

Hunter golfers win one for 'Tex'

By: Bryant Carpenter | Posted: Thursday, July 22, 2010 4:34 pm

MERIDEN - It had been a few weeks since Spencer Wedge had talked on the phone to Tex Kane, a few months since the 18-year old had seen the head pro of Hunter Golf Club.

But there Tex was Tuesday morning, clear as day, walking right up to Wedge and shaking his hand.

Tex was saying something, too.

Wedge tried to make it out. This was Tex, after all, the guy who had hired him to work at the Hunter pro shop when he was only 13, who had given him pointers every time he watched him play.

So Wedge listened and listened hard.

All he heard was his alarm clock going off.

Only a dream, and yet even as he got out of bed, Wedge had a feeling it meant more than that. Given all that transpired over the next 12 hours, who could deny it did?

Wedge got out of bed, journeyed back to Montaup Country Club in Portsmouth, R.I. with fellow members from Hunter Golf Club and shot a 1-under par 70 to help the Meriden club wrap up its first team title in the New England Public Links Championship, an event in which Hunter has been competing since 1935.

A win for the ages.

And a win for Tex, too.

All 10 members of Team Hunter, from elder statesman Les Zimmerman and veterans Tom Boshuyzen and Chuck Stupakevich to young rookies Josh Suzio and Brent Besch, knew that Kane, a pro at Hunter since 1996, was in dire condition in his battle with cancer.

"We knew Tex's situation," said Zimmerman. "We had gotten word that he was ambulated from Philadelphia down to Florida where he wanted to be. I'm telling you, he was on our minds."

"I think that was our biggest motivation: to win for him," said Wedge.

The Hunter guys wanted nothing more Tuesday than to wrap up a tournament they already led by 14 strokes and then share the news with Tex.

They took care of the first piece of business in style. A day after shooting a cumulative 603, they went 10 strokes lower to win the 14-team event by a whopping 33-stroke margin. Finally, after 75 years, after a handful of second-place finishes, including last year to rival Timberlin, Hunter had that New England Public Links team trophy.

Not too long after they raised it - mere minutes, perhaps - Tex Kane passed away at age 64. Team Hunter got the call as they were driving home.

"Obviously, we were on cloud nine, winning the thing for the first time. It was something so special," said Zimmerman. "Then to hear what took place afterward was a letdown. We certainly wished he was still with us so he'd know we were fighting for him."

"We" was the operative word. Hunter took something of a dream team up to Montaup, and this dream team - not hand-picked, but determined by a 36-hole qualifying event - delivered.

Each of the 10 players had at least one individual score count in the team total. (All 10 play; the two highest scores are thrown out each day). On the second day, all 10 shot in the 70s, the range that Zimmerman, who's been playing this tournament since 1977, knows is imperative for victory.

Wedge's 70 was the team's low round. One-time pro Todd Tremaglio, playing with Hunter for the first time, had the team's overall low at 147 (74-73). That placed him sixth in the individual competition behind winner Len Caggiano of Alling Memorial-New Haven (142).

Wedge (149) was 13th. Zimmerman, Stupakevich and Besch, the former Lyman Hall player now playing for Bryant University, tied for 15th at 150.

Zimmerman's sons, Brett and Kyle, were back on the Hunter roster. Jose Diaz was aboard for the first time.

"This was definitely the best and deepest team we've ever had," said Brett Zimmerman. "I think everyone played to their potential for two days."

The New England Public Links, which dates back to 1921, is one of the oldest continuing tournaments in the country. Hunter has had individual champs in the past. Kyle Zimmerman won last year's event at Long Hill Country Club in East Hartford. Bill Dokas won in 1970 and Ed Allison in 1959, years in which the event was played at Hunter.

This team title, though, meant more.

"As individual a sport as golf is, (this tournament is) really our event where you're out there not playing for yourself, you're playing for nine other guys and you're playing for Hunter Golf Club," said Les Zimmerman. "That's been the deal, that is the deal and anyone you talk to on the team would say the same thing."

There was also the Tex factor this year. En route to Tuesday's final round, Wedge shared his dream with the team.

"They were definitely interested; they took it very seriously," he said. "They thought it was very cool; they thought it was a good omen."

Wedge was already certain it was. "After I woke up, I knew I was going to have a good day."

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