

OLIVER TWIST: First-year player Bekker dominates final day of Cotton States

By Matthew Reynolds

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Top-seeded Oliver Bekker lived up to his rank Saturday, winning the 56th W.E. (Winnie) Cole Cotton States Championship at Bayou DeSiard Country Club.

The South African native continued his dominance, cruising to a 4 and 3 victory of ULM's David McKendrick.

Bekker — who shot rounds of 66 and 65 in the two-day stroke play qualifier — navigated a strong field over three days for six consecutive matches to capture the title.

"I knew after I played so well in the qualifier that I had a very good chance to win the event," the three time All-American said. "Before the qualifier, I was a little unfamiliar with the course but felt fairly confident after the first two days."

Bekker's titanic tee shots, laser wedges and sure putter kept him on top throughout the tournament.

"I thought my putter was obviously a key for me most of the week," the Lamar University senior said. "This afternoon I thought the greens were playing ridiculously fast, though. I feel sorry for the members that are going to play this evening."

The seventh-seeded McKendrick — who had not trailed in any of his five previous matches — was upbeat after the loss.

"I honestly felt I played well all week," the Aussie said after the match. "He (Bekker) is a great player, and he played consistent all week. I just came up a little short."

ULM coach Chris Wilson followed his Warhawk golfer throughout the past two days.

"I'm extremely proud of him," Wilson said. "He hit a ton of fairways this week and I thought he stood strong in the midst of an impressive field."

Wilson added that this experience will do nothing but increase McKendrick's confidence going into his junior season.



Oliver Bekker took the Cotton States championship by storm. First, he shot 66-65 during qualifying to clinch the top seed during match play. Then he swept through six consecutive matches to claim the title.

"He showed this season that he is a leader and I think his play this week will make him an even better player," the ULM coach said.

John Luffey Jr., the Cotton States Tournament Chairman, said this was by far the best field the tournament had ever seen. The tournament committee selected 152 players from six different countries from over 200 applications.

"The field was extremely strong from top to bottom," Luffey said. "The tournament is becoming a key date on the calendar of many great amateur players throughout the world."

In a field where the talent ran so thick, Bekker was far from flying under the radar.

"It was apparent that he was a great player early in the week," Luffey said. "Physically and mentally, he (Bekker) was just steady to the very end."

Bekker said the event was one of the best golf experiences he has had.

The former Southland Conference Freshman of the Year felt honored to have been part of a tournament that has had so many great players compete.

"I had a few friends playing here already, but I felt like I have made some life-long friends here this week," Bekker said.

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