

Redbirds fall to Illini at Illinois Challenge

Written by Zack Fulkerson, Reporter
Tuesday, 05 February 2013 10:34

The ISU women's golf team opened its spring season on Sunday, falling to Illinois in the two-round Illinois Challenge. While winning two out of the three matches in the morning, ISU would eventually succumb to the par-72, 5,094-yard course on Sunday afternoon.

The tournament, which was held at the Venice Golf and Country Club in Venice, Fla., was cut short in the afternoon hours to ensure that both teams could make their flights back to the Land of Lincoln.

The morning round consisted of three, three-ball matches, in which the Redbirds were dominant, grabbing two out of the three possible points. A team consisting of senior Katie Jean and sophomore Hayley Guyton defeated their opponents (2&1), as did juniors Rachel Powers and Carlee Cossell. Junior Jordyn Wyzgowski and freshman Courtnee Cossell fell to Illinois in the third match, (2&1).

The afternoon round was made up of individual matches between the teams. Three of the matches did not play through 18 holes, thus splitting those points and awarding each team half. Illinois ultimately won the tournament 6-3. Despite their shortfall, Redbirds' head women's golf coach, Darby Sligh, was pleased with the team's effort.

"We played extremely passionately this weekend," Sligh said. "It's a shame we ran out of time to finish the matches completely, but the competition was outstanding. Winning two match points early was just what we needed to be in position to pull it out but we just fell short in the end. I was very proud of the way this team worked under pressure. I believe we are much better prepared to jump into the season after this solid display."

Coming off of the loss, the 'Birds are readying themselves mentally and physically for six more tournaments spanning 13 total days over the next 11 weeks. Sophomore Hayley Guyton says that the team has been working on their mental game in order to reclaim the MVC title.

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“We’ve all been working with [Coach Darby Sligh] on different goals we’ve wanted for ourselves for the spring. We’ve been working on our mental game to get back our conference title, which is one of our huge goals. We’re all great golfers, but whenever it’s going to come down to dealing with pressure we need to practice those scenarios so that we’re ready for it,” Guyton said.

A key role player in the spring matches will be senior Katie Jean, who was recently named Golfer of the Week for the third time this season. Jean has finished in the top-10 in her last five tournaments, including a first place finish at the Redbird’s home tournament at the beginning of the season.

“I definitely expect us to compete better and a little more consistently. The fall was a bit of a struggle, but judging from the work we’ve put in this winter – and even in the past three weeks — we’ve gotten some really good work in. This past weekend, even though we lost, I think we’re looking a lot better coming out of the winter season than we have in previous years ... so we just need to continue what we’ve been doing,” Jean said.

Sligh shared some of the same sentiments about the improvements that have been made over the past three weeks.

“As always, this is an exciting time of the year for us as we start our spring season. We have seen great gains both physically and mentally in the last three weeks of practice and I’m looking forward to see who will break out and put it all out on the table,” Sligh said.

The ISU women’s golf team will compete next at the Jim West Challenge in Blanco, Texas starting on Feb. 17.