

Dreams of Augusta and Africa

BY RICK PLEDL

TODD BRAMSON

Caddie returns to his roots to chase a dream

It started innocently enough, with a short blurb in the April 2007 issue of *Golf Digest* magazine. Todd Bramson read the item about a caddie play day at Augusta National GC, and it sparked an idea in his fertile mind. Bramson, a resident of Verona and a member and former president at Madison's Blackhawk CC, wanted in.

Like most avid golfers, Bramson dreamed of playing the hallowed course in Augusta, Ga., home of the Masters. But rather than wait for an invitation that probably would never come, Bramson decided to seek employment at the club as a caddie.

There's much that Bramson cannot talk about in reference to his job the last couple of years as a part-time caddie at Augusta National, but suffice it to say it has been the golf experience of a lifetime, and he's gotten his chance to play the course.

"I figured I'd never have an opportunity to play there, so I thought I'd give it a try, because I always loved caddieing anyway," he said. "I thought if it works, it works, and if it doesn't, it doesn't. A lot of people dream of even getting a ticket to a practice round at the Masters, just to walk the course."

Bramson, 49, grew up in Waukesha.



He began caddieing at Westmoor CC in Brookfield at age 12, and he worked there every summer until he was 21. During that time, he got the chance to caddie at the 1981 Greater Milwaukee Open, which then led to a few more loops in PGA Tour events – as well as an opportunity to attend the University of Wisconsin as an Evans Scholar. So Bramson was anything but a novice when he sent a letter to the Augusta National caddiemaster to introduce himself and inquire about a job.

As a part-timer, Bramson has been told over the last couple of years which

Like many of avid players, Todd Bramson dreamed of playing Augusta National GC, and his dream came true.

days he's needed at the club, and he either flies or drives (15 hours one way) to Georgia to be available those days.

"There's no assurance I would even get a loop," he said. "I had to be there, be available, just like in the caddie yard back at Westmoor, where you might show up and not get out."

When it was suggested that some might hear his story and think him just a little crazy, Bramson didn't disagree.

"It is crazy," he said. "But what would

you do to pursue a dream?”

As a financial planner in the Madison area for the last 27 years and a senior partner in North Star Resource Group, Bramson also helps others pursue their dreams. About five years ago he formed Bramson & Associates, a marketing and consulting firm which mentors and trains individuals and organizations through speaking engagements and workshops. He also does motivational speaking and

has authored a series of books called “Real Life Financial Planning.”

Bramson joined Blackhawk CC 15 years ago, served on the board of directors and ultimately became president of the club in 2007. He said he plays about three times a week these days, and his current handicap index is a solid 3.6.

As much enjoyment as he’s gotten from belonging to a fine private club like Blackhawk – growing up as a pub-

lic links player, he said that was a dream of his, too – it pales compared to the experiences he’s had inside the gates of Augusta National GC.

“It’s really a privilege, and I don’t take it lightly,” Bramson said of his caddie job. “It’s one of the most amazing things I’ve ever had the opportunity to do.”

And, yes, he said, Augusta National is even prettier in person than it is on television.

TODD NELSON

Kalahari owner brings African flavor to Wisconsin Dells

Todd Nelson recently moved into a home on the golf course at Trappers Turn GC in Wisconsin Dells. That’s not surprising since Nelson is a native of The Dells and a businessman known for investing locally.

Nelson, 49, along with wife Sherri, opened Kalahari Resort in Wisconsin Dells in 2000. Their second Kalahari Resort debuted in Sandusky, Ohio, in 2005. Construction on a third location in Fredericksburg, Va., was put on hold when its financing dried up, but the plans are still on the table and Nelson expects to break ground when funds become available.

Nelson got into the golf biz in 2006 when he purchased Trappers Turn. The course, located across town from Kalahari Resort, has become an important amenity.

“We felt we needed golf at Kalahari to round out our offerings, and we felt we could add a lot to our group sales business there,” he said. “I’ve loved Trappers Turn for a long time, and I actually tried to buy it a couple other times and was unsuccessful. We just love the place. I think it’s one of the most beautiful places in Wisconsin Dells.”

The purchase has worked out, as Nelson said Trappers should reach 9,000 group rounds in 2010, although he expects that number to grow.

Nelson started playing golf when he

was about 30, but he said he’s gotten more serious about the game since the Trappers purchase. He currently has a 12.3 handicap index.

“It does seem to be coming down,” he said of his handicap, “but I always have those blow-up holes. Or I’ll be right on

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the verge of getting to a 39 – I’ve never had a 39, but I’ve shot 40 about 15 times – and then someone will tell me my score and I’ll blow up.”

Nelson said he settled on an African motif for Kalahari Resorts because he wanted something unique, and when he first opened there was no shortage of waterparks, hotels and casinos across America which dabbled in Caribbean and various nature themes. He said at the very



Wisconsin Dells native Todd Nelson added to his local portfolio in 2006 with his purchase of Trappers Turn GC.

beginning the decision was made to keep the properties authentically African by importing art and artifacts every year. Someone from the company visits the continent annually for that very purpose.

Kalahari Resorts is a family operation. Todd and Sherri Nelson have five grown children in their 20s, and all but one work in the business. Likewise, Trappers Turn has become a family tradition in just a few seasons.

“My parents have a table on our deck, which is just kind of designated their table,” Nelson said of his parents Todd and Fairlane. “They eat out there every day, and it’s sort of our family meeting place. We just love the place.”