Daytona State favored going into nationals

Falcons women ranked No. 1

By KEN WILLIS
SPORTS COLUMNIST

When you've become a perennial contender on the national level, with five championships as credentials, there's really just one logical goal as you head into the National Junior College Women's Golf Championship.

"To win," said Laura Brown, who's wrapping up her 15th season as the only women's golf coach in Daytona State College's history.

The chances?
"Good," she said. "Really good."

There's a reason for the confidence heading into the finals today-Thursday. DSC is ranked first nationally among two-year programs and the Falcons are coming off their best team round of the year — a final-day, even-par 288 at Venetian Bay to win the Region 8 championship. DSC started the April 21 final round two behind chief rival Seminole State College and won by nine.

DSC won its fourth and fifth national titles in back-to-back years — 2010-11 — when the Falcons were led by two-time national individual champ Mitsuki Katahira of Japan. Last year, DSC slipped to fourth in the national championship.

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So Young Hwang led Daytona State in scoring during the season (74.9) and was third in the nation.

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To win their sixth championship, the Falcons will have to do it in completely different surroundings — Longbow Golf Club in Mesa, Ariz.

DSC has been host to the past nine JUCO nationals — seven at LPGA International and two at Halifax Plantation. This week's forecast in Mesa calls for 100-degree highs each day. Handling the desert conditions will be an obvious factor, but mid-May at LPGA's Legends Course isn't exactly chilly, so sweat shouldn't be a new element for DSC's golfers.

"Last year (at LPGA) it was hot and humid and by the fourth day I was really tired," DSC sophomore Erin Selfridge said.

"It could be different. I don't know — I've never played in the desert before."

Selfridge, from Jacksonville, is one of three Falcons playing her final tournament for DSC — Callie Kitchens and Megan Garland are the others. When they arrived in late summer of 2011, the Falcons were off those two straight national titles. To go two straight years without one would be a definite letdown.

"I want to win one while I'm here," Selfridge said. "We're going out there to play our best. That's ultimately our goal — to win — but I think we're all focusing on our own games and what we have to do to get to that goal, not necessarily the goal."

Rounding out the DSC roster this week are two freshmen — Mary Dawson, of Melbourne, and South Korean So Young Hwang, who led the team during the season with a 74.9 scoring average, which was third in the nation. Hwang came to DSC after two years at the IMG Academy in Bradenton.

Again this year, the top competition for DSC comes from near — Seminole — and far — McLennan College (Waco, Tex.), West Texas College (Snyder, Tex.) and defending national champion Redlands College (Reno, Okla.). One potential advantage this year for DSC is a head coach that's not distracted by her duties as official tournament host.

"I haven't had that stress," said Brown, who played golf at New Smyrna Beach High and the University of Florida. "It's kinda nice to just go and spend the week with your team and not have to worry about running the tournament."