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TOP STORY

WKU MEN'S GOLF

## Metts takes unique path to Hilltopper head coaching post

New WKU coach is a former juvenile probation officer

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Chan Metts was a juvenile probation officer in his native Georgia with the itch to coach college golf.

When family connections led to a graduate assistant job in South Dakota, he and his wife, Whitney, took a chance.

“Luckily for me,” Metts said, “I have a wife who was willing to sell our house in Dublin, Ga., and move halfway across the country with me to pursue this dream.”

That was in 2015. Three years later, Metts has earned his first Division I head coaching job.

Metts was named Monday as Western Kentucky’s new men’s golf coach. He’d served the last two seasons as a Georgia Southern men’s golf assistant after working in 2015-16 as a GA for the men’s and women’s teams at the University of Sioux Falls, a Division II program.

Athletic director Todd Stewart and associate AD Jim Clark sorted through a stack of candidates and interviewed several in person before settling on Metts, 34.

It was a search Stewart never hoped to conduct. The job opened when Phillip Hatchett, who’d coached the Hilltoppers since 2010, died in a June cycling accident.

Finding someone to carry on Hatchett’s legacy became a central theme of the search, Stewart said.

“That’s why we wanted to find someone to carry on the legacy of Phillip, because he was so well respected as a coach and a person,” Stewart told the Daily News.

“We wanted to get somebody in here that would make (Hatchett’s widow) Beth Hatchett proud and our players proud that it’s someone who’ll pick up where Phillip left off.”

Metts brings a unique background to his first college head coaching job. He didn’t earn a college scholarship out of high school, instead walking onto the Georgia College and State University men's golf team in 2005.

“I was finally able to play really well in one of the walk-on tryouts that they had,” Metts said. “I kept knocking on (the head coach’s) door, trying to talk to him, basically begging him for a spot. He finally took a chance on me.”

Metts went on to a successful college playing career. He nearly led his team to a national tournament appearance and earned a scholarship by his senior year.

The son of a Georgia high school football coach, Metts said he had a passion for working with young people. He channeled that after college into a job with the state’s Department of Juvenile Justice, where he worked for seven years.

“When you’re working with young people, all you’re trying to do is help them achieve whatever goals they have,” Metts said. “Sometimes in that line of work, it was teaching them how to set goals and maybe what goals to work for.

“Now I get to work with a lot more motivated student-athletes. I have the same goals when I go to work every day. It’s to help whatever young people I work with be the best version of themselves that they can be.”

Golf was an avenue for Metts to unwind after work, he said. He competed in amateur events around the region and state and wanted to do more with the sport.

“I just finally decided that this was something I wanted to pursue,” Metts said. “I used to sit at my desk every day and dream about the possibility of becoming a coach.

“You never know if those dreams are going to come true or if you’re going to get that possibility. I finally just said it was something I was going to look into.”

Metts' sister and brother-in-law lived in South Dakota. They helped him get a GA position at Sioux Falls.



That led to a full-time post at Georgia Southern, where Metts was heavily involved in tournaments, travel, recruiting, practices, schedules and workouts.

The Eagles competed in the 2017 NCAA Regionals in Metts' first season on staff and twice finished second in the Sun Belt Conference Championships in his tenure. Six Georgia Southern players earned all-conference honors during his time there, while Steven Fisk and Jake Storey were each named Sun Belt Player of the Year.

Metts learned of the WKU head coaching vacancy through his boss at Georgia Southern, Carter Collins, and Austin King, a former Tops golfer who's now a Charlotte assistant.

During the interview process, Metts "struck us as someone who was ready to be a head coach," Stewart said.

"I think one unique thing about Chan's background, which I think serves him well, is working for seven years as a probation officer," Stewart said. "That certainly exposed him to a wide variety of people and issues, and I think any coach would tell you that part of their job is analyzing behaviors and behavioral patterns and moods. Chan has a wealth of experience in that area.

"In golf, while your players are very similar in some respects, every tournament, you identify someone as your one, two, three, four and five. Those 1-5 can be very different people and be very different in terms of how they approach the game. I think he'll be able to relate to all our players in whatever way he needs to."

Metts inherits a WKU squad that returns all but one player and brings back every player who competed at the 2018 Conference USA Championship, which the Hilltoppers finished with their best conference tournament round since 2008.

Rising senior golfer Billy Tom Sargent also became the second Hilltopper to ever compete in a NCAA Regional as an individual, and the first since Brent Long in 2008.

“I want to go after high-character kids that aren’t afraid of hard work,” Metts said. “Every day, I want to go in there and do things the right way and we want to outwork our opponents.

“I think if we can do those two things – if we can do things the right way and work harder than everyone else, we will be successful.”

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## **Brad Stephens**

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