

Houston "Fore"-cast for High School Golf '07-08

Written by Coach Rick Nordstrom of Cinco Ranch HS

It is our mini-Ryder Cup time again here in the Greater Houston Area. As the cooler weather seems to be finally arriving, your local Houston high school golf teams have been practicing hard in the heat since August and have already begun their year long tournament season. Most area high school teams have already played in two fall tournaments. The typical high school team plays 3 varsity tournaments in the fall and 5 varsity tournaments in the spring as they gear up for their district and regional tournaments in April. The state tournament in May will end the official high school season.

Several of our local teams represented our Greater Houston Area well last year at the "Elite Eight-team" State Tournament. Our local Woodland's boys, Clear Lake girls and the Montgomery girls all captured state championships last year. Also advancing to the elite 8 team tournament were the boys from Cinco Ranch, Memorial, Montgomery and Seven Lakes. Also playing very competitive in the girl's state tournament last year was Kingwood.

After two fall tournaments, these teams once again appear very strong and several of the usual contenders again seem to begin the year fighting for the 2007-2008 regional championship. The Woodlands boys just won their own 26 team tournament this past weekend at River Plantation. They shot 308-301 and had the individual winner of Ryan Kelley who shot 71-76. Cinco Ranch finished in second place as they tied The Woodlands on the first day, but could not overcome the Highlanders great second day of 301. Cinco Ranch's sophomore Kyle Westmoreland came in second individually with a score of 72-76. Clements finished third in the 26 team tournament as defending State Individual Champion Blake Redmond shot 74-76 to tie for third with Klein Oak's Cash Wilkerson and The Woodland's Gino Parrodi. Others shooting 155 or better were Adam Cashner and J.T. Taylor of Conroe, Eric Strine of Klein Oak, Micah Hill of Cinco Ranch, Jimmy Murphy of Clements, and Ian Armstrong of FB Austin.

There are many 5-A competitive boys' teams this year that appear to be very strong. Strake Jesuit returns 5 starters from last year. Senior Ben Thorseth has verbally committed to Rice and played extremely well in the Houston Amateur this past month. Other Crusader returners include Robert Mills, Garrett Verarde, Nicko Dodd, and Chris Lauinger. Fort Bend Austin appears strong too as they return 4 players in Cameron Hollek, Ian Armstrong, Aaron Sobremonte and Zach Soth. Their district rival Clements returns State Champion Blake Redmond, Justin Lavine, Johanas Veerman, and Jimmy Murphy to make that district an interesting dog fight. Elkins also has one of the top players in that district in Mark Slater. Cinco Ranch lost all five of its state qualifying team, but appears to be just as competitive with "super sophs" Kyle Westmoreland and Micah Hill. Cinco Ranch is also led by Junior Jimmy Elliott and Senior Bubba Valadez as the Cougars have already posted two second place finishes this year against top quality fields. The Woodland's looks once again to have a team that can defend its 5-A state championship. The Highlanders are led by Ryan Kelley, Gino Parrodi and Juan Salcedo who excelled in their tournament victory last week. They continue each year to have amazing depth as several more of their players will be making headlines this year as usual. Another tough team from year to year that also has a lot of tradition is the Kingwood Mustangs. They should be very competitive with their deep roster of players. Another Mustang team that is always tough in Region III is Memorial High School. With the U.S. Junior Amateur champion sophomore sensation Cory Whitsett and returner Lawrence Chang, the Mustangs should once again have a shot at the state tournament.

Several other teams should be competitive too who have outstanding individuals who have already posted good scores this year. Conroe has J.T. Smith and Adam Cashner, Klein Oak has Eric Strine and Cash Wilkerson, Katy Taylor has Kevin Vanden Heuvel, Katy has Trey Cassity and Andrew Ball, and Cy-Falls has Joey Reynolds who has posted some great scores in this year's T.J.G.T.

There are several great 4-A boys teams in the area also. Katy's Seven Lakes went to the state tournament last year and return all of their players. They won the River Ridge tournament in September with great scores from Tyler Thompson, Albert Miner and Ryan Hadash. Two other standouts for the Spartans are Trey Sullivan and Brian Swanson. The Friendswood Mustangs will be good again with players such as Taylor Dio, John Kyle and Corey Hayford. Montgomery also has a good shot at a return to state as they have deep

tradition with not just their girls but also with their boys. Barbers Hill has returning state qualifier Austin Snell who should rejoin the team in the spring after spending this semester in Florida at the David Ledbetter School. Another 4-A team that is tough every year and has many state tournament appearances is Crosby.

There seems to be only a few favorites on the girl's side at this time of the season. Clear Lake won the state championship last year by 31 strokes and have a deep solid program and should once again be a force in Region III. The Kingwood Lady Mustangs also played well at the state tournament last year, and return 2 great players in Sara Kothny and Katie Craig who should make them one of the top teams in the region. Clements seems to be the most loaded and has won both of their fall tournaments this fall. They return 4 of their top 5 players and could be the favorite to win the region this year. Returning for Clements are Portland Rosen, Maggie Ray, Katy Cardno and Brittany Butler. Other top individual players in the Houston Area include Dina O'Brien and Ellie McKinley from Cinco Ranch, Janell Lysack of Seven Lakes, Brianna Herrmann of Katy Taylor, Hannah Arnold of Lufkin, Megan Victorick of Deer Park, Casey Grice of A&M Consolidated, and Gina Bortelletto of The Woodlands. On the 4-A side, Montgomery continues to be the 4-A program to beat in the entire state as usual, for they are the defending state champion for the past several years. Montgomery has one of the top ranked players in the nation in state champion junior Lisa McCloskey. Montgomery's other top scorers this year so far are Allison LaRoche and Karisma Smith.

All of these Houston Area high school golfers make our area one of the nation's hotbeds for high school golf. The coaches and players are all very excited about this fall and upcoming spring season. High school golf has come a long way in the past few years as more kids have taken up the game and the school districts now have year long programs with coaches who are dedicated to the game and the kids. All golf fans should try to get to at least one high school tournament. I promise that you will enjoy the level of the talent and our mini-Ryder Cup atmosphere. Thank you to all of you that help promote high school golf and work with our kids.

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