



# New Mexico Activities Association Student Spotlight

## Farmington's Graff getting into the swing of things before state

By Jake Newby

Requiring a positive temperament, patience, a short memory and unflappable focus, golf wasn't an easy sport for Farmington High School junior Meghan Graff to learn.

A late bloomer to the game, Graff didn't begin playing organized golf until her freshman year at FHS. Her father was a good golfer and Graff said his love for the sport rubbed off on her.

Growing up, Graff said her family couldn't afford to sign her up for lessons or send her to summer camps, so she went through her share of ups and downs early in her prep career.

"I'm a big athletics person, so I played softball and basketball (growing up), and I had that competitive mindset. Golf is a lot different than those sports," said Graff, a 22-handicap golfer this season. "Golf is a very mind-manipulating sport and you have to be mentally strong to achieve success. I didn't always get that."

As a freshman and sophomore, Graff said she would frequently let the occasional bad shot send her entire outing into a downward spiral.

Farmington girls' golf coach Stephanie Jaquez said the 16-year-old had a noticeable temper as an underclassman, but has since matured.

"One thing about Meghan is her willingness to change. She's very coachable," said Jaquez, who has coached the Lady Scorpions for four years. "Oftentimes, you'll try to critique and coach kids, and they're a bit reluctant, but Meghan's not that way at all. She's taken to my coaching and has made big improvements maturity-wise."

Graff said her coach's advice has helped her turn a corner with her temperament.

"On the course, sometimes on holes, she'll see that my head's down and will say, 'You know what, don't even take your club out. Back up, regroup and think about your next shot,'" Graff said of Jaquez's coaching. "That little system has really helped me."

Graff's work ethic has compensated for her lack of experience. In the past, she said she struggled mightily with her short game, which prevented her from shooting under 100 regularly. She has since worked on turning that weakness into a strength and said that work is paying off.

Graff has also been working on her consistency. As a freshman, her average score was 97. She improved as a sophomore by shooting a 93, but has gotten stagnant this season with a current average of 94.

A reason for the slight regression, Jaquez said, could be alterations the two have made to Graff's swing. Those changes



have presented ongoing challenges ever since the spring portion of the season began in early April.

“One of the things we have been working on lately is grip and tempo,” Jaquez said. “She was gripping the club too firmly and rushing her swing and it cost her several strokes this spring.”

Graff has been trying to find her groove this spring after enjoying a successful fall, during which time she acquired all three qualifying legs needed to clinch a spot in the individual state tournament.

After earning two of those legs at the October 8 Coyote Invite in Grants with scores of 88 and 90 and the other one at the September 28 Riverview Invite in Kirtland, she capped her fall hot streak by shooting a season-low 83 at Piñon Hills Golf Course in the Piedra Vista Varsity Tournament.

Now, she is working to regain her fall form.

“She’s kind of like a little parrot — you give her something or tell her something, and she latches onto it and remembers it,” her coach said. “She’s going to work on it until she’s perfected it.”

Graff’s softball background has translated nicely to the course, where her long-range game has helped her stand out. Her creativity has also been a plus and Jaquez thinks Graff’s natural instincts are rare for a golfer her age.

“Meghan has the ability to think outside the box with her shots,” Jaquez said. “Depending on the conditions, she may use different clubs and you don’t see a lot of kids doing that. She’s able to work different clubs different ways.”

While the skills are there, the mental aspect of the sport has played a role in Graff’s month-long slump. To find consistency before the state tourney, Graff has been studying the habits of Farmington boys’ golfer Zack Holesinger.

A fellow junior, Holesinger has also already qualified for the individual state tournament. He’s been hot recently, shooting a 79 at the Farmington Spring Invitational on April 11. Graff thinks of him as a mentor.

“I want to play like him because he’s so consistent and that’s so huge in golf,” Graff said. “The way Zack does it, he makes it look easy, and I’m like, ‘Man, I want to make it look easy.’ When you don’t have a ton of experience, you can make up for it by playing with great players and learning from great players and Zack’s just a great all-around player.”

The state tournament begins May 9 in Farmington’s backyard at Piñon Hills. Though her game has been hit or miss lately, Graff said she’s confident and focused — two traits she has lacked in the past.

“I’m just going to focus on my tempo and on staying level-headed, because Piñon is a hard course,” she said. “I’m going to work, work, work on my faults, figure out what I’ve done wrong, and make sure I’m not doing those things at state.”