

Fun starts at Cotton

With qualifying now done, match play intensity arrives

By Keith Prince

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Arkansas golfer Stephen Cox produced a second impressive under-par round Wednesday to wrap up medalist honors at the 55th annual W.E. (Winnie) Cole Cotton States Invitational.

Thus, Cox — who shot 66-70—136 for an eight-under total — will go into today's match play as the No. 1 seed among 64 players.

The field now faces the opportunity of playing six matches over the next three days to earn the coveted title, starting with two matches today.

When Wednesday's 36-hole qualifying competition concluded, a five-over 149 was the outright cut score.

Nine other golfers shot 150 and four of those players earned the final four spots in match-play action via a sudden death playoff.

That group included David Kite, Matt Fast, Rory Smith and Zeke Reyna III. The lone local golfer that posted 150 and was eliminated was Quitman High School standout Clay Shovan.

The second seed going into the match-play format is SMU golfer Brandon Destefano.

Destefano has fired a pair of 3-under 69s (138) and said he is ready for the next three days.

"I've had two solid rounds, mainly by keeping it in the fairways," Destefano said. "I hit 15 greens both days and if I had putted well I could have shot 65.

"The primary objects was to get past the qualifying rounds, but I did want to get a good seed. Now I'm ready for match play."

Defending champion Andrew Dresser of Texas Tech is also among a talented group that will make this an interesting battle.

Dresser has recorded rounds of 69-73—142 to easily make the cut, which topped out at six-over 150.

"Pins were in some very demanding spots, especially on the back, but I comfortable the whole day," Dresser said. "I just needed a steady round to get into match play and I did that."

Former Monroe prep standout Matthew Harvey of Georgetown, Texas, matched Dresser

at 142 by following Tuesday's 72 with a two-under 70.

Harvey, who had just one real blemish Wednesday when he four-putted the treacherous No. 14 green, was pleased with his effort.

"I had more control of things today and I rolled the ball better, except for one hole," he said. "I just went out there trying to hit fairways and greens but hit some close early and got off to a fast start."

Harvey birdied No. 1, 3 and 7 on the front as he shot 33 before coasting home in 37 on the back. He hit eight of nine greens on both sides.

Casey Russell of West Monroe also came in at 142 after a second straight one-under 71.

"I played better today and it was good to score well on the front nine," said Russell, who has just completed his college eligibility at ULM. "That took the pressure off so it was as pretty comfortable round."

Russell also shot 33-37 with birdies at No. 3, 5 and 6 on the front.

Monroe southpaw Bob Cooper also made the cut with 72-74—146.

"I played a little more conservatively today, just trying to avoid any big mistakes, and there was never any real stress to deal with," he said.

Cooper's only birdies came at No. 5 and 6 as he finished at even-par 36 on the front, following with 38 on the back.

Pat Collogan, ULM's top golfer this year, also made the cut at 75-72—147 despite "feeling a little rusty. I've been working a golf camp at Oklahoma State the last week so I haven't had much time to practice.

"But I hit it OK, better today than on Tuesday, and I am looking forward to match play," he said.

Other local golfers who have won spots in today's action include former Sterlington ace Dustin Green (172-75—147), Ruston product Patrick Blunt of Cedar Creek (74-73—147) and Tech senior Derek Busby of Tallulah (72-76—148).

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