

Cole family key to Cotton States tourney's success

Keith Prince / General Assignment
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There are many significant aspects to the prestigious W. E. Cole Cotton States that begins Friday at Bayou DeSiard Country Club, but none is more beautiful than its historic tie-in with the Cole family.

Named, cultivated and nourished by Bayou DeSiard's late nationally respected pro Winnie Cole, the Cotton States Invitational will forever be linked to the Coles.

That rich family tradition continues this morning at 8:40 when 57-year-old Henry Cole of Monroe tees it up in the Cotton States for the 39th year. Winnie's youngest son has missed playing just three times in the past 42 years.

The entire field will be involved in today's qualifying round (Tee times are shown on 3C) and Cole hopes to make the championship flight - even though it grows tougher each year to compete against the talented group of "flat-bellies" that come to battle for this coveted title.

While Henry Cole doesn't relish any form of the spotlight, he admits feeling a special responsibility to this tournament, and needs to be heard from.

"I do want to remain involved as long as I can," Henry said. "I am proud of what my Dad did in starting and building the Cotton States into something that I believe has been beneficial to golf in our area. Our family will always feel a special bond to it."

Henry Cole played in his first Cotton States in 1961 when he was 15. Three years later, he reached the finals before losing to the great Homero Blancos, who won his third consecutive title that year.

"He beat me pretty bad," Henry said with a chuckle. Cole could have added that Blancos beat everybody pretty bad for three straight years here.

In addition to playing in more Cotton States than anyone else has, Henry Cole has reached the finals more times (4) than anyone else.

He was the runner-up in 1964, 1974, 1984 and 1992. He lost to four outstanding players. After Blancos, Cole fell to Stan Lee of Heber Springs, Ark., who won twice; Pat Stephens, a great player from Richmond, Ky.; and LSU star Rhett Crowder of Jackson, Miss., who recently won his fifth Mississippi state amateur title.

"They were all very good players, but that's the beauty of this tournament. We have always had tremendous players here," Cole said.

One of those "tremendous players" at the Cotton States was Henry's older brother, Clayton Cole, 62, who won the title in 1965 and who this September will be inducted into the Colorado Golf Hall of Fame.

Clayton Cole is in his 13th year as the head pro at famed Cherry Hills Country Club in Denver.

As far as his first memory of the Cotton States, Henry said, "Actually, the first thing that I remember is following one of our Monroe golfers, Wayne Woods, when I was about 10 years old. He was really a good young player."

Henry has a bushel basket full of memories about the Cotton States - particularly appearances of so many players who went on to greatness in the game.

"And bits and pieces of matches that were nearly unbelievable always come to mind," he said.

He remembers when Hal Sutton was in trouble before making two straight sand shots on his way to the 1976 title.

And he can still see the flop shot that brother Clayton made on No. 17 to go from apparent defeat to victory against LSU standout Randy Wolff in the semifinals in 1964.

"Rick Hyland beat (future British Open champ) Bill Rogers here one year, and three years after Jackie Cupit won here in 1960 he finished tied for the lead in the U.S. Open before losing in a playoff the next day," Cole said.

He also recalled that former Monroe-ULM golfer Robert Shelton defeated current PGA seniors star Dr. Gil Morgan on the way to the 1970 title.

"I think one of the real beauties of the Cotton States is that it is match play. So many times a dramatic shot will make the difference, and you can have upsets so easily.

"It's been fun being a part of it down through the years," he said.

And we are all lucky that the Cole family has so graciously helped give our community a wonderful golf treasure that we know as the Cotton States.

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