

It's tee for four in top flight

Cotton States semifinalists shine in their Saturday matches with solid victories at Bayou DeSiard CC.

Keith Prince / General Assignment
Posted on July 27, 2003

Defending champion Zack Atkinson and Australian Neven Basic face tough semifinal opponents this morning in the final day of the 52nd annual W.E. Cole Cotton States Invitational - but it would be hard to bet against either man after seeing their Saturday performances.

Atkinson destroyed a pair of opponents with machine-like accuracy, and Basic was perhaps even more impressive with an 11-birdie, no-bogey barrage at Bayou DeSiard Country Club.

In today's semifinal matches in the championship flight beginning at 9 a.m., Atkinson will square off with LSU standout Garrett Prather as Basic will face Ole Miss star Chris Rogers.

In Saturday's morning round, Atkinson needed a stellar effort to defeat Auburn's Matthew Myers 2 and 1.

"I was 4-under when I finally closed him out with a birdie on 17 and it took that kind of performance because he played awfully well, too," said Atkinson, the University of North Texas ace who won five straight matches here last year.

The lanky Texan then squared off with UNT teammate Weston Bingham in the afternoon and was in control from the outset, especially after going three up with a birdie on hole No. 9.

"We were both tired," Atkinson said. "Weston just didn't make his putts, and I was able to play steady, consistent golf all the way."

At one point, Atkinson had three straight birdies and finally ended it with a 3-foot birdie on No. 15.

Basic, in America for a summertime five-tournament tour of which this is the final stop, appears to be getting stronger each time out.

He said that he is considering turning pro after another full season of amateur play next year.

Basic came here after a second-place finish last week at the Rice Planters Invitational in South Carolina when he was 11-under for three rounds.

Saturday, he defeated Brad Gibson of Denton, Texas, 6 and 5 in the morning and then swept past Louisiana-Lafayette's Craig Trahan 5 and 4 in the afternoon.

"I had four birdies in the morning and then made seven in the afternoon match," Basic said. "I played very well both matches."

Just as impressive, he didn't make a bogey the entire day.

"I only missed two fairways and two greens the entire day," he said. "I think the course is a very fair test, not too hard but not too easy. ... I particularly like the par-5s because each one offers a great risk-reward opportunity."

Prather's two victories Saturday included a 6 and 5 romp over prep star Zack Trichell of Natchitoches, who has signed to play golf at Louisiana Tech.

Prather then polished off Greg Dubeau of Marksville 3 and 2 in the afternoon.

Dubeau, a 2001 Louisiana-Monroe graduate in marketing who did not play college golf, upset medalist Ben McClung of Vanderbilt in Saturday's opening round.

And, he used some magic to pull it off with a hole-out eagle wedge shot from 73 yards on No. 1 and later chipping in for



Michael Dunlap / Assistant Chief Photographer

Defending Cotton States champion Zack Atkinson is now just two match wins away from defending his title.

birdie on No. 11.

"I played well and made some great shots in the morning," Dubeau said. "I just couldn't keep it going against Prather. He and Atkinson should have a good match; both are very steady."

Rogers advanced into the semifinals by ousting TCU's Drew Pigg 7 and 5 and then ended Louisiana Tech's Chase Hemperley's run by a 5 and 4 count in the afternoon.

Hemperley, the big man from Dodson who stunned current Louisiana state amateur champ John Humphries on Friday, won his Saturday morning match against Spence Girouard 3 and 2.

Keith Prince is a staff writer for The News-Star. Call him at (318) 362-0267, e-mail kprince@thenewsstar.com or write to P.O. Box 1502, Monroe, La. 71210.