

Foursome has potential for state tournament glory

BY STEVE PAJAK
spajak@sacbee.com

The days when high school boys played a little football, then a little basketball, then wrapped up their school year with a little golf for fun are long gone. At the highest level, at least.

Now, it's about swing coaches, psychologists, nutritionists and year-round commitment. It's also about hitting the ball long and straight, putting it great and shooting under par. And, possibly, about pushing each other to the point that a local team this year will be the second from Sacramento to win the state golf title (Del Campo won in 1977).

While the high school boys season is off to a soggy start, a survey of area coaches identified the top four contenders to bring home some state hardware at season's end. They are, in no particular order, Christian Brothers, Granite Bay, Jesuit and Del Oro. Ponderosa and Oak Ridge lurk on the top-tier fringes.

"NorCals is going to be a battle this year," said Christian Brothers coach Kirk Purdy. "The Bay Area is loaded, too."

The Falcons finished fourth in the state last year and return five of their top six players, including sophomore sensation Andrej Bevins, who won the individual title in the 15-team Father Barry Masters two weeks ago at Ancil Hoffman and the De La Salle Invitational last week. Kit Carson, second in the Father Barry, Dylan Fuller and Hunter Rappleye top a potent lineup.

The Falcons, as always, must deal with Jesuit first. The teams have already seen each other four times this season, with Christian

Brothers prevailing in two head-to-head clashes and Jesuit finishing ahead in two multi-team tournaments. The Marauders won the Father Barry for just the third time in the event's 26-year history, with Christian Brothers second.

Jesuit, the state runner-up in 2009, has tremendous depth with seven players - Chris Macasaet, Ben Corfee, Patrick Cairns, Alex Dow, Steve Griggs, Preston Wtulich and Kevin Coyle - capable of shooting par and vying for six positions.

A four-stroke head-to-head loss to Christian Brothers fueled Jesuit's fire.

"It was a kick in our butt," said coach Kevin Fleming of his Marauders, who have won their three tournaments this season. "It was great; it makes practice more fun. I have kids who come to practice with purpose."

Del Oro features one of the area's best 1-2 punches in steady senior Eric Ash and Austin Smotherman, a junior who rivals Bevins when talk turns to the best high school player. The Golden Eagles are 7-0 with a seven-shot win over Ponderosa to their credit.

"It's early, but we're playing

well," said Del Oro coach Hal Steinback. "We have eight kids competing for six spots, which is something we haven't had in the past. You have to be balanced up and down the order (to win at the highest level). We're competitive with each other, which helps."

Del Oro will duke it out with Granite Bay in the Sierra Foothill League. The Grizzlies advanced to the Sac-Joaquin Section Masters tournament with three freshmen last season and have five underclassmen atop their lineup this season. Brandon Baumgarten tops the team's ladder for now, followed by Alex Gibbs, Chuck Pedone and Bryan Wise.

"Basically, we have two more years with this group," coach Terry Stafford said. "We have the potential to be really good."

Seniors headed to college on golf scholarships but on high school teams not expected to make deep postseason runs include Taylor Knoll (Folsom/Nevada), Joel Slak (Folsom/Pacific) and Will Scarlett (Woodland/UC Davis).

Call The Bee's Steve Pajak,
(916) 326-5526.