

Taylor helps Caledonia win district

Article by Adam Minichino Columbus Dispatch
May 1, 2010 11:52:00 PM

CALEDONIA -- One bad shot or hole can spell disaster for a golfer.

After parring the first hole at the Class 4A Division 3, District 4 Tournament at River Birch Golf Club on April 19 in Amory, Zac Taylor found himself at a turning point early in the day.

The Caledonia High School senior hooked his tee shot on No. 2 left out of bounds. He hit his next shot in the woods in a hazard. He went on to shoot a triple bogey eight while the rest of the competitors birdied the hole.

"I thought, "Uh oh, it may be one of those bad days," " Taylor said.

Instead of allowing that hole to ruin his round, Taylor recovered to par the next two holes to move to No. 5. A strong tee shot and an equally effective use of his pitching wedge on his second shot helped him eagle the hole.

"After that, I just had a fire light in me and I was ready to play," said Taylor, who went on to shoot 75 and earn runner-up medalist honors and help lead the Confederates to the district title.

That performance is just one reason Taylor realized an opportunity Friday to sign a golf scholarship to play at East Mississippi Community College.

"I had an OK season. I didn't have the best season I could have," Taylor said. "I didn't play good the last couple of matches, so it was in the back of my mind (that it might affect his chances to play in college). But I wasn't thinking about that at district. I just wanted to shoot the lowest possible score and see what happened.

"I was thinking I was probably going to get a scholarship (to play golf in college) after district, and I am really happy I did. I have worked my tail off."

The 75 is Taylor's low round of the season. It helped Caledonia secured it a spot in the Class 4A State Tournament on May 11-12 in Olive Branch.

"Most people who get an eight on a hole are done. I am done," Caledonia High golf coach Bradley Tate said. "A 75 with an 8 is pretty good. That is why he is getting a scholarship."

Tate said all area golfers endured difficult weather at the start of the season. He said the team played its first four matches in the rain, but he said Taylor remained focused and kept his stroke average in mid to high 70s. That consistency wasn't part of Taylor's game when he started playing.

"I put him on the team in the ninth grade and took him to every match," Tate said. "He was the worst golfer we had. Now he is the best golfer we have. It is going to be tough without him."

Taylor credited his father, Arl, for helping him pick up and learn to love the game of golf. He said he played football up until his eighth-grade year before he discovered golf was a natural relaxer for him and something he found success in.

Tate said Taylor is positive all of the time and is extremely helpful with the team's younger golfers. Taylor said Tate sometimes chides him for working too much with his teammates because it takes away from his game.

But that is the kind of teammate Taylor always has been. Taylor, who tried out for the Caledonia High golf team when he was an eighth-grader and didn't make it, said older players "kicked his tail

consistently" when he was younger. But he said, "I want to be able to play like that," and dedicated himself to improving his skills.

As team captain this season, he feels it has been his responsibility to pass on what he has learned through the years to the younger players on the team. In fact, he sees a lot of potential in several of his teammates, and he said he is happy to help them in any way they can so maybe one day they will be even better than him.

Those intangibles impressed EMCC golf coach Dale Peay.

"He is a quality young man, and that is a high priority," Peay said. "We want to bring in high quality young men who are good students and who are very good golfers. Zac fits that to the bill."

Peay said he has followed Taylor's progression since he was in the ninth or 10th grade. He said he has progressed steadily to become someone who is the "best senior golfer in our district."

"He has matured as a golfer, not only with his swing but with the mental side of the game," Peay said. "He is not going to make crazy mistakes or do stupid things. He is a steady golfer who we feel is going to be able to come in and help our program immediately."

Peay said the Lions lose six players from this season's team, which gives Taylor an opportunity to contribute right away. He is excited because he feels Taylor will be able to handle the transition from high school to college golf.

"I know he is going to develop because he is going to do anything he has to to make himself better," Peay said.

Taylor has done that ever since the ninth grade. He is confident he will continue that progression at EMCC.

"My dad and my grandfathers (the late L.C. Taylor and Gary Jacobs) always taught me you can be as good as want to, you just have to set your mind to it," Taylor said. "If I find something in life, I am going to try my best to be the best in it. I think deep down when I started to play golf I knew I could be decent. I just kept trying and trying and trying, and I think I finally got there, but I still can get a lot better."