

ATHERTON AT U.S. AMATEUR GOLF CHAMPIONSHIPS

By Laura E. Young

Sure, John Atherton misses volleyball. Sure, the third-year sports administration student was disappointed to learn there was no longer a men's volleyball program at Laurentian when he came North.

And with his height, he just looks the volleyball type. In fact, he had thought of staying in Toronto for a fifth year of high school because the school team was a top-five contender in Ontario high-school volleyball. He almost went to Wilfred Laurier University for volleyball.

But "I've wanted to be in SPAD since I was Grade 11," he says.

And volleyball isn't the only sport Atherton excels at. Laurentian has a golf team and even a golf course, if not on campus, certainly next door. He is the third generation of golfers in his family, after his grandfather, Don, and his father, Brian. His mom, Anne, golfs, too. John has been a member of the Donalda Golf and Country Club since he was born.

Now, in just three short seasons, what Atherton has done in golf at Laurentian has put the university on the golf map.

Atherton is Laurentian's golf team captain. In August, he qualified for the prestigious U.S. Amateur championships. "I was pretty much in shock after it happened. I couldn't believe I did it, because it's the biggest thing I've ever accomplished."

His results in the tournament were mixed. The second day started badly and he couldn't rebound, missing short putts and not capitalizing on the birdies he did have. He missed the playoffs by four shots.

"Overall, the whole experience was unreal. We were treated pretty much like professionals. Everything was done for you. There was water [to drink] on every tee. Everything was in such perfect condition."

Disappointed with his performance on the second day, he has spent this season working on the mental aspect of his game.



Fore! John Atherton realized many dreams this season, including an OUA bronze medal (he was fourth last year) and a trip to the prestigious US Amateur championships in August.

Golf is a big game for confidence; he does have confidence issues sometimes, Atherton concedes.

"Everyone has their ups and downs. Just as I keep telling myself, not too many people get to play in the U.S. Amateur tournament. I do have the ability to be at that level, so why not do it every time? For me, it's all about confidence. If I get a couple of bad shots, I just lose belief sometimes."

Atherton works with assistant golf coach

and mental trainer, Kyle Paquette. A graduate of Laurentian's sport psychology program, Paquette is currently at Brock writing his master's thesis on the factors that influence coaches' use of sport psychology.

Paquette and Atherton are trying to establish routines and the right frame of mind to golf. It can take about a year to see their work reflected in Atherton's results.

The vast majority of elite-level athletes have routines when they compete, says Pa-

quette. The routines begin the moment their feet touch the floor in the morning. A golfer should not be on the course, "rolling the dice" and taking chances, Paquette says. This is an important lesson for Atherton. There should be routines for everything so that, even on his worst days, he will play consistently, Paquette says.

Atherton is a relaxed guy, even on the golf course, so training is about trying to get him into a more focused state-of-mind, with a more competitive approach to his game, Paquette says.

"One of the best mental thoughts is to have fun," Atherton says. "If you can have fun, you're probably going to play well."

But this past season was also about Atherton's job for the team.

Coach Paul Schweyer asked Atherton to play a leadership role. "We always want to improve and represent the university to the best of our ability. Results mean a lot. Actions speak louder than words. Scores matter," Schweyer says.

The team looked to Atherton as the "go-to" guy, the player they count on to score well, and stay calm on the course. "That behaviour trickles down to the rest of the team," Schweyer adds.

The OUA golf season was short but sweet for the Voyageurs; it started October 4 and ended with the OUA tournament on October 21. It was the team's most successful: Matt Bortolotto won the Laurier Invitational, a first for a LU golfer. Bortolotto and Atherton were named OUA all-stars. Atherton won a bronze at OUAs.

Atherton figures it's all worth it, despite the short season, the long hours of travel, and the weather. "I just love the game so much. I still think I can get better, so I want to see how far I can take it. The U.S. Amateur was a great first step in how far my golf career could possibly go."