

Cotton States packs Bayou DeSiard

2010, 1999 champions back to challenge deep field

Bayou DeSiard Country Club saw a full parking lot Tuesday and likely will again Wednesday.

The 2011 W.E. Cole Cotton States Amateur Invitational golf tournament is under way — a little later in the year than usual — and the event's officials are excited with the turnout.

"We've got about 49 or 50 players that are ranked in the Scratch Players World Amateur ranking system," tournament Co-chairman Stewart Causey said. "Maybe about as many as half of those or maybe more are legitimate contenders. You never know. We may even have some guys break through this week."

Golfers participated in practice rounds Monday with two days, 36 total holes per competitor, of qualifying Tuesday and Wednesday.

The field will be narrowed to 64 men Wednesday afternoon based on the best qualifying scores, and match play will tee off Thursday morning with morning and afternoon rounds each day leading to Saturday afternoon's final.

Causey expects those 64 scores to be lower than they have been in years past.

"It's a much deeper field than last year," he said. "The qualifying score's going to be much lower than last year."

The number and quality of players the Cotton States has drawn to Monroe this week comes by design.

Bayou DeSiard moved the event back a month this year to limit its competition with other similar tournaments in the region.

"Last year we had the Rice Planters tournament (in South Carolina) and the Texas State Amateur we were up against on the same week," Causey said. "The only thing we have in competition with this year of any consequence to us is the Porter Cup (in New York), and it's a very, very select, select field that goes there."

This year's impressive field at the Cotton States includes a few returning competitors, some local golfers and representatives from around the world.

LSU's Ken Looper, the highest-rated participant at No. 148 in the world, is back to defend his crown after last year becoming the first Louisianan to win the tournament since 2001, as is friend and Tiger teammate Austin Gutsell.

Bob Cooper, the 1999 champion, leads a contingent of local players that also includes ULM's Timothy Wilson, Louisiana Tech's Patrick Blunt and Travis Wilmore and former Bulldog Clinton Shepard.

Wichita State's Tyler Gann, a 2010 semifinalist, also is back.

University of Oklahoma's Abraham Ancer, who won the NCAA's East Regional, and his Sooners teammate Riley Pumphrey come into the event at Nos. 179 and 290, respectively, in the rankings.

In all, 18 states and five countries are represented, including Argentine golfers Martin Kim (No. 278) and Mariano Malmierca.

Nakarantra "Boom" Ratanakul, a Thailand native and the 2010 runner-up, has gone professional since last summer.