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George Burquest
Seattle University

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Timeout Session: Kevin Li Wins the WAC

George Burquest, Staff Reporter

Named Western Athletic Conference (WAC) Freshman of the Year, Seattle University Men's Golfer Kevin Li had an impressive end to his first season. Li became the first freshman to win the WAC individual title since 2015, and the second Redhawk to ever win the conference tournament.

Taking place April 26-28 in Payson, Ariz. at The Golf Club at Chaparral Pines, Li shot a three-round total of six-under 210 (69-72-69), securing himself first place and a ticket to the NCAA regionals by one stroke.

However, it was not always a straight road to success during Li's freshman season. The business economics major had to overcome his own stress and self-criticism in order to play his best golf of the season when it was win or go home at the WAC Championship.

The following is a condensed May 3 interview with Li.

GB: Obviously you ended up finding success, but what were your expectations headed into your freshman season?

KL: My primary goal for the year was to get a couple of collegiate top-10's, and as a freshman, that can be difficult. You have to compete with everybody else in the field, including your own teammates... I struggled a lot throughout the year, I never got a collegiate top-10 until the WAC conference.

GB: You mention struggling at times, how did the season go for you up until the WAC Championship?

KL: Interestingly, my national ranking reflected my mental state... During the fall I was playing better than I expected, but then, over winter break, I was down in Florida playing in tournaments, and was struggling until I received a text from my coach after he saw my scores, telling me that I needed a break and was stressing myself out... my mental was being left behind. When tournaments came around in early spring, I would fall apart at the end because I was expecting too much from myself. Soon enough, my ranking fell as much as I wanted to raise it, and I knew that I had to change my mindset and commit to what my coach had told me: live in the present, trash all the stuff that happens before and stop over-anticipating. It's almost dramatic. In my first-ever conference tournament, which was pretty stressful, I lost sleep the week before and even during the tournament. Given all of that, it was such a great experience to win. It will be a memory for a lifetime.

GB: How did you manage to play such good golf when you had so much stress during the conference tournament?



Kevin Frazier

George Burquest, Staff Reporter, interviews Kevin Li.

KL: The last time I had won was at an amateur tournament that led to me earning a spot on the team here at Seattle U. In both that tournament and the WAC, I had similar amounts of stress—I was losing sleep the night before the final round. For the WAC tournament, I couldn't even eat my breakfast properly. But, I knew the stress would fade away when I stepped onto the driving range, because that's exactly what happened when I last won... Once I got onto the course, I was able to talk myself into concentration mode, focusing on the things that I can control, rather than thinking about what position I will end up in or how other players are going to do.

GB: Was there any point you thought to yourself, "I could actually go win this thing?"

KL: Oh, throughout the whole tournament. After the first round, I was in solo second-place and I realized, ok, other people are messing up. The course was sneaky, people made some huge mistakes by just missing a little bit, so it required consistency and accuracy. It was one of those courses which fit my type. My ball flight is consistent and relatively precise, so the conditions were to my advantage.

GB: So what comes next? What are your thoughts heading into the NCAA regionals?

KL: Honestly, what's next is making up homework... But yeah, based on how I played in the spring, I wasn't planning on regionals. But when the moment comes, you have to seize it.

GB: Does this accomplishment during your freshman year affect your outlook for the next three years?

KL: Not for me. In my perspective, these things shouldn't affect the way you work at all. I am hungry for achievements, but a very important lesson I learned this year is that you can't purposefully go after it, you have to trust the process and put in the work. Nobody can guarantee when they are going to win a tournament or when the work they put in will result in their game.

GB: Do you have plans to pursue golf professionally after Seattle U?

KL: Yes, absolutely. It's been my dream to turn pro since I was six. It has taught me so many life lessons and I am just so appreciative of my parents for leading me here, and I really appreciate all the work I have been able to put in over the years.

Li will compete in the NCAA's Racho Sante Fe Regional May 13-15. If he finishes in the top six out of 15 golfers, he will advance to the NCAA National Championships later in May.



Kevin Li. (Kevin Frazier)