

Husker men prepare to fill gap in experience

BY JOHN GASKINS
Staff writer

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LARRY ROMJUE
NU men's golf coach

Last year was fun and easy for Nebraska Golf Coach Larry Romjue. Romjue got to sit back and watch as four seniors put together the greatest run in Nebraska golf history, finishing two shots out of a Big 12 Championship and 14th place at the NCAA Championship.

Now, he can look at the trophies and pictures of those teams and reminisce about the glory days. He can remember just how fun it was to watch Jamie Rogers, Josh Madden, Scott Gutschewski and Steve Friesen win more individual and team titles than any class in NU history.

But three months removed from those glory days, Romjue now faces the hard part — finding replacements for those seniors.

“I've never lost four seniors in my 30 years of coaching,” Romjue said. “You never like to start over. It's always nice to have established players. But I'm looking forward to seeing who is going to step up this year.”

The lone returning starter from last year's squad is sophomore Seth Porter, whose stroke average was the worst on the team.

But Romjue said Porter should have no problem coming forth as the team leader.

“We lost 14 years of experience and have one returning,” Romjue said. “But, obviously, Seth should be our best player because he's had the experience of playing at the college level.”

“I think his scoring average from last year was misleading. He played some tough courses — courses our seniors failed to break 80 on a couple of times. He's naturally going to progress into a better player and lower his stroke average by a few shots.”

Joining Porter will be Peter Smith, a sophomore who played on the 1997-98 Husker squad but spent the last year working on his game in his native Australia. Another Australian prodigy, 22-year-old red-shirt freshman Dean Beste, should make an immediate impact, Romjue said, along with redshirt freshman Andy McKay of New York.

Romjue went on an extensive recruiting hunt last year to prepare for the loss of the six 1998-99 seniors. As usual, Romjue was able to mix top Nebraska high school standouts with golfers from all over the United

States and the world.

The in-state recruits include 1999 Nebraska State Junior Stroke Play Champion J.J. Sullivan of Omaha Gross and 1999 High School State Champion Ryan Anderson of Papillion-LaVista. Romjue also signed Jim Troy of Chicago, a younger brother of former NU golfer Mike Troy, and Rob Arthur of Vancouver, B.C.

Despite his excitement for the new crop of talent, Romjue isn't sure yet which golfers will emerge and make up his starting five when the Huskers open the season Sept. 13-14 at their home course, Firethorn C.C., for the Fairway Club Invitational.

Meanwhile, Women's Golf Coach Robin Krapfl finds herself in a completely different scenario.

All of Krapfl's starting five from a year ago return this fall, which leaves Krapfl feeling confident about the upcoming season.

“I'm always optimistic, but I feel this team has the talent to compete for the top spot in the Big 12,” Krapfl said. “Some of our players proved this summer that they can go low. Now, it's just a matter of believing in themselves.”

The players Krapfl referred to were senior veteran Elizabeth Bahensky and sophomore Sarah Sasse.

The two took the Nebraska women's golf circuit by storm this summer, finishing first and second in every major event, including the State Stroke Play and Lincoln City Championship.

Bahensky, who is No. 38 in the preseason college rankings, came out on top every time.

“I really feel Elizabeth can be an All-American,” Krapfl said. “She's consistent, doesn't have any weakness and out-thinks everybody.”

Meanwhile, Sasse, who was heavily recruited by other top college teams after an outstanding junior

career, had a sub-par 1998-99 season. But Krapfl sees her, like Porter, improving with experience.

“She's got a year under her belt, and now she knows what it takes,” Krapfl said. “She's been struggling with her short game, but once she works it out, she will be shooting lights out.”

Also returning is Australian sophomore Amanda Sutcliffe, who won NU's Chip 'N' Club Invitational last year in her first collegiate start. Rounding out the returning five are sophomore Catha Fogelberg and junior Amy Roux.

But Krapfl said the starting five might not be solidified yet. That's because of the emergence of incoming freshman Amanda Krane from New York.

“She's been playing wonderful all summer,” Krapfl said. “It will be interesting to watch these practices. She could challenge any of these girls for a starting spot.”

The women's team, like the men's squad, opens the season at home, playing host to their own tournament. They'll tee it up Sept. 13-14 in the Big 12 Preview at the Country Club of Lincoln.

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