

Big Cotton Field: Annual tourney draws record 152-player field

By Keith Prince

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The 56th annual W. E. (Winnie) Cole Cotton States Amateur Golf Championship tees off today at Bayou DeSiard Country Club and the largest field in history — 152 players from throughout America and five other countries — will be trying to join an elite list of past winners.

While this year's field is the largest in history, even more impressive is the depth that it features.

Both defending champion Mark Ogren of the University of Illinois and 2006 runner-up Creighton Honeck of the University of Arizona are returning to head the cast.

"We've always drawn excellent fields for the Cotton States — dating back to its beginning in 1951," tournament director John Luffey said. "But this year's event is definitely stronger up and down the line than any in our history."

The field has an international flavor and includes 13 Australia golfers, led by Leigh Deagan, who is ranked among the top 120 amateurs in the world.

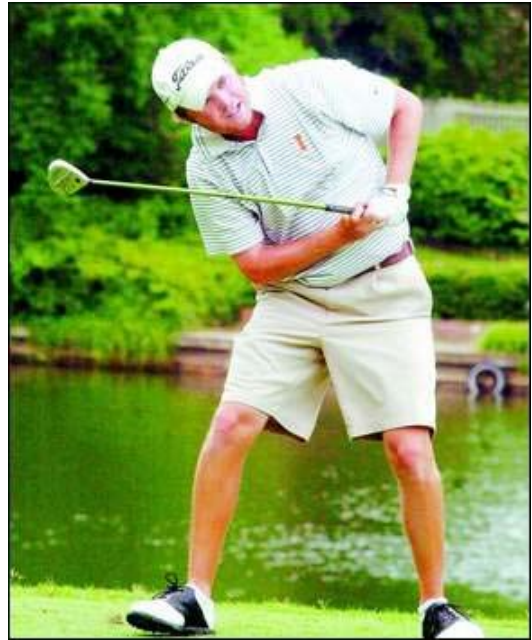
England will be represented by two players, including Keenan Farren who plays at the University of Texas and is a previous Walker Cup member for his country.

Mexico will be represented by Raul Lemus, a two-time Mexico junior champion, Kevin Sohn, now playing at Southeastern Louisiana University, is from New Zealand.

David McKendrick, also of Australia, will head a group of seven players with ULM ties as he comes into the tourney after finishing sixth at the recent Louisiana State Amateur Championship and then winning a Collegiate Players Tour event last week in Texas.

Monroe native Matthew Harvey, who played at St. Frederick and eventually graduated from high school in Georgetown, Tex., where he won the Texas 5A state title in 2006, will represent Louisiana Tech, along with Chad Bailey of Ruston, who tied for 22nd last week at the state amateur.

Harvey, named Freshman Golfer of the Year for 2007 in Louisiana, has played well in the Cotton States for the past three years and has twice reached the semifinals before falling in the quarterfinals last year.



Mark Ogren from the University of Illinois returns to the Cotton States golf tournament as the defending champion. He beat the University of Arizona's Creighton Honeck in the finals last year.

This year, however, Harvey is coming in at less than full speed after missing 10 days of golf recently with a stomach ailment.

"I haven't played any competitive golf since our college season ended (mid-May) but I am feeling better and always look forward to coming back to Bayou DeSiard for the Cotton States," said Harvey late last week prior to a practice round.

Patrick Blunt of Cedar Creek, who has been one of the state's top prep golfers the past three years, heads a group of young area golfers set to participate.

That list includes Tanner McDonald of OCS, Jerry Johnston of Cedar Creek, Robert Rodgers of St. Frederick, Clinton Shepard of West Monroe, Clay Shovan of Quitman and Will Ticheli of West Monroe.

ULM golf coach Chris Wilson is also entered.

The Cotton States championship row includes such notables as former PGA star Don January, who won here in 1951, Jackie Cupit in 1960, and 1983 PGA champion Hal Sutton in 1976.

Others who have played in the Cotton States, but failed to win, include PGA champ David Toms, British Open champ Bill Rogers and longtime PGA and Champions Tour standout Dr. Gil Morgan.

Local winners have included Bob "Text Message" Cooper (1999), Doug Farr (1991), brothers Terry Peddy (1979) and Wayne Peddy (1968) of West Monroe, Robert Shelton (1970) Clayton Cole (1965) and Jack Rivers (1959).

Shelton, who now resides in Lafayette, recently won the 2007 Senior Cotton States at age 55.

There have also been several championships won by area players and that list includes Paul Jones, Jr. (1980) of Bastrop, Tom Bryant (1981) of Lake Providence and Brian Frazier (1997) of Columbia, who was living in West Monroe at the time of his victory after finishing an outstanding career at ULM.

Cooper is the only former local champ playing this year and at 50 he joins another talented local, four-time runner-up Henry Cole, 61, as the true "veterans" of the event.

The only two men who have won this prestigious title three times are former PGA and University of Houston golfer Homero Blancos (1962-63-64) and long-hitting Gene Dahlbender (1955-56-61) of Atlanta, Ga.

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