

Crabtree rallies for fourth crown

By Todd Phipers

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LAKWOOD — Familiarity didn't breed contempt for Mark Crabtree in the 1994 Colorado Match Play Championship.

Instead, it bred a fourth title in the state's oldest tournament for the 38-year-old Colorado State University golf coach.

Crabtree, who eliminated CSU players Tom Richardson and Scott Mendelsohn in his quarterfinal and semifinal matches, beat friend and frequent playing partner Rick DeWitt of Arvada 2 and 1 in the 36-hole final yesterday at Bear Creek Golf Club.

Crabtree also won at Bear Creek two years ago after capturing his first two titles as a University of Colorado undergraduate in 1975 and '76.

There were mixed emotions over the final three days for the Fort Collins veteran, who teamed with DeWitt for the Colorado Two-Man Championship in 1991 and a runnerup finish this year.

Beating his two Rams sophomores was tough "because as a

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coach, you want them to be successful, and you want them to experience all the great things about golf."

And battling back to overcome DeWitt was "difficult because you do have friends. But I guess there's a part of it that when the light comes on, the competition is there and you don't root against the other person. You just do the best you can."

Through most of the morning half of the match, it appeared that Crabtree's best might not be good enough.

He needed a 50-foot birdie putt down two ledges on the first hole of the day to halve that one and went 3 down when DeWitt won the sixth, 12th and 13th.

"I was confident. I thought I would win," said the 37-year-old contractor from Indian Tree Golf Course. "I hit it really good the first 15 holes."

But Crabtree knocked in a 10-footer for birdie on No. 14 to fight

back to 2 down on what he considered the first turning point. "That birdie meant a lot to me. Obviously, you have a lot of holes left and you want to be patient, but at that point you don't want to be more than 3 down because the gap is starting to widen."

Instead, the gap was closing. Crabtree moved within 1 after 18, slipped 2 back on the first hole of the afternoon, then won the second and third holes to even the match.

After DeWitt's par put him 1 up for the final time, Crabtree bounced back with a birdie on No. 5 to square things again. He took his first lead with a par on No. 8 — the 26th hole of the match.

He stayed 1 up until the par-4 11th, when he saved par with a 5-foot second putt and DeWitt missed from about half that distance to lose the hole.

"That was a killer," said the runnerup, who finished second to Brandt Jobe in the 1988 championship. "They all add up, and they can sure turn it around."



MARK CRABTREE
Second win at Bear Creek.