

'Basic' instinct saves Aussie

Beats defending champ in Cotton States final

Keith Prince / General Assignment

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Sure enough, the Cotton States got its dream matchup in the finals Sunday - but only one member of the dream team showed up.

Australian Neven Basic took advantage of some uncharacteristic mistakes by defending champion Zack Atkinson to win the title 3 and 2 at Bayou DeSiard Country Club.

"I just wasn't as sharp as I had been in my previous matches," said Atkinson, a native of Coppell, Texas, who was trying to become the first repeat winner of this event in 30 years.

"I usually let the other guy make mistakes and I take advantage, but this time he didn't make the mistakes and I did," said the tall Texan who led the University of North Texas to the Sun Belt Conference title last spring. "He did give me a chance or two to turn things around but I just couldn't take advantage."

Basic, who looked absolutely unbeatable in a pair of victories Saturday, felt he also wasn't at his best in the finals.

"I was able to do what I had to do to win, but I was much sharper yesterday," said the 24-year-old Aussie, a college finance graduate who is working in a golf shop in Sydney.

After Atkinson went 1-up with a birdie on No. 2, Basic pulled even with a bird on the next hole and then took the lead on No. 4 when Atkinson bogeyed out of a sand trap.

Although no one could have known at the time, the defending champ would never catch up again.

Two down after nine, Atkinson cut the gap to one hole when Basic hit his tee shot out of bounds on No. 11. But he went back to two down with a bogey on No. 13 and then went three down with a bogey on the par-3 No. 15 when he missed his fifth straight green.

Admitting he didn't chip the ball well enough to save par several times, Atkinson added, "But the greenside rough is much tougher than you think. I never got a feel for it."

Basic wrapped the title up on the par-5 No. 16 when he chipped up in gimme range for a par and Atkinson failed to convert a 5-foot birdie attempt.

"It was frustrating this afternoon but I played really well the rest of the week," said Atkinson, who will now look toward the U.S. Amateur in late August.

Basic, traveling here with mate Robert Curtis who also made the championship flight, actually had his toughest match Sunday morning in the semifinals when Ole Miss star Chris Rogers pushed him to sudden death.

It appeared Basic was ready to close Rogers out with a two-hole lead on 17 when the Rebel ace made a 30-foot birdie to win there, then climbed even on 18 when Basic bogeyed.

"He played well and that was a tremendous putt on 17," said Basic, who then won with a par on the 19th hole to end the semifinal duel.

Atkinson had to rally, himself, in a semifinal match against LSU's Garrett Prather who went two up after the opening two holes.

Atkinson had pulled even by nine and then birdied Nos. 11, 12 and 14 to take control and win 4 and 3.

Both finalists indicated they will be back next summer if possible.



Michael Dunlap / Assistant Chief Photographer

Neven Basic needed 19 holes to win his Sunday semifinal match. He then won the final 3 and 2.

"I have one more year at North Texas and will graduate in June," Atkinson said. "If I don't turn pro early in the summer, I will be back. I have really enjoyed coming here."

Said Basic: "We haven't made travel plans for next year so I don't really know. However, I hope we can work it out to return. I would like to try to defend the title.

"I know I will not turn pro for at least a year - I need to improve my game more - so there is a good chance I will be back."

Concerning local players, Scotty Free won the first flight by defeating Bob Cooper 1-up in the semis and then stopping Scott Smith 4 and 3 in the finals.

In the second flight, Louisiana Tech golfer Derek Busby of Tallulah defeated Adam Swope of LSU in 20 holes for that title.

And, Monroe's Preston Smith, who will be a freshman on Tech's golf team this fall, won the second flight consolation with an impressive 6 and 5 verdict over another Monroe product, Nathan Pierot.

In the fourth flight, Monroe/LSU golfer Brandon Aydlett made it to the finals before falling to Jake Shaw 1-up.

ULM's Chase Cooper was the fifth flight winner with a 4 and 3 decision over Jack Tyson, and Scott Sills of West Monroe won the fifth flight consolation with a 2-and-1 semifinal victory over Jeff Briggs of the University of New Mexico before claiming a forfeit win over Houston's Mandel Urquidi in the finals.

And, ULM's Chris Bourdeon was the sixth flight runner-up to Jason Horrell of LSU.

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