

COVER STORY

ALWAYS STEADY**Martin Roache's consistency paves way for big win in Cleveland**

If familiarity breeds contempt, then South Carolina State's Martin Roache has done himself a disservice by adopting golf as his main game.

Fact is, Roache's approach to the sport comes closer to being an obsession rather than a love/hate thing. His dedication to finely tuning all parts of his game is what separates him from his college counterparts. Deper still, attention to detail is the reason he emerged triumphant in last month's National Minority College Golf Championship held at Cleveland's Highland Park Golf Course.

Roache's victory, his first as a collegian, was a study of consistency. Yeah, he had a few errant shots. But when it counted the most, he stayed on course to win by one stroke over Florida A&M's Leo Bennett. Roache's two-day total of 141 set a new record for the five-year old tournament.

The Orangeburg, S.C. junior set the course on fire. But what's most pleasing (if you're an avid SC State golf fan) is that Roache was in position to shoot even better. The first day, for example, he led the field with a sterling 2-under par 69. He would have finished at 67 had he not bogied 17 and 18. In the final round, he held steady at par until the 18th hole, when he bogied again and carded a one-over 72.

Given his sizzling first round, you'd think that as the leader, he'd feel comfortable, almost unreachable for the rest of the field. Martin confirms that such thinking is self-defeating. He never allowed himself to believe that he had everything under control.

"I didn't think about that," Roache told *Black College Sports Review*. "When you start thinking about the other golfers and what they're doing, that's when you start to mess up. To play well, you have to worry about what you're doing. You really have to have that kind of concentration in order to win consistently."

Lyman Foster has coached Roache for the past three years. The Bulldogs mentor has witnessed continued growth in Roache's game during that time. In his mind, the black college champ will only get better.

"Consistency is Martin's strong suit," says Foster. "In the past, he showed flashes of

excellence. Now he's playing more even. He doesn't like to be second-best. Martin's success is due to hard work and self-confidence. He works on his game constantly."

Constantly? Now that's an understatement.

In basketball, there are folk you can

average and inconsistent. Learning how to play the individual course instead of the individuals he's paired with has produced very satisfactory results.

"Playing to beat the course is vital," Roache acknowledges. "That's where your real competition is. If you can match par for the course, you'll always be in the lead or

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always find hangin' out at the courts, alias the gym rats. Roache does the same, but he chooses the golf course instead. He has an ongoing case of fairway fever.

Roache's fever runs a higher temperature than usual during the summer months. Over the past two years, Roache has practically been a full-time resident at golf courses in Myrtle Beach, SC. He gets his hours in as a cart attendant, greens attendant, or driving range coordinator, whatever needs to be done for that particular golf course. During non-working hours, he's on the course, refining everything from club grip to sand strap shots. It's not unusual for him to spend as many as six to seven hours a day on the course when he isn't working.

The endless hours are anything but continuous labor for the Bulldogs top golfer. He is the first to realize that the extra hours have made a difference.

"My swing is improved and so is my confidence," Roache says. "This is a game where you can improve as you get more experience. The more experience you get, the more you feel that you can play at a high level all of the time."

Roache has always had a mean game once he hit the green. But he's reached a new level by improving in more than just two or three other aspects of his game.

"He has the ability to get up and down the course," Foster adds. "He has good length coming off the tee and is especially good with the long iron. Plus, he focuses well on getting par."

Getting par is the key to Roache's approach. Without that focus, he becomes

close to the lead. Par is really hard to beat."

With one college season remaining, Foster plans to enter Roache in tougher tournaments to bring out the best that's in him. Doing so, the coach explains, puts Roache in a situation where he'll be tested constantly by the top players at highly regarded golf programs.

Roache will get a full taste of that in tournaments such as the Palmetto Invitational, a South Carolina college tournament which features some of top powers in the southern region (Clemson, South Carolina, North Carolina, Wake Forest). Foster is confident that his guy will get an invite for the '92 event.

Given that level of competition, along with the battles Roache has to face on his own team, it seems that he should continue his ascent to national prominence. He's the Bulldogs No. 1 player, but on any given day, there are three other SC Staters who he knows can beat him.

It's no automatic for Roache or anybody else to make to the black college nationals. The Bulldogs always have a 36-hole qualifying play-off to determine who makes the trip. If you don't finish in the top five, you don't travel.

For now, that's something to worry about for next year. Roache, an economics major, is only concerned about the present.

"I just want to continue to work hard," he says, "and be the best college golfer I can be. It's a matter of taking things one step at a time. If I continue to play well, then maybe I'll have my chance to turn pro. But for now, I'll focus on the present."

— Craig T. Greenlee

