

Husker coach gives Australian golfer second chance

BY DARREN IVY
Assignment Reporter

During his two-year absence from the Nebraska golf team, Jamie Rogers went on a national tour of odd jobs in the land down under.

His first stop was at an Australian night club. Then a driving range in Melbourne. Then another one in Queensland.

But now he's back in America and is the top golfer for the Cornhuskers.

So far this spring the Maroochydore, Australia, native has won two tournaments and placed second in another while leading the NU men's team to a No. 30 ranking in the MasterCard Collegiate Golf Rankings.

"He gives us a dimension we didn't have," NU Coach Larry Romjue said. "It's like Tyronn Lue leaving and then

coming back.

"Tyronn is a professional prospect and so is Jamie. He is the best player who has ever played here and he makes the others around him better."

Rogers' road back to the University of Nebraska-Lincoln was difficult.

His saga began in 1994, when as a freshman he won the season-opening meet and was one of NU's top golfers.

Then his parents got divorced. Rogers, who was close to his family, left school to return to Australia.

"It is not a very nice thing to have happening when you are 7,000 miles away," Rogers said.

Once at home, he said he didn't play much golf because he started working at a night club - which proved to be an exhausting experience.

"My life became one long night," Rogers said. "I would work late and then sleep all day."

However, Rogers said he still yearned to play golf and got the opportunity when he was hired at a golf course in Melbourne.

While in Melbourne, he said he wasn't thinking about returning to the United States. But the opportunities he had hoped for as a professional golfer "just weren't there." That's when he called Romjue.

"It took me a couple years to realize (Nebraska) is the place where I could make it happen," Rogers said. "I don't know why (Romjue let me come back), but I am glad he did. I wanted to come back in 1996, but they didn't have any scholarships and I couldn't afford to pay myself."

"If I would have it to do over, I wouldn't have left in the first place."

Romjue said he believes in giving people second chances and didn't want to deny Rogers an opportunity.

"If I don't let him back, there is not

another place he could go," Romjue said. "He is a decent kid who just made a mistake."

Once Rogers knew he could come back, he took golf very seriously. He moved in with his grandparents in Queensland and worked at a driving range from January 1997 to August 1997.

"I improved a lot over those eight months," Rogers said. "I worked with the pro and went from a minus-1 handicap to a minus-4. I won a couple tournaments, and it gave me confidence when I came here."

That confidence carried over to the fall season when Rogers was NU's top golfer with a 71.43 stroke average - an average that ranked him eighth nationally.

This spring he has helped NU win two meets and finish second in another. He is ranked 42nd in the nation in the MasterCard Individual Rankings.

NU junior Steve Friesen said Rogers has taken the Huskers to an entirely new level.

"He's good enough that even when he's playing bad he can be around par or under par," Friesen said. "It makes you play better because you know you have to golf your best just to have a chance to beat him."

Rogers likes his teammates' competition and said he has enjoyed putting Nebraska golf on the map.

"Some guys don't even know we have a team," Rogers said. "It's to our advantage because we sneak up on people and knock some people off their perch."

If Rogers continues on the pace he is on, Romjue said he will be an All-American. The next step is the pros.

"My goal is to make a living off it," Rogers said. "But I feel I have to beat the guys in college before I have a chance at making any tour."

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Lue to forgo senior year for NBA

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career-scoring list, said it doesn't matter what team drafts him, but he said Orlando, Dallas and Milwaukee have shown interest. In addition, Nee said nearly all the other teams have inquired.

"A lot of people don't want to show their cards," Nee said.

Lue has done his research. He's talked with agents, players and other sources and said he currently is predicted to go somewhere between 6th and 15th in the June 24 Draft and no worse than 20th.

Lue said Arizona junior Mike Bibby is predicted to be the first guard taken. Lue said he would likely be the second.

Scouts and agents told Lue they like his explosiveness and one-on-one ability to get to the basket. The strike

against him is his height.

Nee, who has helped Lue evaluate his situation, agrees that quickness is a strength.

"There aren't too many guys in the NBA who can take it from free throw line to free throw line faster," Nee said.

Because of Lue's ability, Nee said the decision to turn pro didn't surprise him.

The decision also wasn't a surprise to Lue's distant cousin, Cookie Belcher, who is also from Mexico, Mo.

"I knew right away at the end of the year, but I didn't want to let it out," Belcher said. "I wanted to let him have a chance to tell everyone himself."

But Lue's family didn't know until Monday night. Lue said his family left the decision up to him, but they wanted him to get a degree.

"I said I will get it for them," Lue

said.

To fulfill that agreement, he will take correspondent classes to finish his marketing degree.

Lue, who leaves behind a team that lost no experienced players from last year, said he hopes his teammates understand.

"I love my team," Lue said. "I know many of them wanted me to come back for my senior year, but I hope they will respect my decision."

Belcher respected his decision.

"I'm proud of Tyronn," Belcher said. "It's good to see a guy from our hometown make it somewhere. We are losing the best point guard in Nebraska history."

Since they are losing such a player, Belcher said everyone will have to step up.

"It will make us want to work a lot harder."

Goalie gets first start in net

BY DARREN IVY
Assignment Reporter

Growing up in the Caribbean, Cornhusker freshman goalie Karina LeBlanc watched from the sidelines as her father played soccer.

But she never played.

She didn't set foot on a soccer field until she was 12 years old and living in Maple Ridge, British Columbia.

"A parent on the basketball team was a coach for the soccer team and talked me into playing," LeBlanc said.

Even though LeBlanc got a late start on soccer, it hasn't stopped her from becoming the starting goalie on the Under-20 Canadian national team and the most likely person to replace Becky Hornbacher as NU's starting goalie next year.

When she started, LeBlanc found herself on the opposite end of the field - trying to score on opposing goalies.

But after an injury to her club team goalie, LeBlanc, the leading scorer at the time, volunteered to play goalie.

And she hasn't left the net since.

This spring, LeBlanc is starting in

the net for the first time as a Husker and Coach John Walker is confident in her abilities.

"Karina is a terrific athlete and has a terrific work ethic," Walker said. "She has all the tools to be a top-level goalkeeper. She's well on her way. She just needs minutes."

Walker said LeBlanc will get quality minutes against four of the top six teams in the country this spring and get even more experience this summer when she goes home to play on the national team.

"(In the fall) I think you will see a much more experienced and confident goalkeeper," Walker said.

One person who is familiar with LeBlanc in the goal is sophomore defender Sharolta Nonen. LeBlanc and Nonen played together last summer on a Canada Games team.

"I've played with her before so it's not a big change for me," Nonen said. "I feel very comfortable and confident in her ability."

Walker hopes the other players will feel the same way.

"The way a goalkeeper handles herself can affect the mood and confidence of the team," Walker said. "If

the team has confidence in a goalie, it allows the team to take a few more chances because they know they have someone behind them."

With Hornbacher in the net, the Huskers were able to take chances. LeBlanc said she has learned a lot from Hornbacher, but still can improve.

"I haven't been playing long enough to know everything," LeBlanc said.

In fact, she almost ended her soccer career when she was 15. She had to choose between playing on the British Columbia basketball or soccer team.

"I loved them both the same," LeBlanc said. "I always wanted to play basketball, but the soccer coaches kept harping on me that I have potential. They told me I had a bigger future in soccer, and I believed them."

In 1996, she decided to give up track and basketball and focus on soccer.

That's when she started looking at American colleges.

"I chose Nebraska because there was good coaching, and I knew I would learn."

New teams, homers mark opening day

(AP) - Swimming pools, cigar bars. Devil Rays, Diamondbacks. Revamped Marlins, new-look Brewers. They were the stories on opening day - until McGwire and Griffey.

Mark McGwire and Ken Griffey Jr. quickly showed what this expansion season may be all about. Both homered Tuesday, beginning the chase for Roger Maris' record of 61.

"It's an awesome feeling," said McGwire, who hit 58 dingers last year. "How can you not get chills?"

The Florida Marlins, meanwhile, also got off to a strong start. Having stripped nearly half their roster in a move to slash a \$53 million payroll to \$33 million, the World Series champions scored six runs in the first inning and beat the Chicago Cubs 11-6.

The Tampa Bay Devil Rays, however, looked exactly like the expansion team it is in an 11-6 loss to Detroit at St. Petersburg, Fla.

The Devil Rays fell behind 11-0 after five innings and the sellout crowd of 45,369 at Tropicana Field had little

to cheer except for Wade Boggs' home run.

The new team, though, had something that no one else in the majors has: A cigar bar inside its ballpark.

In Phoenix, some fans at the Bank One Ballpark also had a unique view - from a pool, heated spa and a swim-up bar beyond the right-center field fence.

The aquatic area, which holds 35 people and costs \$4,000 per game to rent, was ready to make its debut when the Arizona Diamondbacks played host to the Colorado Rockies.