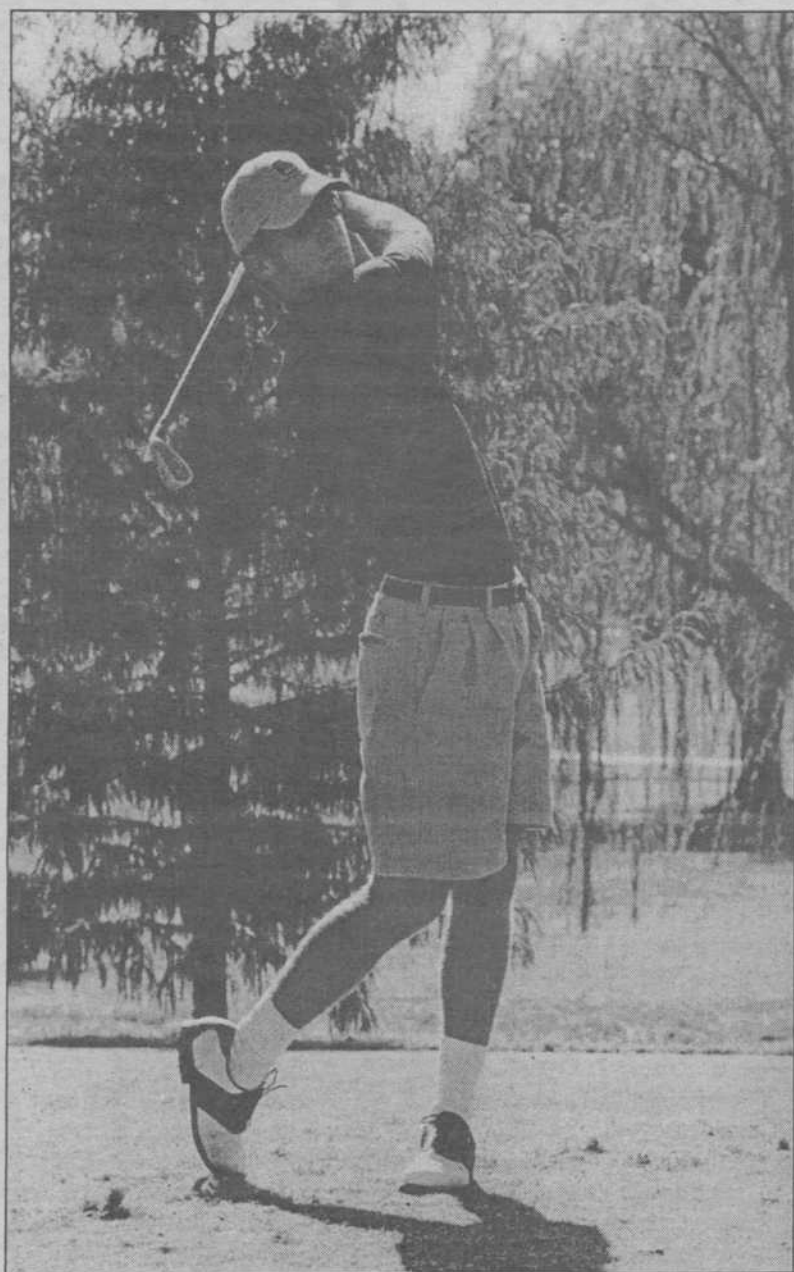


GAMECOCK MEN'S GOLF

All-American Thompson leads men's golf



Special to The Gamecock

Kyle Thompson won the 2000 Carpet Capital Collegiate, one of two tournaments won by Gamecock golfers this past year.

BY PRESTON BAINES
THE GAMECOCK

The Gamecock men's golf team blasted the competition in the fall season, but they aren't ready to stop there. The team's goal is to win the university's first-ever national championship in any sport.

Puggy Blackmon, head coach for five-and-a-half years, said this is the deepest and most talented team he's coached at USC.

Senior Kyle Thompson leads the way for the fifth-ranked Gamecocks. Thompson, one of the top collegiate players in the nation, led the Gamecocks through a surprising fall finish after being ranked 18th in the preseason polls.

"Kyle is having an All-American year and has really been a leader on the team this season and his entire career," Blackmon said.

In Thompson's five collegiate tournaments in the 2000-2001 season, he has finished 2nd, 12th, 1st, 3rd and 20th. Those tournaments don't include the numerous other amateur tournaments he plays in year-round.

Thompson and his coach agree his mental approach is the key to Thompson's success. Thompson is almost a lock for first team All-America, and he's also a possibility for college Player of the Year.

While Thompson's individual statistics are great, the USC team statistics are even better. The Gamecocks have finished in the Top 10 in all five tournaments they've competed in.

The high mark of the fall season was the team's championship at the Inverness Intercollegiate following a second-place finish at The Ridges to start the fall season.

Redshirt sophomore Johan Kok won his first collegiate tournament at the 2000 Ridges.

"Johan is going to be one of the key factors in us getting where we want to be come season's end," Blackmon said. Kok is second in scoring average on the team at 71.83, trailing only Thompson's 71. Thompson has the only other individual victory on the team from the fall, the 2000 Carpet Capital Collegiate in Dalton, GA.

Senior John Bloomfield and junior college transfer Ernie Rose will also be important components in the team's quest for the SEC and national championships.

Bloomfield, of Kingston, Jamaica, has improved his stroke average each season and is the 1996 Caribbean Amateur Champion. He shot a USC record 19-under par at the 1999 Red River Classic.

Rose comes to Carolina after winning numerous tournaments on the junior college level and being named a junior college All-American. Both Bloomfield and Rose haven't finished below 41st in any tournament this season.

One of the leaders on and off the course is senior Lars Cederqvist, a 2000 Verizon Academic All-American with a 4.0 GPA. He finished fourth on the team in scoring in the 1999-2000 season.

Other players returning and looking to make an impact are redshirt sophomore Scott Feaster, sophomore Michael Maness and redshirt freshman Nash Elliot.

"Michael probably has the greatest potential of any player I have personally coached," Blackmon said.

Brent DelaHoussaye of Greenville is the highlight of this year's freshman class. He's already a team leader in scoring average and, according to Blackmon, shows a great deal of maturity. He was one of the state's best high school golfers and won the state championship his senior year at Riverside High School. The other freshmen on the team are Nash Elliot, Matt Robinson, Lee Taylor and Jake Thompson.

The obstacles that stand in the Gamecocks' way are the same ones that block their path every year. Georgia, Georgia Tech and Clemson are the only three teams in the nation continuously ranked ahead of the Gamecocks.

To get by those obstacles, Blackmon thinks the team still has to improve.

"In order to get where we want to be, we have to step up our focus," Blackmon said. "We started well in the fall and seemed to be more distracted towards the end. Our commitment level isn't quite where it needs to be."

If USC can get that commitment level up, this could just be the year of the Gamecocks.

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HEAD COACH



Puggy Blackmon
7th year at USC

2001 SCHEDULE

Feb. 19-20	Mercedes-Benz Collegiate	Pointe Vedra Beach, Fla.
March 9-11	Las Vegas Intercollegiate	Las Vegas, Nev.
March 24-25	Schenkel EZ-GO Invit.	Statesboro, Ga.
April 6-8	Billy Hitchcock Int.	Auburn-Opelika, Ala.
April 20-22	SEC Tournament	TBA
May 13-14	Cavalier Classic	Charlottesville, Va.
May 17-19	NCAA Regionals	Williamsburg, Va.
May 30-June 2	NCAA Tournament	Durham, N.C.

THE GOLFERS

John Bloomfield	Sr.	Jamaica, West Indies
Lars Cederqvist	Sr.	Skoevde, Sweden
Brent DelaHoussaye	Fr.	Greenville
Nash Elliott	Fr.	Estill
Scott Feaster	So.	Columbia
Johan Kok	So.	Peachtree City, Ga.
Michael Maness	So.	Galivants Ferry
Matt Robinson	Fr.	Rock Hill
Ernie Rose	Jr.	Gilbert
Lee Taylor	Fr.	Roanoke, VA
Kyle Thompson	Sr.	Columbia
Jake Thompson	Fr.	Greenville