

2007-08 Men's Golf Season Preview

Some like it hot. Some like it hot ter.

Seminole men's golf coach Trey Jones likes to turn the heat up as high as it can go and then some.

He's the same way with the goals he sets for his players and his program at Florida State. Now in his fifth season in Tallahassee, the goals he has set have increased each year — and he's not about to stop turning the heat up on his players to reach those very lofty goals.

"We can win national championships at Florida State," said Jones. "We

have the support, the facilities and the climate — all the resources we need to be successful. Each year we continue to upgrade our roster with players who believe we can reach the ultimate in college golf — being the best. Those are the kind of players we have at Florida State and those are the kind of players we are going to continue to bring to Florida State."

Jones has certainly put together a roster full of talented players who have the ability to compete with the top teams in the nation in 2007-08. The Seminoles return seven of eight let-

ter winners including four of the five starters who catapulted the Seminoles to a third place finish in the ACC Championship, a fifth place finish in the NCAA East Regional Championship and a tied for 13th place finish in the NCAA Championship finals.

Florida State returns a pair of All-Americans along with two additional starting line-up regulars, and four players who have played in the starting five throughout their careers while adding two of the top recruits in the nation to one of the deepest and most talented rosters in the college golf. The Seminoles lost only one player from last year's team that enjoyed the top season for the program in more than a decade.

"We are a very talented team with a great deal of potential entering the season," said Jones. "The golfers who led us to a great season last year are all back and should be even better players this year. But no spots in the line-up are secure because they all continue to improve and we have added two outstanding players. The competition that will go on amongst our guys to see who will play in each event is going to be fun to watch. On the same hand, the pressure to perform is always going to be there — you won't be able to take a round off during qualifying or in a tournament because someone just as good as you are wants your position in the line up."

The top two spots in the line-up seem secure and will be handled by a pair of All-America and All-ACC honorees in senior Jonas Blixt and junior Matt Savage. Last season marked the first time since 1995 that two Florida State golfers had earned All-America honors (Blixt earned second-team honors while Savage earned honorable mention honors) in the same season and the first time since 1998 that at least one Seminole has been named to one of the All-America teams. Last season also marked the first time since 1994 that two Seminoles had earned All-ACC honors in the same year.

Blixt (Hammaro, Sweden) earned medalist honors at the ACC Championship and finished tied for 29th in the individual standings at the NCAA Championship in 2007. His outstanding performances during his sophomore and junior seasons have led the Florida State men's golf team to heights that are unmatched in the recent history of the program. In addition to leading the Seminoles to the 2007 NCAA Division I Championship finals for the first time since 1996, he has led the Seminoles to play in consecutive NCAA Regional championships for the first time since the 1995 and 1996 seasons.

Blixt finished at even par for the entire spring 2007 season and turned

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— Coach Trey Jones



Jonas Blixt

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Cameron Knight

in his most outstanding performance of the first three years of his career came in winning the ACC Championship at the Old North State Club in New London, N.C. In winning the ACC Championship, he carded his single-round career-best score (65) in the final round, his career best three-round tournament (208) and his career-best three-round tournament score vs. par (minus eight) in winning the event by one stroke. He then finished as the Seminoles' top golfer in the NCAA finals with a one-under par total of 215 in leading the Seminoles to a fifth place finish at the NCAA East Regional Championship.

"Jonas just continues to get better and better with each round and in each tournament he plays," said Jones. "He is such a mentally tough golfer who has worked extremely hard to get to where he is today. His final round performance at the 2007 ACC Championship was as good a round as I have ever seen in a big tournament. He has the potential to finish his career being mentioned as one of the top golfers ever at Florida State — and that's saying a lot."

Savage (Louisville, Ky.) also has the potential to become one of the top golfers in school history during the next two seasons. He has played in 23 events in the first two year of his career and has finished in the top-25 of the individual standings an incredible 15 times. Savage has finished in the top-25 in 13 of his last 15 events entering the 2007-08 season including a tie for ninth place finish in the 2007 NCAA Championship finals. His NCAA finish marked the highest individual finish for a Seminole since Andy Purnell finished sixth at the NCAA's in 1990. Nolan Henke, another of the all-time Seminole greats, finished in second place in the individual standings in 1987. Savage finished in a career-best third place at the fall 2006 Shoal Creek Intercollegiate.

Savage averaged a career-low 72.92 strokes in 37 rounds during the fall 2006 and spring 2007 seasons. He shaved nearly one stroke from his freshman season average and now averages 72.37 strokes per round for his entire career. Savage has finished at the top of the Seminoles' leader board in five of the Seminoles' eight events during the spring of 2007 and once during the fall of 2006. In addition, he has finished with scores at 75 or better in 29 of the Seminoles' 37 rounds this year (fall and spring seasons).

"Matt is flat-out an outstanding golfer and is without-a-doubt going to continue to grow and get better during the rest of his career at Florida State," said Jones. "He puts everything that he has into being a great student of the game and that allows him to be a great golfer. As he continues to work hard his scores are going to continue to come down."

The third and fourth positions in the Seminoles' line-up are anchored by a pair of sophomores — Cameron Knight and Seath Lauer — two players who contributed to Florida State's success a year ago and two players who best golf is definitely ahead of them. Both players were in the line up during the majority of last spring and both played integral parts in the Seminoles' successful postseason run in the ACC, NCAA East Regional and NCAA Championship finals in 2007.

Knight (Dade City, Fla.) enjoyed a very consistent freshman season and finished his inaugural collegiate season with a 74.65 stroke average. He averaged 72.00 strokes during the 2007 NCAA Championship finals and finished as the Seminoles' third leading golfer in the event.

Knight played well during the spring of 2007 and finished his play in the 2007 NCAA Championship in a tie for 49th place. He finished with a 288 total to rank as the Seminoles' third-

leading golfer in the championship. Knight led the Seminoles in the third round with a career-low 67 to help the team make the top 15 and allow them to play on the final day of the event. He was very consistent over each day of the NCAA East Regional Championship as he averaged 74.00 strokes per round and did not finish with a score above 75.

"Cameron really showed us what he was capable of during the spring and on into the postseason," said Jones. "We were really excited for him because he is a quiet player who doesn't say much in practice or on the course. He certainly spoke loudly with his clubs and his mental toughness last spring and was one of the biggest reasons why we played as well as we did as a team in the regional championship and national finals."

Lauer's season closely paralleled that of Knight as he also gained confidence during the fall season and began to become a complete player in the spring. It was during the spring season that both Knight and Lauer began to really display their true potential.

Lauer (Huntington, Ind.) was the Seminoles' standout at the Linger Longer Invitational — the event smartly utilized by Jones as pre regional and championship finals tune-up for the team. Lauer set a near personal-best mark for single-round score (68 in the second round) and career-best records for 36-hole score (138), gross tournament score (21), tournament score vs. par (minus 6) and best finish (tied for fourth) in leading the Seminoles to their fourth top three team finish of the year. In many aspects, it was Lauer's play at the Linger Longer that set the tone for the entire team going into the national tournament.

Lauer finished fourth on the team with a 74.45 stroke average in 10 tournaments during his freshman season. He played the best golf in the postseason and finished in a tie for 32nd place in the individual standings to help the Seminoles to a fifth place finish at the 2007 NCAA East Regional Championship. He carded two of Florida State's top-10 scores during the spring of 2007. He carded a career-low 67 in the Hootie at Bulls Bay Invitational and a 68 in the Linger Longer Invitational.

"Seath's maturation in the spring season of his freshman season was also a big boost to our team," said Jones. "He is a very good player and the success he was able to achieve did wonders for his confidence. His was able to gain confidence from his teammates early on and his teammates were able to gain confidence from him during the spring season. That shared confidence is one aspect of our total team concept — one that will be very important this season."

The competition for the remaining spot in the line up created by the graduation of senior Torstein

MEN'S GOLF

Nevestad will be hotly contested from the first day of practice in the fall. Any of the three remaining seniors — Song Jeon, Bradley Ruch and Tommy Rymer — junior Nicholas Smith — or freshmen Drew Kittleson or James Byrd — could fill the important void in the line up.

"We have so many good players who can play for this team at any time," said Jones. "Every returning player on the roster and both of the incoming freshman could easily play for us. The competition for many of the spots in our line up are going to be up for grabs each week. As a coach, that is very exciting because it will help our players improve and our players get better."

Jeon (Seoul, South Korea) is four-year member of the Seminole men's golf team who was part Jones' first recruiting class at Florida State. He is a senior who has played in 20 events including one NCAA East Regional (spring 2006) and two ACC Championships during his career. Jeon has carded his career-low tying score of 69 three times — during the spring 2005 Gator Invitational, the fall 2005 Shoal Creek Intercollegiate and the spring 2006 ACC Championship and was Florida State's top finisher at the 2005 ACC Championship with a tied for 12th place finish.

"Song needs to regain some of the confidence he had at the beginning of last spring," said Jones. "He is a fundamentally sound golfer who works hard. He just has to play his way back into the line up and play well in qualifiers to be a force for this team."

Ruch (Louisville, Ky.) did not play in 2006-07 as he took a redshirt season in order to re-define some of the aspects of his game. He began his career at Florida State during the fall of 2003...he has played in 19 events and 57 rounds during his career (including two ACC Championships) and is one of the Seminoles' most experienced players. His last action came at the spring 2006 Gator Invitational so he is looking forward to getting back out on the course for the Seminoles.

"I think a year away from competition did Bradley a lot of good," said Jones. "He has refocused his game and

tweaked a couple of aspects of his mechanics. I expect Brad to be a different player for us — one who is ready to compete and one who is ready to continue to improve as a golfer.

Rymer (Hastings, Minn.) is the fourth of the Seminoles' seniors who will look to play his way into Florida State's lineup. He has as played in nine events in the last two seasons and helped the team earn a bid to the 2006 NCAA East Regional Championship and the 2007 NCAA Championship finals. Rymer is a long hitter who regularly finds the greens with his tee shot.

"Tommy is a golfer who can help us this season," said Jones. "We are going to play a number of courses that are very conducive to his style of play. We are hoping he can earn his way into the line up and help us during those tournaments."

Smith (Belleview, Fla.) is another of the experienced Seminoles who will be expected to earn his way back into the line up in 2007-08. He played in six events as a sophomore and played well during his second season at Florida State. Smith began the season well as he was a total of eight strokes over par in the Florida State hosted Seminole Intercollegiate and the Hootie at Bulls Bay Invitational and finished in a career-best tied for 10th place in the individual standings as he helped the Seminoles to a ninth place finish at the Seminole Intercollegiate. Smith averaged 75.89 strokes in nine rounds during three events in the spring season.

"Nick is an immensely talented golfer who has played well for us during the first two years of his career," said Jones. "He needs to play more consistently in qualifiers and in each round of the events he plays in for us. Once he develops more of a sense of consistency, he will be a force for us and will have the ability to help us win tournaments."

Florida State's freshman — Kittleson and Byrd — are college-level ready golfers who have been recruited to help the Seminoles immediately.

Kittleson (Scottsdale, Az.) — the No. 4 ranked junior golfer in the nation by the AJGA — is the one of the highest ranked prep players to ever join the Florida State men's golf program. He earned All-America First-Team honors as a high school senior and represented the United States in the Junior Ryder Cup and the Honda International Junior Championship in 2006. Kittleson is a highly consistent player who will compete for playing time in the Seminoles' line-up immediately upon his arrival at Florida State.

Byrd (Windermere, Fla.) joins Florida State for his first season and will immediately become a candidate to earn playing time as a member of the Seminoles' starting line-up.

He is also one of the top high school players entering the collegiate ranks in 2007 and earned Future Collegians World Tour All-America Third-Team honors in 2006.

"The addition of Drew and James as freshman and building blocks are the types of players who will continue our progression toward becoming a complete program," said Jones.

"They will allow us to be a solid team from the top with our seniors to the bottom with our freshman. Drew and James are the types of players we have to continue to bring in to our program in order continue to put the heat on every member of our lineup to be at their best each and every day."

Always turning the heat up — just the way Jones likes it. ■



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Matt Savage

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