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Office of University
Communications

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Gardner-Webb Junior Sets Collegiate Record in Club's First Season

BOILING SPRINGS, N.C.—Gardner-Webb University has fielded a disc golf team for only a year, but the program already holds a national championship appearance and an individual collegiate record.

(Photos by Dr. Bob Carey) Chase Richards competes in the championships.

The GWU team recently finished 38th in the 2015 National Collegiate Disc Golf Championships, ahead of schools like Clemson, Auburn, Texas A&M and Purdue. Junior team member Chase Richards set an individual collegiate distance record during the event, throwing a disc 620 feet, 6 inches.

“As a team, we were able to accomplish great things,” Richards shared. “Since it was our first year and first time at the national championship, our team hadn’t played together as much as some of the other teams we competed against. We just wanted to have a great time playing disc golf together, and we did. I never really realized how far I could throw a disc until now. It took a lot of practice.”

The sport, similar to golf in some aspects, requires players to throw flying discs at targets, with the goal of completing the course with the fewest number of throws.

Michael Heredia tosses a disc during the national championships.

GWU students A.J. Carey and Michael Heredia formed a disc golf team in 2014 and were joined by Richards, Kane Guilliams and Tyler Helms. “I got interested in disc golf my senior year in high school, and I started playing with other people on campus during my freshman year in college,” said Carey, a sophomore who is studying sports education at Gardner-Webb. “It’s a very addicting sport because it’s fun, it’s free to play in most cases and you get to see a lot of beautiful landscape.”

After participating in tournaments through the fall and spring, the GWU team advanced through a national qualifier to reach the championships in North Augusta, S.C., on April 15-18. The national tournament offered stiff competition from schools like eventual champion Ferris State (Big Rapids, Mich.) and difficult weather conditions during a week of heavy wind and rain.

“They worked hard to reach this point,” offered Dr. Bob Carey, the club team’s sponsor and chair of the University’s Department of Communication & New Media. “They played well and represented Gardner-Webb well. They didn’t finish quite where they wanted, but that’s OK. You have to experience a national event before you know exactly what to do in it. It’s been a great experience for them. The other teams were like, ‘Wow, you guys have only been around for one year?’”

After a successful first year of competition, team members now hope to grow the program and involve more students. Some institutions recruit students to play disc golf, Carey said. But at Gardner-Webb, many students aren’t even aware of how disc golf works, Richards added. “Some people see those baskets on the course on campus and think they’re some weird kind of grill,” he explained. “A lot of people just don’t know about the sport.”

Players hope their first-year success will raise awareness, said Heredia, a graduate student who plans to complete his Master of Divinity degree in December 2015. “One of our mottos in disc golf is ‘Grow the Sport,’”

A.J. Carey competes during the national championships.

Heredia revealed. “Disc golf has grown tremendously in the time it has existed, and the next step at Gardner-Webb is finding more people who are excited about competing at the collegiate level. When all of the current team members leave, I would love to come back and see a disc golf team thriving. We’re on course to do that.”

Located in Boiling Springs, N.C., Gardner-Webb University offers a comprehensive academic experience that introduces students to the diverse world of ideas and to the people who think them, preparing them for professional success and for productive citizenship.