

Cotton States gets going after updates at DeSiard

Two days of qualifying, featuring 18 holes each on Tuesday and Wednesday, have completed the field of 64 for the W.E. Cotton States Amateur Invitational. Beginning today, a two-match schedule leads up to the Saturday crowning of a new champion. It has been a long time coming for an event that skipped a year as host course Bayou DeSiard Country Club underwent a dramatic facelift. "We've had to skip the tournament a couple of times in the past for course-related issues, but there has never been any adverse effect," said Doug Ratcliff, chairman of DeSiard's greens committee. "These improvements will only help the tournament in the future." This week's homecoming hasn't been limited to the Monroe course's fairways and bunkers, though.

Top performer in Tuesday's qualifying round was Monroe native Matthew Harvey, a Louisiana Tech product who shot 68. Harvey, fans will remember, fought his way back from emergency surgery to appear in the tournament's most recent edition, back in 2008. Just weeks before the Cotton States, he had been rushed into surgery in a San Jose, Calif., hospital to repair the re-occurrence of a collapsed lung problem. Harvey, the initial Tech golfer to earn first-team All-WAC honors, made all-state at St. Frederick as a freshman and sophomore before his family moved to Austin, Texas, following the 2004 demise of State Farm Insurance in Monroe. He won his first-round match 4-3 over Jamey Taylor of Friendswood, Texas, thanks largely to one stretch of three consecutive birdies but Vanderbilt's Hudson Johnson of Longview, Texas, who shared medalist honors that week, proved to be too tough in the afternoon.

"I made some mistakes and he's a super player," said Harvey. Then a six-month course enhancement project at Bayou DeSiard suspended play for members and put the Cotton States on the shelf for a year. That \$1.6 million project was designed to improve every aspect of the course, which has long been ranked among the state's Top 10 private courses, and was directed by golf course architect Ron Prichard of Houston, Texas.

Focus areas included in the upgrade were construction of new, wider cart paths, total reconstruction of every bunker on the course, improving drainage throughout the course (including the bunkers) and eliminating more than 100 trees. Prichard also directed Bayou Desiard's project when it reconstructed greens in the late 1980s. "Over the long term," Ratcliff said, "this will provide a tremendous boost to our course and our golfers for years to come."

One of the South's better amateur events for six decades, the Cotton States has received elevated status in recent years thanks to a scoring system that awards significant points in the national amateur ratings program. The tournament's most recent winner is Bobby Massa, who went on a birdie binge in the final round to win the 2008 Cotton States.

Massa, then a junior at Texas-Arlington, birdied No. 4, and was 1-up over fellow finalist Will Osborne after nine holes at Bayou DeSiard Country Club. He caught fire with accurate approach shots and steady putting after the turn, notching birdies on No. 10, No. 11, No. 12, while Osborne could only manage par. It was Massa's third appearance in the Cotton States, and the fourth for Osborne, then a senior at Arkansas.