

Aussies ace first Cotton States test

Foursome all enter weekend's match play seeded in top 11.

Scott Beder

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The boys from Down Under are showing the ability to get under - par that is - in the W.E. Cotton States Invitational golf tournament at Bayou DeSiard Country Club.

A contingent of four Aussies from Victoria has posted four of the lowest two-day totals during two rounds of qualifying, including a tournament-best 11-under par by Marc Leishman.

Leishman carded rounds of 68 on Thursday and a tournament-best 65 on Friday to secure the No. 1 seed heading into today's match-play format which pits the low 16 scores from the first two days in the championship flight.

"At home I'm used to the ball bouncing off the fairway," Leishman said. "Here you can hit it wider and the greens are a heap bit softer as well."

Leishman's countrymen Heath D'Altera, Kane Streat and Anthony Brown have found north Louisiana to their liking as well. D'Altera posted two consecutive rounds of 69 to earn the No.

5 seed at 138, while Streat is the No. 8 seed at 140 and Brown the No. 11 seed at 141.

"I'm quite happy," D'Altera said. "Today I played pretty good and I thought I would have a better score the way I hit it, but I had the same score."

The Aussies' strong showing is not surprising considering that their "college" training is playing golf.

Leishman and Brown attend the Victorian Institute of Sport, where they focus solely on playing golf and honing their game to turn professional. As Leishman puts it, it's "school without school work." It is a highly competitive atmosphere where you have to perform to remain enrolled.

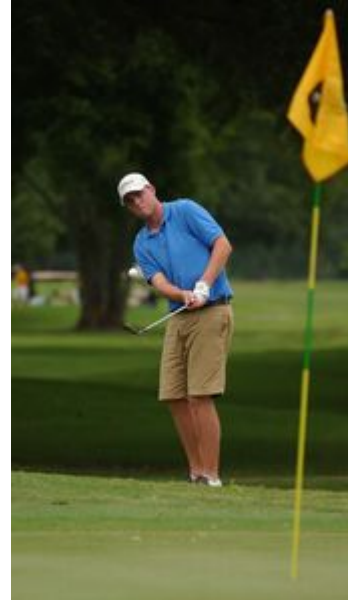
"This is my third year," said the 20-year-old Leishman. "It's a year-by-year thing. If you perform, you stay in. If you don't, you're out. It keeps you on your toes."

Leishman, who is from a town called Warrnambool, is spending most of his summer traveling and playing golf around the world. He is playing tournaments in Scotland, the United Kingdom and the U.S. The institute pays for his travel to Scotland - where he won a tournament recently - around Australia and to the U.K.

D'Altera, 21, does not attend the institute, but his life is also dedicated to golf.

"We don't have a lot of colleges so I'm playing golf and working part time," D'Altera said. "I'm going to stay over here for 21/2 months and play in amateur tournaments."

All four are also part of a 24-man team that represents the state of Victoria, one of six state teams. Each state team will eventually pick four golfers to represent them in a big tournament among the states later this summer. Their performance at every tournament is scrutinized.



Brandi J Thomas/The News-Star
Marc Leishman followed up his first-round 68 with a 65 Friday at the Cotton States Invitational.

"The squad is being picked while we're over here, so we're trying to play well," said D'Altera, who is from Geelong. "This is my first tournament over here. I've never been outside of Australia."

The Australians weren't the only golfers shooting low scores. Twenty-two golfers finished under par after the two qualifying rounds. It was a case of good players taking advantage of a course softened by rain earlier in the week.

One of those taking advantage was Monroe's Brandon Aydlett. The former St. Frederick standout and current LSU golfer followed Thursday's 70 with a 67 on Friday to finish at 137 to secure the No. 2 seed.

"I was hoping to follow up," said Aydlett, whose 67 was his best competitive round at Bayou DeSiard. "One good round doesn't mean much if you can't back it up with another."

Aydlett's two strong rounds have given the former Gulf States PGA Junior Golfer of the Year a needed boost of confidence after some up and down times.

Prior to the Cotton States he spent two weeks in Texarkana with swing coach Jeff Jones.

"I had a great couple of weeks with my teacher and worked on some things that needed to be done and it's paying off," Aydlett said. "I'm pretty confident and comfortable, especially having played out here so many times. I'm feeling more confident about my game than I have in a long time."

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