

Del Norte golfer qualifies for NCS tournament

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Del Norte junior Kai Russell has advanced to the North Coast Section Division-II Boys Golf Championships for the second straight year after another big spring in H-DNL action.

Russell, who finished sixth in the season standings and received all-league honors, will make the trip to Rooster Run Golf Course in Petaluma on May 8 along with nine other golfers from the H-DNL, including five from the league champion Eureka Loggers.

Russell closed out the league season with a round of 89 at Baywood Golf and Country Club recently and was one of several Del Norte golfers that showed a lot of improvement this season, according to his coach Luke O’Laughlin.

“Everybody, from last year to this year, has made a pretty drastic improvement overall,” the coach said. “It’s kind of starting to click for them. This year was more about improvement and they all did that.”

O’Laughlin is hoping Russell can carry that momentum into the Division-II section tournament and possibly qualify for the Division-I championships.

“The best case for him is to qualify and make it to the next tournament,” the coach said. “But at least we’d like to see that improvement and keep building on that.”

Russell closed out the regular season with a big push, shooting a season-low 82 in back-to-back rounds at the Redwood Empire Golf and Country Club in Fortuna and the Del Norte Golf Course heading into the final

round in Arcata.

Even more impressive, he teamed with fellow junior Blake Larson to place first at the Dutcher Creek Freeze two-person scramble tournament in Grants Pass on April 14.

The Warriors duo got to compete in sunshine for the first time all season on the way to shooting a 68, and they beat out several schools from Oregon for the victory.

And they did it on a course they had never seen before.

“What made this even more special was that while golf is predominately about what the individual player is capable of, seeing them get a chance to compete and win as a team was a nice change of pace,” O’Laughlin said. “It really showed the beauty that is golf, and that’s playing this game with friends.

“They had to play off each other and talk through it, and it was kind of a neat environment to watch them do that.”

The season itself was a challenging one for the Del Norte boys and the rest of the H-DNL, with cold, wet and windy conditions persistently causing problems.

But none of that appeared to dampen the golfers’ spirits.

“It was great to see everybody (in the H-DNL) battling through what we had to go through,” O’Laughlin said. “It was great to watch these kids battle through the amount of rain and cold we had and not be phased and to keep at it.”

Russell, in particular, impressed for the Warriors on his way to earning a second consecutive White Star.

Larson also enjoyed a big spring and placed 16th overall in league, while shooting a season-best round of 90 in Del Norte.

This year’s Warriors team also included Anthony DeVoss, Ayden Antonetti, Gabriel Gallardo, Nicolas Jager and Gabe Howard and placed sixth in the H-DNL team championship.