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GOLF: NATIONWIDE TOUR: SOUTH GEORGIA CLASSIC

DeCorso's incredible journey

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Call it a fairy tale, a dream come true or simply the next - if biggest - step in Bryan DeCorso's long, jagged journey as a professional golfer. DeCorso, 36, a native of Guelph, Ont., who lives with his wife, Charlotte, in Ocoee, Fla., near Orlando, won the Nationwide Tour's South Georgia Classic yesterday by four strokes over Bryce Molder and Greg Owen, and what a sweet victory it was.

"It's been a long road," DeCorso said in a telephone interview moments after he tapped in on the 18th hole at the Kinderlou Forest Golf Club in Valdosta, Ga. He won \$112,500 (all currency U.S.) to move into fourth place on the tour's money list with \$148,976. The top 25 at the end of the season will qualify for the 2009 PGA Tour.

DeCorso, ranked No. 750 in the world entering the tournament, had battled hard to hit this high point. He'd walked away from golf for nine months, not touching a club while working in construction. He was an on-course Golf Channel commentator for 17 tournaments. He played mini-tour events while caddying on the Nationwide Tour for fellow Canadians David Morland IV and Ian Leggatt.

"Then, in September, 2005, I submerged myself in playing full-time," DeCorso said. He stayed close to home and paid fees ranging from \$85 to \$360 to enter one-day and two-day events on the year-round Moonlight Golf Tour, which Frank and Mary Magee run in Central Florida. DeCorso said first-place prizes range from \$100 to \$4,000.

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DeCorso picked up cheques here and there. His wife had her own corporate event planning business. But the business climate wasn't good, and two years ago she decided not to continue. He supported her decision, as she supported his to devote himself to playing. But there were bills to pay, and the onus was on him.

Meanwhile, he wanted to change his swing so that it

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would be more reliable.

"I was playing the mini-tours, and I couldn't afford to change something," he said. "So I stuck with what I had."

Things were tough financially. DeCorso's wife is an American, while he has his green card. They gave up health insurance.

"It was so expensive, and we were cutting things out," DeCorso said. "It was hard to sleep. There were a lot of fears. What if I got injured?"

The couple stuck with the long-term plan. DeCorso entered PGA Tour qualifying school last fall and reached the final stage. He was tied for 15th place after four rounds of the six-round tournament. The top 25 won their PGA Tour cards. His back went out in the final round, but he fought to 74 and won full status on the Nationwide Tour.

DeCorso finished 10th in February at the Moonah Classic, a Nationwide Tour event in Fingal, Australia. He then missed three consecutive cuts. He had an epiphany during that stretch at a tournament in Livermore, Calif.

"Three times there, I landed on the green and three times I made double bogey," DeCorso said. His ball flight has always been low and hot and hooking, so the shots ran through the greens and into high rough. It's all but impossible to compete on the Nationwide and PGA Tours without a higher ball flight.

DeCorso ran into Greg Towne and Carl Rabito, who both teach in the Orlando area. Rabito, one of 43 PGA-certified master teaching professionals, is an expert in biomechanics and believes that body structure governs function. He and Towne work together.

"I told Greg and Carl that I wanted them to change me," DeCorso said. "Do what it takes. I don't care. Mould me like a piece of clay. I don't want to start the ball [to the] right and I don't want to hook it any more."

They started working together only three weeks ago and changed DeCorso's posture, takeaway, spine angle and downswing. Towne caddied for DeCorso at the Henrico County Open in Richmond, Va., two weeks ago. DeCorso was tied for the lead starting the final round and finished in fourth place. He was encouraged.

Last Tuesday, DeCorso, buoyed by his play, contacted RBC Canadian Open director Bill Paul, hoping for an exemption into the July tournament. Paul said he'd get back to him.

"I totally understand," DeCorso said.

Meanwhile, Towne was with DeCorso in Valdosta until the Nationwide tournament started last Thursday. DeCorso then played what Sean Foley, Stephen Ames's swing coach, said in an e-mail yesterday was "fearless" golf. Foley works with Owen and was at the tournament.

After DeCorso won, he and his wife embraced for what seemed like minutes on the 18th green.

"I'm so glad Charlotte was there," he said. "That was a heartfelt moment. I'll never forget it."

And maybe Paul won't forget DeCorso's request for a Canadian Open exemption. DeCorso's earned it.

Canadian winners

Bryan DeCorso is the 12th Canadian to win on the Nationwide Tour and its previous incarnations. The others:

Stephen Ames* 1991 Pensacola Open.

Jerry Anderson 1991 Texarkana Open.

Ahmad Bateman 1997 Carolina Classic.

David Hearn 2004 Alberta Classic.

Glen Hnatiuk (four) 1992 Gulf Coast Classic, 1995 Utah Classic, 1996 Carolina Classic, 1999 Tri-Cities Open.

Ian Leggatt 2000 Dayton Open.

Jon Mills (two) 2005 Canadian PGA Championship, 2007 Albertsons Boise Open.

David Morland IV (two) 2002 Hibernia Southern Open, 2003 SAS Carolina Classic.

Jim Rutledge 2006 ING New Zealand PGA Championship.

Rick Todd (two) 1991 El Paso Open, 1992 Dakota Dunes Open.

Richard Zokol 2001 Samsung Canadian PGA Championship.

**Was a citizen of his native Trinidad and Tobago at the time.*

Jeff Brooke