



Wildes, Gibson sign grants with Andrew

By Larry Fleming

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Murray County High School golfers Jacob Wildes and Zach Gibson want to use a two-year experience at Andrew College as a springboard to playing the sport at a higher profile major college.

“Zach and I are of the same mind-set,” Wildes said. “We both could have gone to a mediocre four-year school or go to Andrew College and work hard to get to the highest level possible in two years.”

Wildes and Gibson became future Tigers on Thursday when they signed athletic-academic scholarships to the junior college in Cuthbert. Andrew started a men’s golf program in 1998 and the Tigers have won three region titles and qualified for three national tournaments. Andrew added women’s golf for the 2006-07 season.

“I’m very excited about it,” Gibson said. “I like it because it’s a small school (Andrew’s enrollment is about 300). When we visited down there everything seemed personal, and everybody knew everybody and I liked that aspect.”

For Wildes, attending Andrew will be almost like going home.

“It’s an area of South Georgia where I grew up,” said Wildes, son of former Indians basketball coach Kerry Wildes. “It’s going to be kind of nostalgic going down there. We moved to Chatsworth when I was about 7 years old.”

Murray County golf coach Brett Dotson said the hard work put in by the two golfers has paid off.

“They’ve lived at the golf course working on their games,” Dotson said. “They’ve gotten a lot better. They’ve both played for us since they were freshmen. In fact, Jacob worked out with us some when he was an eighth grader.

“They’re getting the maximum from their scholarships and they’re excited about going down there.”

Wildes said his game suffered as a junior when he put pressure on himself trying to impress any coach that might be watching his performances.

“I was thinking this could be the time someone would see me play,” he said. “As a result, I struggled last year. Both of us are glad to have this (signing) behind us so we can enjoy our senior year.”

Dotson said Gibson had a tournament average of 82 last season while Wildes’ average was 86.

Sticking together for at least two years means a lot to Gibson.

“That definitely helps,” Gibson said. “It makes for a smoother transition into college life because there’s somebody there you already know.”

On their visit to the school, the two golfers met Andrew golf instructor Mike Riffe, toured the campus and played a round of golf at the Tigers’ home course at Bagby State Park. Riffe was in Chatsworth on Thursday for the signing ceremonies.

“On our visit, coach Riffe seemed like a real nice guy and came across as a coach who would do anything in the world to help us,” Gibson said.

Gibson hopes the Indians, who will return to Region 7-4A competition this season after spending two years in Region 5-5A, can make a run at a region championship in his final year at Murray.

“We really want to finish first or second in the region and get to the state tournament this year,” Gibson said. “I think that’s a legitimate goal.”