

Seeking a Repeat

With one national title in his pocket, PGA Professional John Simmons is eager to challenge again in The 2008 PGA McGladrey Team Championship

By Bob Denney

Though winter is settling in at Newport National Golf Club in Middletown, R.I., there is a burning fire within host PGA Professional John Simmons.

The leader of the Newport National's foursome that captured the inaugural PGA McGladrey Team Championship is making plans to defend a title in the second edition of The PGA of America's nationwide grass roots best-ball event.

The Championship's three-tier format begins with Local Qualifying Events in the spring, followed by 41 Section Championships and capped by a National Championship, Oct. 20–22, at Pinehurst (N.C.) Resort.



defending Champion team to return. But, I don't think that will be allowed, so we will have to earn our way back."

The second PGA McGladrey Team Championship continues a three-tier process to the National Championship. The Local Qualifying Event level features modifications that will increase the maximum handicap index combination for teams and the opportunity for host sites – with 18 teams or more – to send two teams to the Section Championship.

Registration to host a Local Qualifying Event is being accepted at PGA.com/teamchampionship.

"I hope that this Championship runs for 100 years and I'm back here for 100 years," said Simmons upon accepting the team trophy last September. "It's a great event not because we won, but because we were a part of it."

Section Championships, hosted by The PGA of America's network of 41 Sections, will once again team a PGA Professional with three amateur partners in the bid to earn a National Championship berth.

"It did not hit us until we got to Pinehurst how big this Championship was," recalls Simmons. "I had never been to Pinehurst. I have been to three national team finals in the Oldsmobile and Buick eras, and that was nice. But the experience of going to Pinehurst, and the way their staff treated all of us, was phenomenal."

Simmons had to catch a flight home soon after the 2007 Championship, but his amateur partners spent the next day at Pinehurst.

"The people at Pinehurst did not forget about us after one day," says Simmons. "The boys on the team had lunch the following day at the clubhouse and the kitchen staff served them dessert with frosting that spelling out, 'National Champions.'"

Once Newport National Golf Club's Champions returned home, the club added its own celebration.

"The coverage we received in the state was great, and people got the word about what we had accomplished," says Simmons. "This coming year we realize how difficult it will be to advance from the Local and Section to have a chance to defend a title. The Section Championship had 22 teams, and you had to win, period, to get to the National Championship. I was very proud of the kids and how they came through and how they carried themselves both on and off the course."

PGA Professionals and amateurs in the 2008 National Championship will share a \$200,000 purse in prize money and gift certificates. The field will compete on three of Pinehurst's premier layouts – Nos. 2, 4 and 8. ■

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—Defending Champion
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"To compete in a National Championship, with three kids, the youngest at 17, and to win the Championship, and be the first to do so ... well, it's a memory that will last a lifetime," says the 41-year-old Simmons, who was joined in the National Championship by amateurs Jamie, 24, Andrew Farrea, 20, and 17-year-old Tod Camara, a high school hockey player who incredibly had only four months of golf competition on his résumé.

"I wish that there was an exemption for the