

LaCassie Wins 2006 Western Amateur

Courtesy of Western Golf Association

BENTON HARBOR, MI (8/6/06) – Bronson LaCassie held on to defeat Spain’s Pablo Martin on Sunday to claim the 2006 Western Amateur title and become the first Australian in the tournament’s 104-year history to have his name engraved on the George R. Thorne Championship Trophy.

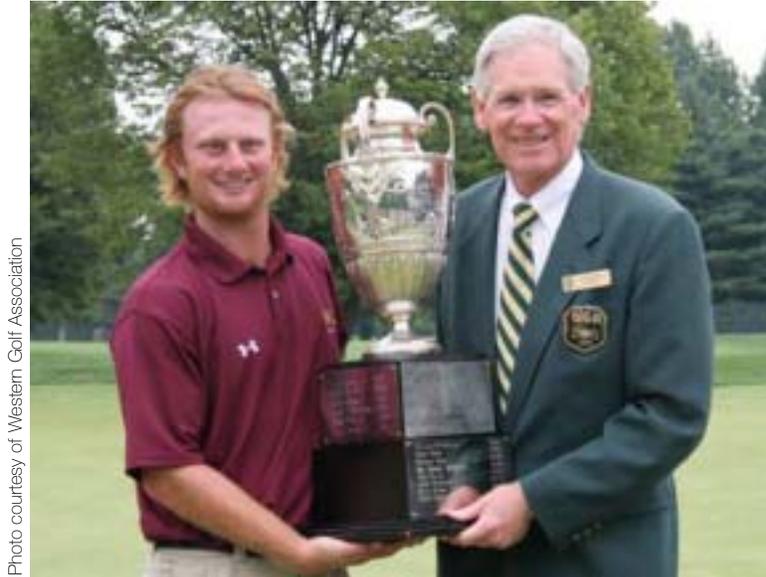


Photo courtesy of Western Golf Association

2006 Western Amateur champion Bronson LaCassie holds the George R. Thorne trophy with Western Golf Association President Rich Peterson after his 2 and 1 match play win over Pablo Martin Sunday, August 6.

LaCassie, 23, of Brisbane, Australia, joins a list of golfs greats who have won the prestigious national title, including Tiger Woods, Phil Mickelson and Jack Nicklaus. But the names of his fellow countrymen absent from the trophy give LaCassie confidence he can live his dream of success as a professional golfer.

Australians Geoff Ogilvy, Adam Scott, Aaron Baddeley and Mathew Goggin, who all have prospered as professionals, are among the Australians who reached the Sweet 16 at the Western Amateur at Point O’Woods G. & C.C. in Benton Harbor, yet were unable to claim the championship.

“It definitely makes you believe you can go on and do what they’ve

done. It is really special,” said LaCassie, the Western Amateur’s first international champion since Michael Kirk, of Johannesburg, South Africa, won in 2000, and only the third foreign champion in history. Jim Nelford, of Canada, won in 1977.

“Definitely winning a trophy Tiger’s won feels special and is something I’ll never forget. Individually, its the biggest thing that’s happened to me in my career.”

LaCassie, 23, a junior at the University of Minnesota, took command of the match on the back nine after he and Martin, 20, of

Malaga, Spain, made the turn all-square. LaCassie won the par 4, 10th with a 12-foot birdie putt, then carded back-to-back birdies on the par 5, 13th and par 4, 14th to take a 3-up lead. Martin answered by winning the par 5, 15th, with a conceded eagle putt, and the par 4, 16th, also with a conceded birdie putt, after LaCassie missed the greens on both of his approaches.

Undaunted, LaCassie answered on the 208-yard, par 3, 17th, hitting a 5-iron to eight feet below the cup and curling the putt in for a birdie and the 2 and 1 victory.

“I felt on 15 I got a little unlucky with a flier over the green, and on the 16th I had an awkward yardage,” said LaCassie.

Not much else went wrong for LaCassie. “I really felt confident out there,” he said. “I never got nervous. I pretty much knew where all my shots were going to go.”

LaCassie, who was beaten by Martin by four strokes when they were paired in the third round of this year’s NCAA championship, knew he would have to play his

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best. "He's a great player. He's won a lot of college events and is very experienced," LaCassie said. "I knew he was going to be tough to beat."

Martin, a first-team All-American and a member of Oklahoma State's 2006 NCAA Championship team, credited LaCassie's clutch putting as the difference in the match. "I had my chances," Martin said. "You can always hit it closer and make more putts. I had birdie chances. He just played better than me."

Forced to withdraw from his first Western Amateur a year ago due to muscle soreness in his arms after being introduced to water-skiing a couple of days before the competition, Martin made the most of his second chance. "It was a great week, a fun week," he said. "It's awesome to be at a tournament like this. It's as good as it gets."

With three of the final four hailing from outside the United States, the internationals were heavy favorites to prevail. "Golf's getting more and more popular everywhere in the world," said LaCassie, who chose to attend college in the United States so he could compete in the summer amateur circuit. "The ones you see here (at the Western Amateur) are the best amateurs in the world. They want to come and play here."

Although LaCassie intends to

turn professional after he finishes school next year— he has just one year of eligibility remaining— he indicated the timing depends on what happens. "If I'm still an amateur, I'll definitely be back next year," he said.

Morning Semifinals

In the morning semifinals, Martin defeated the lone semifinalist from the United States, Scott Pieri, 38, of Fort Wayne, Ind., 5 and 3, and LaCassie edged Dawie Van Der Walt, 23, of Cape Town, South Africa, 3 and 1.

Martin moved in front of Pieri early with a birdie on the par 5, 525-yard second, then methodically built the lead to 5 up through 12

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en route to the win. Martin finally closed the door with an eagle on the par 5, 15th after hitting a 197-yard 6-iron eight feet from the hole and making the putt.

"It was a good match," Martin said. "He's a great guy."

"I felt great today," said Pieri, a former PGA professional who regained his amateur status in March. "I was just a little bit off. I didn't play my best, and I got beat."

Despite the loss, Pieri embraced the experience. This was the expe-

rience of a lifetime to me, said Pieri, who played as a professional in three PGA TOUR tournaments in 1997. "I always felt that nothing would top my PGA TOUR events, but this was the best week I've ever had in golf."

On Saturday, Pieri defeated two of Martin's teammates on the OSU Cowboys national title team, 2006 NCAA champion Jonathan Moore and Tyler Leon. On Sunday, Martin got revenge. "I certainly was the underdog, playing three college All-Americans at age 38," Pieri offered.

In the second semifinal, Van Der Walt took a 2-up lead after LaCassie bogeyed the short, par 4 eighth. But LaCassie won the par 3, 11th, then pulled all-square with an eagle on the 550-yard, par 5, 13th. He birdied the par 4, 14th to take his first lead in the match.

Van Der Walt, a senior at Lamar University, gave LaCassie a nod for playing the better round in their match. "Bronson was playing good," he said. "I knew it was going to be a tough match. He made a good putt on nine not to go 3 down, and made that eagle on 13."

Although he plans to turn pro in 2007, Van Der Walt left the door open for a return appearance at the Western Amateur. "I have one more year in school, then I'll turn pro next summer. Maybe I'll come back next year," he said. **MG**