

Gary Woodland (left) and Jeff King



'Hey, Jerky Guy!'

King (left) with Webb Simpson (center) and Simpson's caddie Paul Tesori

Photos provided by JEFF KING

by KATHY BISSELL

TOUR caddie beefs up business with savory treat

They always say that successful products are created by someone who saw a need that wasn't being met. That's certainly the case with Jeff King — caddie, chef, entrepreneur and creator of Kingmade Jerky.

King, you see, is kind of a jerky fanatic. As a 22-year caddie veteran for various LPGA, Korn Ferry and PGA TOUR players, he has logged many miles between tournament stops, often in his car.

"Every time I went into gas stations, I'd see products I'd never seen, and I'd buy them. I didn't care what the price was or if there were five, 10, I bought them all," King said. "I would eat a piece, and it was always the same style: hard to eat and hard to chew, broke my jaw, and it was full of salt."

He would then toss the offending package of jerky on the floor of the car.

"After years of doing that, I was at home for a few weeks off in a break during a season and said, 'What the heck, man, I'm going to try to make some beef jerky,'" he said, explaining how it all began.

He Googled recipes. He bought a dehydrator at Bass Pro Shops.

"Alton Brown said, 'go buy flank steak and put some kitchen spices in a bowl,' and I did that. To be honest with you, the first batch I made was tragically bad," King said. "I ate less than one piece and the garbage can got full."

Initial failure didn't stop him. It became a personal mission. He was going to conquer the beef jerky. He kept trying until he got a recipe that worked and tasted good to him. Then he loaded up his treasure in snack bags and headed back out to caddie.

"I was caddying for Luke List at the time on the Nationwide Tour and I just told him. 'If you'd like some beef jerky, I made

some. It's in the golf bag, so feel free,'" King said.

They were playing a practice round and about the fourth or fifth hole, List decided to sample some of the jerky.

"He got up to the green after eating a couple pieces and looked at me and said, 'How long have you been making beef jerky? Your whole life?'"

King told him it was two weeks. They both started laughing.

Then Scott Brown, who was with them, said, "Beef jerky? I love beef jerky," King recalled.

Brown grabbed some and pronounced it the best beef jerky he'd ever had in his life.

The next day, King was on the putting green and player after player came up and asked for some beef jerky. Pretty soon he was out.

The next week, Brown reappeared and said he had four people who wanted to buy some of King's jerky, and would he make more for them.

"I absolutely started laughing," King said.

When there's something new and good on the PGA TOUR, you cannot keep it a secret for longer than a week.

"Long story short, it kept going that way. I've never asked anybody on any Tour to buy jerky. I'm not a salesman. They just kept texting me," said King, who started bringing duffle bags of jerky to tournaments. His only challenge was that security dogs in airports would sometimes go a little nuts.

The next season, List got his PGA TOUR card, and King went along. The demand for jerky did too.

"It was coming from everywhere — Graeme McDowell, Davis Love, Billy Horschel, Gary Woodland, Vaughn Taylor. The list just kept going and going, and it got to a point where my kitchen had five dehydrators in it," King said.

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When King got to tournaments, it was like someone had rung the Pavlovian bell.

“As soon as they saw a red duffle bag, they knew what it was,” King said. “They stopped practicing went and got their wallets, and my duffle bag was empty in 30 minutes.”

His customers kept telling him to get it into stores, but he said he didn’t have that background, having gone to college on a golf scholarship. He’d not taken any business classes. So, he just kept up with the demand from Tour players.

“They all supported this because it’s kind of a family, the player and caddie relationship, and it was a good product, and it’s healthy,” he said. “It’s something they want to eat while they’re performing.”

When Stewart Cink wanted to talk about jerky recipes, King said it gave him goosebumps.

“I grew up watching Stewart Cink, respected everything he’s done for the game of golf and his accomplishments, and I go out there to caddie, and then all this happens,” King said.

On the first tee, King introduced himself to Cink and they shook hands.

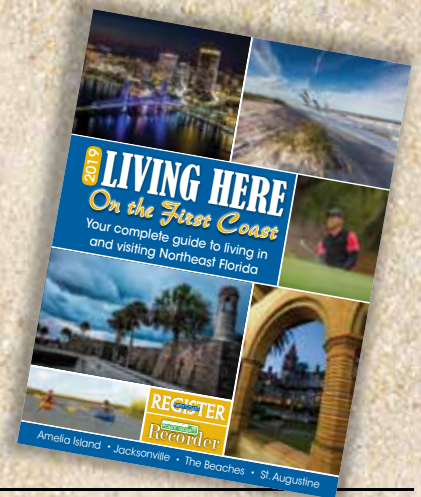
“We played 18 holes, and we got done, and we shook hands, and as we were walking to the scorer’s tent, he looks at me and he goes, ‘You know what I did the other day? I tried making some (jerky) with this and this and this.’ So, he knew exactly who I was the whole time and didn’t say one word about beef jerky. And he goes ‘Have you ever tried that? I’m going to have to get some recipes from you.’”

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King (left) with Rickie Fowler

While King may end up as a meat snack maven, he said he still intends to caddie.

“The PGA TOUR saw what was happening and all the players posting pictures and supporting with tweets. I never asked them to do any of it, but they were just willing to help,” King said. “The PGA TOUR contacted me and said let’s get a deal going.”

He found contacts for turning his love for jerky into a business. He had to find a manufacturer, get a sales team, learn about distribution. He began to meet people who had some know-how to help him get started.

“I’ve never been a business owner,” King said. “I’d been a caddie. I’ve been around sports my whole life. Being a business owner is not something — it wasn’t intentional. I had zero experience.”

The relationship he has with the players converted his hobby into Kingmaster Beef Jerky which is now the Official Jerky of the PGA TOUR. King described the arrangement as a partnership, and he cannot thank the players enough.

“It’s never been about money,” he said about his new life as an entrepreneur. “It’s about doing good things for other people.”

King has caddied for List, James Hahn, Vaught Taylor, Scott Stallings, Derek Ernst and Sunjae Im. He has also caddied on the LPGA Tour for many years.

“Now nobody knows my name anymore. It’s the ‘Jerky Guy,’” he said, laughing.

And King is okay with that.

If you like beef jerky, King said the best place to find his products are at www.kingmade.com, although they are also available at Walmart.com and Amazon.com.

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
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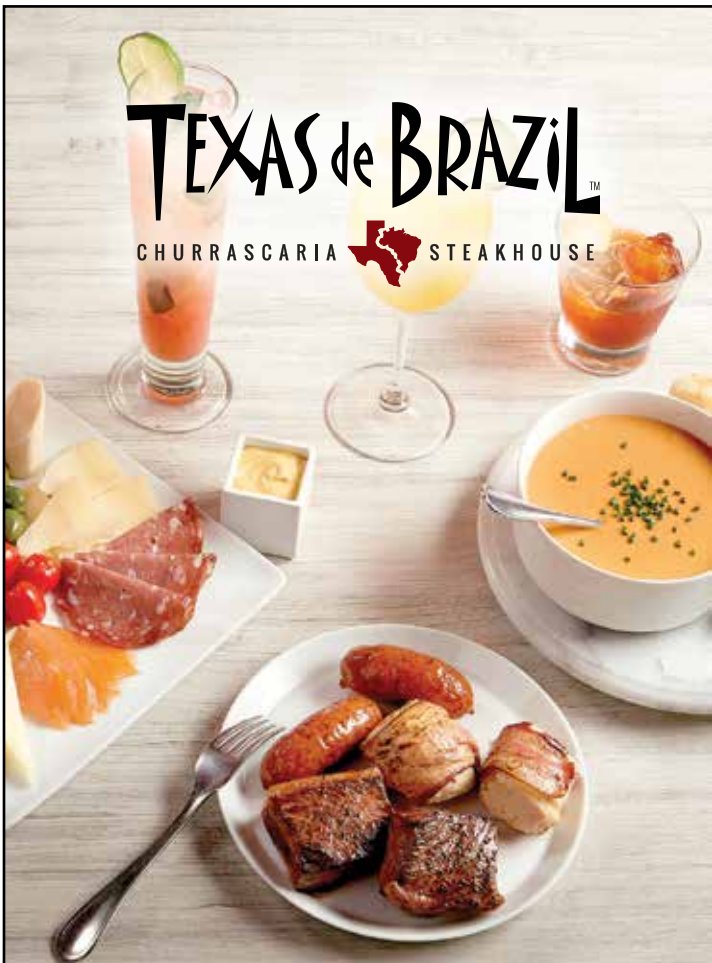
The Kingmade site often has specials. And when you order, they make sure to reach out to you later with money-saving offers.

The Kingmade jerky product pouches are designed to make you smile.

The front features a steer, complete with horns, wearing ski gear, a golfer's hat or dressed as a hunter, depending on which recipe you prefer. The steers even have names: Clyde (sweet chili pepper style), Otis (buffalo style) and Arnie (classic recipe).



King (left) with Graeme McGowell



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