calif.), and Shinnecock Hills (N.Y.).



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