



New Mexico Activities Association Student-Athlete Spotlight

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Carlton puts Team First In an Individual Sport

By Tyler Dunkel, NMAA Sports Information Director

The game of golf is an individual sport. It is just you and your ball for 18 holes. There are no subs and no one to give you a break after hitting a bad shot. As a golfer, it can seem like you are on an island all alone. However, Sean Carlton, a senior at Hope Christian, is seeing the game more from a team perspective, sacrificing his dreams for the betterment of his team as the Huskies go for a fourth straight team title in 2015.

Over the past couple of years, Carlton has led the Huskies to three state championships, earning two individual titles in the process. Through it all, it has never been about him; it has always been about the team first and putting in the hard work to be successful.

"I try to tell my teammates that hard work is rewarded and hopefully for us the reward will be a fourth straight state championship," he said. "I tell them that every shot counts out on the course and, as long as we stay focused, we should be okay and reach our goals."

Hope Christian's head coach, Jon Lehman, commented on Carlton as a teammate. "Sean has always been supportive of each one of his teammates. He is always willing to help. Sean is our team leader and as he goes the team goes. He always puts the team first before himself and I think he proved that to me this past week when he changed his qualifying date for the U.S. Open so he could try and help his team win a district championship. He could have qualified closer to home but he wants to be with his teammates. If that isn't a leader, I'm not sure what is."

According to Carlton, finishing his high school career with a fourth blue trophy is what is most important. "To win a fourth straight title would mean so much because there are a lot of people who can't say they won one state title so to win a fourth would be fantastic. It just shows if a team with as much talent as ours can work together as one, we can win a fourth straight."

He also commented on the prospect of winning his third individual title as well. "To cap off my career with a team and individual title would mean a lot; not only did I reach my goals but I also helped my team reach theirs by winning another blue trophy. If I happen to win another individual state championship, I just know that it was for my team."

Carlton was first introduced to golf by his father at a very young age. He recalls watching him in the



backyard hitting chip shots. "I always played baseball when I was younger but when I was a little kid my dad would have me in a jumper in the backyard and I would watch him chip. As I got older he would take me out to the driving range and hit golf balls. That's really where my love for golf came from."

It was from those moments that golf, family and hard work were instilled into Carlon's makeup. He credits family and a strong work ethic for his success. "The most important thing in my life is my family. My grandparents really taught me about the importance of family. I want to make my family proud so I use them as motivation when I'm on the course. It drives me to practice and work harder, doing everything in my power to be successful."

He continued by saying, "I always wanted to be a PGA Tour player and my dad made it very clear that it would take a lot of hard work and dedication. He told me that to reach my goal, I would have to make sacrifices in life. I'm a true believer in hard work paying off and so far it has."

Hard work has certainly paid off for Carlon. In the fall of 2014, he finished in the top-5 in all four junior amateur tournaments, winning the San Diego Junior Amateur at the Steele Canyon Golf Course. He has played in numerous AJGA events during his career, never missing a cut. In 2013, Carlon qualified for the US Junior Amateur, which was held at the Martis Camp Club in Truckee, Calif.

In 2014, Carlon made one of the toughest decisions of his young career, skipping the District 5-A/AAAA championships to play in the U.S. Open Regional Qualifier at Twin Warriors. The decision was a difficult one for Carlon, as he left his teammates to pursue a lifelong dream.

"For a few years now I have played in the U.S. Open Regional Qualifier at Twin Warriors Golf Club. Normally, that tournament doesn't fall at the same time as the district tournament but it just happened to last year. I told my coach and teammates that I didn't want to leave them but they were extremely supportive of my dreams. I knew they could win it on their own and if they felt like they needed me, I would have backed out of the qualifier but they told me to follow my dream."

Coach Lehman also commented on Carlon missing the 2014 district tournament. "It was a tough decision for him but his teammates really supported him in his decision to skip the district tournament and try and qualify. We knew this was his dream and the entire team supported that decision."

Carlon never forgot his teammates' support. When he discovered that the 2015 U.S. Open Regional Qualifier again falls on the same date as the district championship, he made the decision to move his qualifying opportunity to a later date in order to help his team win the district title in 2015.

"The qualifier falls at the same time again this year and I felt like I owed it to my team to play with them to try and win a district championship. They were so supportive of me last year and I knew I could play in another qualifier later down the line. It was the least I could do for a group of guys that supported me in my dream. The team is the most important thing to me."

If Carlon and the Huskies can manage a fourth straight state title this coming May, Hope Christian will be the third boys team in New Mexico history to do so. At the same time, Carlon can become just the second male golfer to win three consecutive individual state titles in New Mexico history.

In the fall of 2015, Carlon will continue his golf career at the University of New Mexico, playing for head coach Glen Millican. "My parents always wanted me to attend college and get a college degree. Going to the University of New Mexico next year, I will be the first person in my family to attend college. The next step after high school was to play Division I golf and play for the Lobos and Coach Glen Millican. It's a great school for business, which is what I will get my degree in."

After college, Carlon hopes to play professionally but plans to stay close to the sport he loves if he does not go pro. "I hope to turn pro after playing college golf but if that doesn't work out I want to stay in the golf industry; maybe work for a golf club company and tour the country at PGA Tour events."