

Hoefle takes another shot at the Open

Written by Tom Fruehling

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The last time Bill Hoefle came close to golf's magic ring he slipped up at the worse possible moment.

Two years ago, he was 6-under par going into the last hole of the sectional qualifying tournament for the very prestigious U.S. Open.

But he double-bogeyed the hole, limped into sixth place and came home to Marion kicking himself but hardly screaming.

He'll try again next Monday (June 6) at the St. Charles Country Club near Chicago, one of a dozen sites around the country where one or two of the top finishers earn the prize of competing in this year's U.S. Open, June 16-19, at the Congressional Country Club in Bethesda, Md.

Hoefle, 40, the highly-regarded sophomore boys basketball coach and assistant boys golf coach at Linn-Mar, made it to next week's 36-hole sectional qualifier with a runner-up score of 72 earlier this month in a first-round meet at Crow Valley Country Club in the Quad Cities.

He'll be joined by hot shot college golfers, tour professionals who lack an exemption to the tournament or aren't in the top 50 in the rankings, and some like himself, very good players no longer trying to make a living at it.

"I've got a chance to make the Open, and so does everyone else who will be there," says Hoefle, who just completed his sixth year of teaching business classes at Linn-Mar. "It's one day of golf, and if I'm at my best, it's always the possibility. But there won't be a lot of pressure for me, and I have no great expectations."

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For him, these days professional golf is a part-time summer job.

He says he has his own circuit of three or four Midwest tournaments (always including the Waterloo and Cedar Rapids Opens).

There's always the hope that he'll cash in big time, like the \$40,000 awarded to the Waterloo winner.

But he usually collects a few thousand dollars over the summer, doing what he'd be doing anyway even if there was no prize money involved.

"It beats winning trophies," says Hoefle. "And it's better than teaching summer school."

With teaching and coaching jobs that he loves, wife Mary, a pharmacist at Mercy Care North, 7-year-old daughter Abby and 5-year-old son Nathan, he has a fulfilling life away from the links.

In his younger days, though, Hoefle chased the dream of being a full-time PGA touring pro.

Fellows he played with in national junior events like Phil Mickelson, David Duval and Justin Leonard made the leap into fame and fortune.

"My aspiration had always been to play on the PGA Tour. I thought I was good enough. But people don't know how hard it is to make it to the top 125 in the world," he said.

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Growing up in Ames, where he was a high school pal of Iowa State basketball coach Fred Hoiberg, Hoefle won the state prep golf championships in his sophomore and junior years. Expected to lead his Ames High team to a state title as a senior, he was suspended for drinking with buddies before a football game and missed the tournament. It was a valuable lesson, he says now, that he passes on to his players and students about young people making the right choices.

Named Iowa Amateur Player of the Year in 1991, he went on to star with the elite golf program at Oklahoma State and earned an MBA at the school in 1994. (Had he accepted the scholarship offered him at Stanford University, he would have been a senior when Tiger Woods was a freshman.)

Hoefle spent the next six years pursuing his passion. He played three years on the professional Hooters Tour, then stepped up for three years on the Nationwide Tour, golf's equivalent to baseball's triple-A. He always earned paychecks but only once made it into a regular PGA tournament.

In 1999, he decided to hang it up.

"It was time to get a real job," he says.

Married by then, the couple moved back to Iowa from Kansas City and he took a position as stockbroker for A.G. Edwards in Cedar Rapids. He enjoyed dealing with clients but not the sales aspect of the job.

"I decided what I really wanted to do was teach," he said.

Hoefle took courses for a teacher's certificate at Coe College, student taught at Linn-Mar in the fall of 2004 and has been happy there ever since.

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But, he says, "If I win the U.S. Open, I might not be back next year."