

College players make the grade

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Talented, young players are honing their professional skills in the college arena better than ever. The crop we are watching at Chambers Bay is proof of that. Not only did a large number qualify to play the 115th U.S. Open, including reigning NCAA Champion, Bryson Dechambeau of Southern Methodist University, but six made the cut -- the most amateurs to qualify for the weekend since 1966. College players now have great practice facilities, good coaching staffs, and play on great courses with pro-like set-ups in regular and post season against difficult competition, all of which contributes to learning how to win.

In 2007, Hank Haney made statements in Golf Digest that ruffled some collegiate feathers. "If you want to be the best golfer in the world, why would you go to college?" he said. While that may have been true at one time, it's not the case anymore. If a player's goal is to do everything possible to become a world-class player, playing college golf is a great place to figure it out.

The seven current and newly graduated players who made the cut -- Nick Hardy and Brian Campbell from Illinois, Beau Hossler from Texas, Denny McCarthy from Virginia,

Jack Maguire from Florida State, Cheng Tsung Pan from Washington and Ollie Schneiderjans from Georgia Tech -- are glowing examples of what is right with college golf. Not only are they showing amazing golf skills, they are showing amazing social poise under the spotlights. Polite, thoughtful and talented, these kids are impressive. When asked why the amateurs played so well at Chambers Bay, Nick Hardy replied:

“I think they are well prepared in college golf and I think all these guys that are playing here just come prepared. They know how to play the game and I think they are just -- they are very good players. I think you have to give -- the courses that we play in college are not easy either. We see tough pins and greens like this anyway, so I think they are well prepared.”

It's interesting and noteworthy how the programs have evolved and grown exponentially in the last decade. Brian Campbell summed it up like this:

“Our coach, Mike Small, likes to see the golf team as a program and not a golf team. He continues to get better and better every year. And it's not just how we play but how we conduct ourselves on and off the course, and really just building a program that way, and connecting with people and just being real social. I think it makes us tougher as a group of players. And we really respect what he teaches us and we take the advice he gives us and it really helps.”

The future is bright.