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TOP STORY

WKU MEN'S GOLF

Sargent, Hilltoppers succeeding in honor of late coach Hatchett

Redshirt senior tied program record Sunday with 5th career win

BRAD STEPHENS bstephens@bgdailynews.com 1 hr ago



When Billy Tom Sargent takes the course, he takes reminders of his late coach with him.

Sargent's golf bag is emblazoned with a black patch that reads "P4C," short for "Play for coach."

The Western Kentucky golfer wears a gray rubber bracelet on his left wrist with the same message.

"He was a father figure to me," Sargent said of his late coach, Phillip Hatchett.

Less than a year after Hatchett's death, Sargent and the Hilltoppers are surging into the final month of their season.

WKU posted a team score of 851 last week at Vanderbilt's Mason Rudolph Championship. It was the best team tournament score for the Toppers since 2008.

Sargent led that effort in Nashville by collecting his fifth career college tournament title. The redshirt senior shot a 12-under-par total of 201, winning a prestigious event by two strokes.

“I never really thought about winning or anything,” Sargent said Wednesday before a practice round at Indian Hills Country Club. “It came down to the last day and I just tried to stick to my game plan, really.”

Sargent was named Wednesday as Conference USA Golfer of the Week. It’s the third time this season the Georgetown native has received that award.

“It was really impressive to watch,” first-year WKU coach Chan Metts said. “He had complete control of his game from the first tee shot on Friday through that last putt he made on Sunday.”

Sargent already established himself as a program great before his final college season. He won two tournament titles in 2016-17 as a redshirt sophomore and then another last year as a redshirt junior.

The Hilltopper was named last season as an All-Conference USA Second Team performer – WKU’s first all-conference pick since 2010. He was also the first Tops golfer since 2008 selected to play in an NCAA Regional.

Sargent was preparing for his redshirt senior season last June when he lost the man who recruited him to WKU and coached him throughout his college career. Hatchett, 55, died when he was struck by a vehicle in Logan County while riding his bike in a group with other cyclists.

“Being 2½ hours away from home, Dad’s not here,” Sargent said. “Coach (Hatchett) kind of took us all under his wing. It wasn’t all just about golf and him coaching us and making us better golfers.

“He was making us better people and mentoring us and making us better all-around people.”

Athletic director Todd Stewart in August hired Metts, a Georgia Southern assistant, to succeed Hatchett.

“I think anytime that a great tragedy happens, it can make a team kind of go one of two directions,” Metts said. “It was very clear from day one when I got here that these guys were able to use that to make sure they came out on the other side of it as a tighter unit, as closer guys.

“There’s a family atmosphere on this team, and I think a lot of it goes to the culture that coach Hatchett had established and just the fact they weren’t going to let something like what happened go in vain.

“They decided to play for coach this year.”

That motto of playing for coach has been on Sargent’s bag, wrist and mind as he’s put together an impressive 2018-19 campaign.

Sargent’s now won two tournaments, having also claimed victory in October at an event in Kennesaw, Ga. His victory last weekend in Nashville gave him five tourney wins for his career, tying the Hilltoppers’ career mark set by Brent Long.

The win at Vanderbilt came through adverse conditions. Sunday’s final round was stopped twice for weather delays as wind and rain battered the course.

“That’s where you have to be the most patient, because you might not get as close to the hole as you normally would with good conditions,” Sargent said. “It’s all about patience and staying in the moment.”

Sargent’s 54-hole score of 201 tied for the second-lowest in program history, one off the record 200 set by Long in 2008.

Following the tournament, WKU moved up to No. 89 as a team in the Golfstat rankings, while Sargent surged more than 100 spots to No. 139 in the individual rankings.

“All the credit really goes to Billy Tom and how hard he works on his game, day in and day out, just how dedicated he is to it,” Metts said.

Sargent and the Hilltoppers have one more regular-season event left, the Southern Intercollegiate on Monday in Athens, Ga.

One week after that, WKU will be in Texarkana, Ark., for the Conference USA Championship. Play begins April 22, with the champion decided April 25.

The Toppers will be aiming for the program’s first C-USA crown.

“Every day we’re working harder and pushing each other because we want to be the best we can be,” Sargent said. “Our No. 1 goal going into this year was always just to win conference, win for coach and move on to (NCAA) Regionals as a team and be successful.”

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MORE INFORMATION



Tops' Sargent ties program record with fifth career win

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