

Casola enjoying second chance at auto racing

By David Biggy
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HOLMDEL — After some time managing Tri-County Motor Speedway in North Carolina, Dominick Casola ended up returning home to get back to working on the grounds of A. Casola Farms, owned by his parents.

"I came home in March 2011, pretty much resigned to the fact that I wasn't going to get my shot to race professionally ever again, or race at NASCAR's highest level," said the 25-year-old Casola, who this season has been racing primarily at Wall Stadium after developing his own local team, Dominick Casola Motorsports. "But it seems I might have a second chance coming to me, and I'm going to enjoy whatever opportunity arises."

On Aug. 15, Carter 2 Motorsports owner Roger Carter, whose regular driver had left the team prior to the Aug. 18 Automobile Racing Club of America (ARCA) race in Springfield, Ill., contacted Casola asking him to drive for the team that weekend.

"Apparently, Carter's driver quit, so in the middle of the day on Wednesday he sent me a message on Facebook," Casola said. "Later in the day, he called me. I wasn't sure if he was serious because I wasn't expecting it. His offer came out of nowhere and it was a big shock."

Casola accepted the offer and took the next day to make transportation and hotel arrangements, and about 4 a.m. the following morning hopped aboard a flight from Newark to St. Louis, then drove several hours southwest to Springfield. The next day was qualifying and the race.

"I did pretty well," Ca-



Dominick Casola hopes to make the leap to NASCAR after racing at Wall Stadium this past season. PETER ACKERMAN/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

sola said. "I had forgotten how fast those ARCA cars were, but I adjusted and ran well overall. We were top-10 capable but we had some mechanical issues. I'm not really a dirt-track driver, but I thought it was a successful run. Roger Carter was happy."

Carter was so happy that he invited Casola to race for his team the following weekend in Madison, Wis. Casola flew out on Friday, ran in practice and qualifying on Saturday, then raced on Sunday.

"I got spun out with about 30 laps to go," he said. "I probably would have finished top-15 except we had to make a green-flag pit stop and change two flat tires."

Despite the problems, Carter decided to sign up Casola for a minimum of seven races in 2013. Casola, an unfunded driver — which essentially means he doesn't bring any cash to the table like most other drivers do when seeking

out a race team position for an owner — said this was an opportunity he couldn't refuse.

"When I ran an ARCA car regularly a few years ago, I took it for granted," he said. "I lived the life of a professional racecar driver, but I didn't really think much of it because I was just doing that all the time. This was an opportunity I couldn't pass up because this gives me the chance to really enjoy driving again."

What's better is that Casola recently has been in talks about driving a couple of NASCAR Sprint Cup races. Casola is prohibited from sharing exact details until an official announcement has been made.

Still, Casola is blown away that he's even having that type of discussion with anybody right now.

"I think I'm ready, and I don't know if I can be any more ready," said Casola, who in 2010 ran one NASCAR Truck Series race at

Talladega Motor Speedway.

"But it's funny how stuff works, and all I know is I'm going to do the best I can and hope somebody notices."

Of course, no matter what happens, Casola remains grateful to have such a supportive team of people around him, whether driving locally or elsewhere.

"I've been through a lot of highs and lows during 11 years of racing, and I couldn't have done it without the support of my parents, family and friends," he said. "And I'm so thankful to have such a dedicated, hard-working group of volunteers who help me get my cars onto the track at Wall. They do so much for me and love what they do, and I can't thank them enough."

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