

Cox has Cotton States' Best Round

By Keith Prince

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Sometimes it is possible to save the best for last.

That's what happened Tuesday at Bayou DeSiard Country Club when University of Arkansas golfer Stephen Cox turned in the final card of the day — and it revealed a 6-under-par 66.

Cox's super round gives him a two-shot lead after the first day of qualifying for the 55th annual W.E. (Winnie) Cole Cotton States. The field of 128 golfers will be cut to the 64 low scores after today's second 18-hole round with match play beginning Thursday.

Cox's card showed nines of 34-32 and the Jonesboro, Ark., product reeled off birdies at holes 1, 3, 6, 11, 12, 16 and 17 with one lone bogey at No. 5.

Michael Smith of Lafayette, a junior at the University of Louisiana-Lafayette, is in second at 68 while six other collegiate golfers posted three-under 69.

That group includes defending champion Andrew Dresser of Texas Tech, Brian Noonan of LSU, Arkansas' Andrew Carroll, Morgan Landry from ULL, Brandon Destefano of SMU and Ryan Zamorano of Texas-Arlington.

Several local golfers also had solid performances Tuesday as West Monroe's Casey Russell shot one-under 71 while 1999 Cotton States champ Bob Cooper was at even-par 72 along with Louisiana Tech golfer Derek Busby of Tallulah and Texas 5A state champion Matthew Harvey, a former Monroe resident who will attend Louisiana Tech in the fall.

Also former Sterlington star Dustin Green, now playing for Louisiana College, matched par at 72.

Russell, who led ULM to the Southland Conference title two years ago, said, "I took advantage of most of the scoring opportunities I had, but there was certainly nothing spectacular going on. My biggest disappointment was a 5-footer for eagle on No. 6 than I didn't make."

Cooper, a Monroe insurance executive, had perhaps the wildest ride of the day.

The left-hander did not have a par until No. 11. Instead, he shot 37 on the front with five bogeys and four birdies and then birdied No. 10 to get back to even.

He also birdied 16 on his way to a one-under 35 on the back.

"I don't ever remember having a round like this," said Cooper. "I feel good about the way

I am striking the ball but I have to eliminate the mistakes. I definitely left some strokes out there.

"But I'll take another score around par. The first object is to get into match play and I'm hitting the ball well enough to do that."

Harvey had nines of 37-35 and felt he, too, left something on the table. "I hit it well enough to score much better. I hit eight greens on the front but didn't have a birdie until No. 9," he said.

Harvey then birdied 14, 16 and 18 but felt "it is playing tougher than I thought it would. The rough is up and there were some tough pin placements.

"I would like to build some momentum for match play but I would take another 72 Wednesday," said the former St. Frederick all-state golfer who has reached the Cotton States semifinals each of the past two years.

Harvey's teammate and best golf buddy from Texas, Riley Pumphrey, is also here and he shot two-under 70 to grab bragging rights among Georgetown, Texas, High School players.

Others of local interest include Cedar Creek ace Patrick Blunt, Monroe's Henry Cole and Quitman standout Clay Shovan all at 74, ULM's Pat Collogan at 75 and Tech golfers Chad Bailey and Trey McNeill at 76.

St. Frederick's Robert Rodgers and West Monroe golfer Will Ticheli both shot 77 and Tanner McDonald of Ouachita Christian posted 78.

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