

5 BC3 golfers seek prized All-American status at nationals

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The Butler County Community College golf squad won its fourth National Junior College Athletic Association Division III Region XX team championship Tuesday at the Oakview Golf Club in Slippery Rock. From left, Carmen Oliva, Tyler Johnson, Noah Morgan, Tucker Skerbetz, Luke Ostermeyer and coach Bill Miller.

(Slippery Rock, PA) Butler County Community College golfers Tucker Skerbetz and Carmen Oliva shot second-round 78s Tuesday to lead the Pioneers to their fourth National Junior College Athletic Association Division III Region XX crown and into the NJCAA national championships in Chautauqua, N.Y., in June.

Skerbetz, a Laurel High School graduate, placed second overall with a 159 in the 36-hole Region XX tournament at Oakview Golf Club, Slippery Rock. Oliva, of Neshannock, was fifth with a

164. BC3's Noah Morgan, of Allegheny-Clarion Valley, added a 172; Tyler Johnson, of Armstrong, a 175; and Luke Ostermeyer, of Laurel, a 187.

The Pioneers recorded a 670 in the championships, in which only the top four scores over two rounds of each player are tallied. Anne Arundel Community College, Arnold, Md., was second with a 686 and Garrett College, McHenry, Md., was third with a 704.

Skerbetz, Oliva, Morgan, Johnson and Ostermeyer now enter the 72-hole NJCAA national championships, to be held June 4-7. If any should place in the Top 18, he would become BC3's first All-American in golf since Stefan Carlsson and Thomas Dimun in 2015 and receive as validation a Chautauqua Golf Club Lake Course flag from the hole corresponding to his finish.

Carlsson, of Knoch, finished 15th and Dimun, of Butler, 16th, at Chautauqua Golf Club in 2015, when the Pioneers placed sixth as a squad.

BC3 has been awarded five All-American honors in golf and previously won Region XX team titles in 2009, 2013 and 2015.

Carlsson was also an All-American in 2014, following BC3's Michael Cuscino, Shenango, in 2008, and Matthew Heighes, Titusville, in 1996 – all of whom competed as individuals in those years.

The Region XX team winner, and top five individual golfers from other squads, advance to the four-day NJCAA national championships, where Morgan in 2018 placed 59th as an individual.

“The thing that is going to help him the most is his experience,” BC3 coach Bill Miller said of Morgan. “He has played the course. With having played it that many times, he is going to have the ability.”

The 6,535-yard, par-72 Lake Course is difficult, Morgan said.

“The greens are quick and tough to read,” Morgan said, “and the fairways are narrow. Hopefully seeing it four times before will help me this year.”

BC3 will look to Morgan for his advice, Oliva said.

“On how to play the course,” Oliva said. “And what to do and what not to do. I hope the greens are fast. I have always played better on faster greens. I am pretty good at reading putts. I will have him help me out a little bit on the practice rounds, ask for some advice on the greens.”

Morgan's strength is in using his 4 through 7 irons, Miller said, and “He approaches the greens pretty well.”

And, Morgan said, “My putting is much better than it was last year. It was one of my strong points last year. If you don't have a short game, you don't have a game. I've been focusing on trying to perfect my chipping and putting so I can save myself around the greens.”

Skerbetz is “seasoned and mentally strong” and hits a tee shot between 240 and 280 yards, Miller said. Oliva chips and pitches well and is “sharp around the greens,” Johnson hits straight tee shots with his 4-iron and Ostermeyer has the ability to “get himself into some pretty good positions,” Miller said.

“I’m optimistic that we can perform well because we have a pretty deep team,” Miller said. “All five players are capable, if they are playing well, to bring in a good score. Some years you might have two really strong players, and you are not maybe as strong on the back end. But we have five guys who can compete. If we go up and have a good week, we can be competitive.”

Michael Rozzi, of Neshannock, finished in a tie for 21st place in the NJCAA national championships in 2018 as an individual and fell two strokes shy of All-American status.