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Redhawk Golf Stars Take Home All-WAC Awards

Sam Bunn , Staff Reporter

After finishing their last golf match of the season with a third-place finish at the Western Athletic Conference (WAC) Championship, April 18-20, three Seattle University women's golf team members were honored in the conference's postseason awards.

Marc Chandonnet, head coach of the team, spoke to what he needs from his players— emphasizing body and mind preparation.

“One thing people don't understand is how physically grueling [golf] can be,” Chandonnet said. “Sometimes we're out from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. walking 16 miles, and we don't get to choose the weather. It's tougher physically than people give it credit for.”

Three athletes were rose to Chandonnet's challenge, throwing their days and nights into sharpening every aspect of their performance. They were recognized this week with All-WAC awards.

Graduate student Keisha Lugito echoed the mental demand of golf is just as vital as the physical part of the sport.

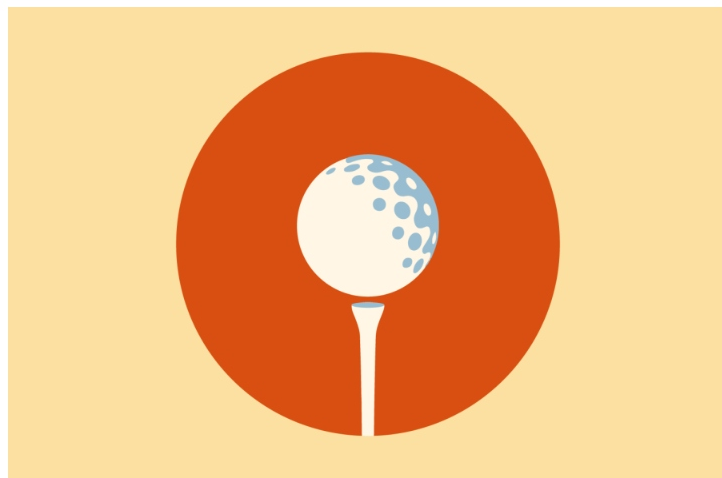
“Golf is a mental toughness game against yourself. It's unlike anything else,” Lugito said.

One cornerstone of the team was Lugito, who was selected to the All-WAC second team. Lugito had an exceptional season for a team that exceeded expectations. Notably, she was named Co-WAC golfer of the week after her 76-72-71 performance at the Pizza Hut Lady Thunderbird Invitational, tying for fifth place individually and leading Seattle U to a second-place team finish.

Another key participant was senior captain Samantha Bruce. Bruce heated up as the season went on, finishing in the top 15 in four out of her final five tournaments and being selected to the first-team all-WAC. After her senior season, she ranks second in scoring average (75.00) and birdies (67) among eligible players in Seattle U history.

According to Chandonnet, Bruce contributes more than just statistics.

“Sam is the heart of this team,” Chandonnet said. “A real captain—she steps up and makes my job so much easier. You can never replace this kid.”



Andrew Mori

Rounding out the dynamic trio is Rivekka Jumagulova, a superstar freshman who walked away from her first season with not only a second-team All-WAC selection, but also the prestigious WAC Freshman of the Year award. Jumagulova has a first-place individual finish at the Pat Lesser Harbottle Invitational under her belt, along with several school records including the number one mark in average score with 73.70. Still a freshman, she is arguably already the most talented golfer Seattle U has ever seen.

A team is only as good as its coach, and Chandonnet has played a huge role in helping the players reach their potential. Jumagulova was appreciative of his efforts behind the scenes to prepare her for a record-breaking season.

“He makes you go and get what you want,” Jumagulova said. “What you deserve to have.”

Bruce believes that another important factor was a cultural expectation that athletes bring the same go-getter attitude towards their studies as their athletic endeavors. The women’s golf team averages an eye-popping 3.76 GPA.

“I like how Seattle U is not only big on athletics but they also prioritize academics,” Bruce said. “I thought that if I wanted to play at a high level, I should also take my academics to a high level.”

Powered by the three All-WAC stars, the team qualified for the WAC Championships and was expected to be in contention for the title. However, shortly before the team departed, they received disastrous news. Jumagulova and talented freshman Shayna Lu tested positive for COVID-19 and were unable to attend the tournament. The Redhawks ended up claiming third place in the championships, including incredible performances by Lugito (who claimed ninth place overall) and Bruce (who tied for the lowest average stroke number with 4.67). If Jumagulova and Lu had been able to play, the result of the tournament could have been different.

But Jumagulova isn’t letting the loss of her first WAC Championship appearance slow her down.

“I’m just trying to do my thing. I want to play and push my teammates to get better,” Jumagulova said. “It’s a teamwork thing. They’re pushing me to become a better version of myself and I’m pushing them.”

Jumagulova, Bruce and Lugito have battled through adversity to win individual accolades, all while putting the Redhawks in a strong position to contend for the title again next year. Keep an eye on this team and on these athletes. They’ll be big news before we know it.