

GOLF

Matching Hole for Hole

With a new match play format in the Liberty League championship, the Yellowjackets set their sights on an NCAA berth.

By Scott Sabocheck

ROCHESTER GOLFER NICK PALLADINO '14 IS used to competing on a hole-by-hole basis on the golf course, having participated in local match play tournaments near his native Cleveland home for many years.

The 2011 NCAA tournament qualifier's experience will come in handy this spring as the Yellowjackets face off with golfers from three other schools for the Liberty League championship. For the first time, the league tournament will use a match play format, in which golfers earn points against their opponents based on their score for each hole rather than how few strokes they take during a full round of 18 holes.

"It's important that my teammates learn to take it one hole at a time," says Palladino, a chemistry major. "You can make an eight and your opponent can make a three and you will still only be one down."

The first round matchups for the league championship feature host Skidmore College against Clarkson University and Rochester against Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute at Saratoga State Park Golf Course in Saratoga Springs on April 28 and 29. The winners of day one will meet on day two for an automatic berth in the NCAA tournament in Howey, Fla., marking the first time that the league champion has been guaranteed to move on to the national team tourney.

"We know it's in our hands," says coach Dan Wesley. "We control our own destiny."

Although match play is typically a foreign situation to many golfers—among major international tournaments, only the biennial Ryder Cup follows a match play format—the Yellowjackets are getting in plenty of practice leading up to the championships. Wesley instituted a Rochester-only match play bracket last season for his seniors to have some fun, and it has carried over to this year's squad as a way to prepare the team for this spring. Wesley also allows his team to play one-on-one at other times during practice so they can get a feel for the different types of emotion that come with match play.



Under match play, golfers compete one-on-one against a player on another team, and whoever achieves the lower score on a particular hole wins that hole, regardless of the difference in the total stroke count. Golfers earn one point for each hole they win. Ties are considered halved, and the margin remains the same after that hole. The winner is decided when one player is up by any margin after the full 18 holes, or by a sudden death playoff if the score is tied after 18. Also, matches can end short of a full round if one golfer is up by a wide enough margin that the opposing player cannot catch up.

▲ **MATCH PLAY:** "It brings in another factor to the match," golfer Nick Palladino says of the match play format that will be used by the Liberty League championship in May.

Wesley says that match play comes with momentum swings after winning or losing holes, and golfers have to be mentally ready to move on to the next hole.

"You need to do everything you can to take away your opponents' momentum and then keep it for yourself when you've got it," he says.

Palladino, Rochester's only participant in the NCAA championships last year, agrees that the format requires a different approach to the game.

"In stroke play, you just worry about yourself and nobody around you," he says. "In match play, you absolutely have to consider what your opponent is doing. It brings in another factor to the match." **R**

Scott Sabocheck is assistant director of Athletics Communications.