



# Driving Ambition

## M State golf team building a national reputation

Success didn't come easy for the Spartan golf program, but it has arrived.

The Spartans – playing in a state where snow keeps them off the course for nearly half the year – have been among the top five golf teams nationally for six consecutive years and won the National Junior College Athletic Association national title in 2012. While the Spartans play a fall season, most teams at the national tournament – held each June in New York – are coming off spring seasons.

The Spartans' success is being noticed in the golf world, with M State players attracting the attention of recruiters from Division I and II colleges. All-American golfer Chris Swenson, who will graduate this spring with his AA degree after competing two seasons for the Spartans, this summer defeated several former Division I golfers to win one of the top amateur events in Minnesota, the Pine to Palm Golf Tournament in Detroit Lakes.

"To win this tournament is a phenomenal accomplishment," said Spartan coach Jason Retzlaff.

But while much has changed from the early years of the Spartan golf program, some things have not.

"Back in my early years of coaching, we struggled to field a team," Retzlaff said, "but the values haven't changed for our pro-

gram. First, we want to recruit people of character. Second, student athletes who are academically accountable. Third, student athletes who are highly skilled in the game of golf. This has been our recruiting philosophy for all 14 years of our golf program.

"Early on we were able to check off the first two boxes. Once we experienced some team success on the golf course, it's been much easier to attract students who can be successful in all three of those areas."

Recruiting, he adds, "certainly has become easier through the years."

Jeff Haukos, one of the players on Retzlaff's first golf team in 2004, is Retzlaff's long-time assistant, and the two men know that the lessons learned by their players on the course also will serve them well in their career and in life.

"To me, golf is the ultimate mental sport," Retzlaff said. "The big thing we work with is ... how to compete and keep your mind clear in a high-stress situation."

And just as important as winning, he said, is having fun.

"Playing sports isn't worth it if you aren't having fun," he said, "and that's something we remind our players, whether it's the first tournament of the year or the final round of the national championship."



## Spartan golfers make it seven in a row

The Spartans will make it seven consecutive years at the NJCAA Division III National Championship in Chautauqua, N.Y., in June after winning the MCAC and Region XIII championships by one stroke over Southwest Tech of Wisconsin in October.

The Spartans trailed going into the last six holes but rallied for the victory on the final day of the two-day tournament Oct. 2-3 at The Quarry at Giants Ridge in Biwabik. Spartan Coach Jason Retzlaff called play on the second day "one of the most exciting rounds I can remember having our golf program involved with."

Spartan golfer Hunter Moen earned individual champion honors for both Region XIII and MCAC with a two-day total of 150, edging out the second-place golfer by a single stroke. Following the tournament, Retzlaff was named the MCAC/Gopher Sports' golf coach of the year for 2017.

**Members of the 2017 Mens Region XIII and MCAC championship team** are (above, left to right) coach Jason Retzlaff, Jordan Kern, Hunter Moen (region medalist), Mason Landborg (returning All-American), Nick Kress, Blake Bloedorn, Kyle Boe (alternate) and assistant coach Jeff Haukos.