

FROM DRAMA TO DEFENDING CHAMPION

AFTER LAST YEAR'S UNEXPECTED ARRIVAL AND FINAL-ROUND HEROICS, SCOTT HEBERT IS READY FOR AN ENCORE PERFORMANCE

By Don Jozwiak, Senior Editor

SCOTT HEBERT IS KNOWN AS ONE OF THE BEST PLAYERS THE MICHIGAN PGA SECTION HAS EVER seen, a respected teacher and as the PGA head professional at a high-profile resort. The low-key Hebert is the last person you'd expect to create much drama, or he was before last year's PGA Professional National Championship.



"It always seems like the winner has some sort of amazing story," says Hebert, PGA head professional at Grand Traverse Resort in Acme, Mich. "I guess last year, it was my turn to be that guy."

That's putting it mildly. Hebert's self-described "whirlwind" experience at last year's National Championship started when his wife, Laurie, gave birth to the couple's first daughter a month before the child's due date. Susie Hebert made her unexpected debut on June 10, right after her dad had won his sixth Michigan Open, and didn't come home from the hospital until June 19 – the day her frazzled father shot a first-round 67 at Georgia's Reynolds Plantation in the 2008 PGA Professional National Championship. Susie and Laurie were healthy and home, and Scott's strong performance in the middle rounds of the National Championship put him three strokes back with nine holes to play.

That's when Hebert upped the drama factor. He dropped five birdies on the field over the next seven holes, then outlasted Sonny Skinner with a 72nd-hole par and a one-stroke victory.

"As it turned out, I had two great things happen to me," says Hebert, 40. "It was just amazing how things worked out."

Things haven't been any less amazing for Hebert since he lifted the Walter Hagen Cup last June. Calls, letters, e-mails and text messages poured in from old schoolmates and his PGA Professional peers. Grand Traverse congratulated him with a billboard in downtown Traverse City, and club members threw him a party – not that he had time to relax, since he had an exemption into the following week's PGA Tour Buick Open in Grand Blanc, Mich., then played in the PGA Championship at Oakland Hills outside Detroit in August.

"I was surprised at how many of the PGA Tour guys went out of their way to congratulate me at the Buick and the PGA Championship," says Hebert, who has 260 members in addition to resort business at Grand Traverse. "So many of them came over and said, 'Hey, I saw what you did on the Golf Channel. Great job.'"

Hebert has since spent his time running the golf operations for the three golf courses and Jim McLean Golf Academy at Grand Traverse, teaching through the winter and squeezing in PGA Tour appearances at the FBR Open, Mayakoba Classic and Zurich Classic. Daughter Susie is approaching her first birthday in good health, along with the Heberts' 4-year-old son, J.P., and papa Scott is trying to balance family, work and gearing up for multiple title defenses.

"I have the Michigan Open in early June, then out to New Mexico for the National Championship," Hebert says. "Winning the PGA Professional National Championship has been great for work, and it's really increased my lesson revenue. People come to Grand Traverse and are aware of who I am and what I've done. The word definitely got out. And that's great, because at the end of the day my job is being a golf professional."

Hebert made a media day visit to New Mexico last year to play Twin Warriors Golf Club, and he appreciates the challenge it and Santa Ana Golf Club will present to his title defense. "Twin Warriors is plenty long, almost like a PGA Tour setup, and the elevation makes it easy for the ball to get away from you," he says. "If the wind blows, it will be tricky."

No matter what happens in Santa Ana Pueblo, you can bet it won't be as dramatic as Hebert's last trip to the PGA Professional National Championship – though he wouldn't mind a little excitement on the back nine of the final round. ■

