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Tuesday, August 28, 2007



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## Area golfers strike gold on greens; Seven students earn U.S. scholarships

Dave Dawson / Osprey News Network  
Sports - Friday, August 24, 2007 @ 07:00

There's money to be mined in the greens of area golf courses. Scholarship money, that is.

Seven local golfers, who have worked with Barrie golf instructor Murray St. Onge, have turned their love of golf into scholarships at U.S. colleges and universities.

"Seven is the most I've ever had in one year," said St. Onge, a longtime area golf coach. "And to have seven that will be heading to the States on full or partial scholarships is really great. It feels great to be able to help these kids and their parents."

This year's crop includes Michelle Meher, Greg Board, Jeff Clarridge and Ryan Currin of Barrie along with Rhoni Daikoff of Orillia and Corey Bartlett of Horseshoe Valley, who is also coached by Mary-Pat Quilly of Settlers' Ghost.

Clarridge, who is heading south to school today, said he's excited about the opportunity.

"I am really looking forward to going to University of Detroit Mercy and starting my NCAA golf career," said Clarridge, who received an 80 per cent scholarship in addition to a "large scholarship" from the Golf Association of Ontario.

While obtaining a degree in business finance is a high priority for Clarridge, who scored high on his SATs and graduated from high school with a high 80s average, golf is also high on his agenda.

"I hope to continually improve my game with the indoor/outdoor heated facilities at the university, qualify for all the tournaments our NCAA Division 1 team participates in, help my team continue winning our conference title and go to NCAA Regional Championships, and, hopefully win some individual titles at tournaments during my four years at UDM," Clarridge said.

Clarridge said St. Onge played a key role in his success.

"I started being coached by Murray St. Onge when I joined Tangle Creek Golf Club about four years ago," Clarridge said. "Murray helped me with the fundamentals of my swing and the mental aspect of my game. He works with video equipment which helps you fine-tune your swing."

Clarridge, like the others, said St. Onge's affiliation with University Prospects was also critical. UP is an international sports recruitment service that connects student athletes with college and university coaches. St. Onge and UP held a golf tournament at Tangle Creek for top prospects and invited several coaches from several U.S. universities.

"University Prospects did a great job of connecting with the golfers, videotaping their swing, videotaping them golfing nine holes ... they had to pay some money, but it sure paid off in the long run," St. Onge said.

Clarridge agrees. He said after playing 'AAA' hockey for eight years, he began to realize that there was more potential with golf. "I stopped playing hockey so I could focus more on golf ... and I worked very hard and my golf got to a point where I qualified for all the provincial junior boy's tournaments as well as all the men's tournaments. I made all the cuts, placed very well in most tournaments and was chosen for some special Ontario teams playing in the Williamson Cup in Syracuse, N.Y. and the Can-Am team in Myrtle Beach."

That's when he decided that a scholarship was possible.

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"I decided I would try for a golf scholarship and had University Prospects videotape my swing and nine holes of a game to present to university coaches," he said.

It paid off. Thanks in part to his high marks and his strong golf, he was offered a scholarship from the University of Detroit Mercy.

"It's a Division 1 private university with a great reputation in academics," Clarridge said.

St. Onge said he encourages his students to not only excel on the golf course, but in the classroom, too.

"Rhoni Daikoff is a good example of that," said St. Onge. "Marks are really important and she scored a 1,300 on her SATs and she got a full golf scholarship."

Rhoni's mom, Cheryl Daikoff, said she is ecstatic that her 18-year-old daughter was able to earn a full scholarship to University of Tennessee.

"I think it's just fantastic," said Daikoff, who said Rhoni is already state-side and practising with her new team.

"It will be a great experience, it will broaden her horizons and just the experience of being a student athlete in a different country is awesome."

The money's not bad, either.

"It's an \$80,000 US scholarship," Daikoff said. "The only thing she will have to buy is books and health insurance so it's incredible." St. Onge agrees with that sentiment and said he feels a little like a proud father.

"I'm not only their coach, I'm a father figure, friend, someone who listens, someone who's there for them during the ups and downs of teenage years... that's the real positive side of coaching," he said.

But it doesn't happen overnight.

"Generally, we've been together for four of five years and built them up over time, but they're the ones that make it happen. I just move them in the right direction," said St. Onge.

He said the work is worth it. His own two children have earned golf scholarships to U.S. schools, and both are the better for it, he said.

"It's been the best four years of their lives," St. Onge said. "It's just an awesome life experience and for me, it's an honour and a privilege to help others reach that goal."

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