

Locals push Cotton States to important national list

Keith Prince / General Assignment
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Dr. Rey Yatco, a local radiologist, is like many of us in northeastern Louisiana: He loves his golf.

Until now Yatco, 53, has been best known in local golf circles as "Veronica's Dad" - that, after working with and watching his talented daughter grow into a super junior player.

Veronica, in fact, became one of only two women to win both the Louisiana Girls Junior title and the Louisiana Women's Golf title in the same year (1998 as a 15-year-old).

She even helped St. Frederick boys win three straight state golf titles - becoming our Annika before the LPGA's Annika decided to battle the boys.

Veronica is now a sophomore at Vanderbilt, although no longer playing college golf.

But that's not today's story. Today, Dad is in the spotlight.

From this point on, Dr. Yatco should be known for accomplishing a feat that will forever help one of Louisiana's most storied golf tournaments.

Thanks to Yatco's efforts, Bayou DeSiard's W.E. Cole Cotton States Invitational is now listed on the Golfweek/Titleist national register of amateur tournaments.

From now on, the winner of the Cotton States will earn 25 points for individual national rankings - putting it on a par with such events as the Canadian Amateur, Collegiate Players Tour National Championship and national championships for NCAA Division II, NCAA Division III, and the NAIA.

The Senior Cotton States -which plays its 10th annual event this May - will also earn points on the national list for the first time this year and its winner will capture 35 points.

Jim Rivers, who conceived of and has directed every Senior Cotton States, is primarily responsible for its new listing on the national list.

"Jim did the leg work for the Senior Cotton States and I worked with Golfweek senior editor Ron Balicki on the Cotton States," said Yatco, who had no vested interest in the project other than wanting to see the best young golfers in America play in Monroe.

"I first started talking to Balicki in November of 2001. After he saw the list of our past champions and of many other great players who have played in the Cotton States, he was very favorable. We were voted in last month."

These are the only two Louisiana amateur tournaments listed on the national register.

Yatco's first knowledge of how valuable this point system is came when Veronica was entering junior tournaments.

"We went to the tournaments where you could earn points," he recalled. "All golfers seeking to improve their status nationally look for tournaments which award national points."

Bayou DeSiard Country Club pro John Pruitt said: "This is going to be a big boost for both of these tournaments. The Cotton States will immediately draw more national caliber players than ever before. The Seniors Cotton States has drawn some top national senior players since its inception, but should get even more now."

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