

Moving up

Jeff Klauk earns a PGA Tour card after reuniting with an old friend to work on fundamentals

By Evan Rothman

ALPHARETTA, GA.

Cody Barden and Jeff Klauk like to joke about the movie "Jerry Maguire" for it echoes of their own working relationship, with instructor Barden as Maguire and pro Klauk as Rod Tidwell.

Since 2006, Barden has devoted much of his considerable energy to Klauk, a former Division II college superstar who won more tournaments at Florida Southern than fellow alumni Rocco Mediate and Lee Janzen combined.

The comparison goes only so far. As director of instruction at White Columns Country Club in Alpharetta, Ga., Barden, 39, continues to teach other clients. The gentlemanly Klauk, 30, isn't much for braggadocio. But the single-mindedness, intensity and happy resolution are Maguiresque: After a strong Nationwide Tour season, Klauk will play on the PGA Tour in 2009, which when the duo started must have seemed as far away as Cuba Gooding Jr.'s Oscar.

"Jeff was at his lowest point as a professional at the end of 2005," Barden said. "He really needed not only a critic that would help him fix the technical stuff but also a guy to remind him how good he really was.

I pledged to him that I'd do everything I could to get him to the PGA Tour, that I wouldn't invest any of my Jeff Klauk time on anything else."

"My golf game wasn't very good," Klauk said. "I was struggling, coming off some back problems and also two seizures. Cody told me he could help me out and, being the son of a fighter pilot, he's a very confident individual."

Barden's confidence proved well-founded. His counsel has helped turn around Klauk's career, and the back problems and never-explained seizures have subsided.

"Everything we've done with his game, the theme, is to not require timing," Barden said. "When Jeff wakes up in the morning, he should be picking up where he left off the day before."

The two men – long-ago acquaintances who fell out of touch for a decade – now talk on the phone every day when they're not working together in person. They're close friends as much as co-workers.

Klauk's success has rounded back to Maguire, er, Barden. The instructor recently was named Georgia PGA Section Teacher of the Year and has added two Nationwide Tour pros to his clientele.

Show them the money. ○



Klauk's old ball position (left) was too far back in his stance. To encourage the new position (center), he practices hitting balls in an exaggerated forward spot (right).

Ball forward

"Jeff had a comfort zone established with playing the ball back (in his stance), which in his mind gave him more compression at impact," Barden said. "He wanted a lower, straighter ball flight, but he couldn't get it with the ball back, because the clubface had to square quickly or he'd hit it dead right. I helped him realize that playing the ball back encouraged him to flip his hands – I call it 'flash ratio' – through the hitting area."

Said Klauk: "With great players, the club stays square longer, and that's where we began. We're trying to minimize clubface rotation through impact – getting rid of the timing."

Several interrelated changes followed, the most obvious getting Klauk to position the ball more forward, eventually enabling him to dial back his "big draw" and add a cut to his arsenal.

"The more I overdo things, the more it falls into place when I play," Klauk said. "You can overdo some things, but for me it's impossible with ball position. On the range, I'll exaggerate it way out in front: 'Go chase it,' we like to say."

Coach & player

Cody Barden

AGE: 39

TITLE: Director of instruction, White Columns Country Club, Alpharetta, Ga.

BIO: 2008 Georgia PGA Section Teacher of the Year; founder of CB Golf (www.cbgo.net); former director of instruction at TPC Sawgrass and the Country Club of Birmingham (Ala.); head men's coach at Pepperdine University, 1994-95 (1995 West Coast Conference Coach of the Year); competed for two years on mini-tours; also works with Nationwide Tour pros Keoke Cotner and Jeremy Anderson; teaches several celebrities, including R.E.M.'s Mike Mills, former tennis world No. 1 Jim Courier and ex-NFL All-Pro Chris Doleman.



Jeff Klauk

AGE: 30 HOMETOWN: St. Augustine, Fla.

RANKING: No. 179 in the *Golfweek*/Sagarin Performance Index, up from No. 252 in October 2007

HEIGHT/WEIGHT: 6 feet, 185 pounds

GEAR: Titleist 909D Comp driver (8.5 degree), Nickent 4DX 3-wood (15 degree), Nickent 4DX hybrid (17 degree), Titleist 755 3-iron, Titleist AP2 irons (4-9), Titleist Vokey Design wedges (48, 52 and 56 degrees), Scotty Cameron by Titleist Del Mar putter, Titleist Pro V1 ball

BEST RESULTS: Winner, Melwood Prince George's Country Open; T2, Panama Movistar Championship and Utah Championship; T4, Henrico Country Open



Barden uses a towel to help Klauk ingrain the feel of snapping his left leg forward on the downswing instead of bowing the leg.



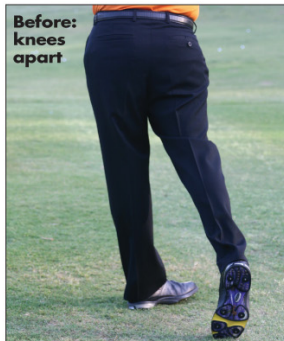
COURTESY PHOTOS/KENT MCCORMIE

PHOTOGRAPHED AT WHITE COLUMNS COUNTRY CLUB, ALPHARETTA, GA

Mimicking Davis Love III's knees

Barden says he couldn't have gotten Klauk to move the ball forward without teaching him better weight transfer, or in the instructor's lingo, "pivot action of the body." The player's lower-body pivot most concerned Barden.

"It wasn't efficient," Barden said. "His legs buckled through the impact area. We worked hard on posting up (i.e., straightening) his left leg in the downswing. As he pivots through impact, Jeff tries to have the right knee catch up and touch the left knee, which he can do if the left leg is posted but not if it's buckled and runs toward the target. And as Jeff got the hang of posting his left leg, the more speed we could develop with his body, which meant he needed less speed from his hands and wrists."



Before: knees apart



After: knees close

The pair worked the issue in several ways. Barden had Klauk watch video of Davis Love III's leg action. (Love's longtime pro, Jack Lumpkin, mentored Barden.) The instructor physically moved Klauk's left leg to demonstrate the desired snapping action.

He also taught Klauk a drill in which Klauk has to trap a towel between his knees (dropped by Barden or, on the road, Klauk's caddie) on the downswing — sort of a lower-body version of the glove-under-the-armpit drill.

"If you have the correct ball position and the correct pivot position and you can better control the clubface," Barden said. "Jeff didn't realize that moving the ball forward promoted a better lower-body pivot. It was hard for him to make that leap, but he has."



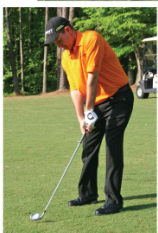
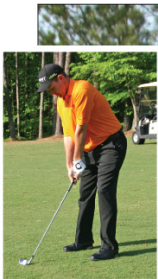
Push to the top

Barden uses what he calls the “impact push drill” (pictured) to get Klauk to feel the desired movement of the clubface post-impact – Barden wants less rotation. He has the player set up to a mid-iron with the club soled. Without any backswing, Klauk must push the ball to Barden, who’s standing 10 yards or so ahead.

“If Jeff flips or flicks with his hands, he can’t get the ball airborne,” Barden said. “It helps him learn the correct position of the clubface, staying square longer through the through-swing.”

The instructor’s other preferred drill is from renowned teaching pro Jim Flick.

“I have Jeff hit high, soft pitch shots about 40 yards with his 9-iron,” Barden said. “If he flips his hands, the leading edge will dig into the ground, he’ll take a divot and the ball will go about 80 yards. To do it right, he has to keep the face quiet through impact, holding off the rotation.”



Straightening out the wedge game

“I’ve probably improved most on wedges inside 100 yards,” Klauk said. “With the ball too far back, I didn’t have all the shots. It’s so important to learn different shots for the same yardage – hitting high shots, low shots, dealing with the wind or back pins. It all goes back to keeping the clubface square (longer). It’s amazing how much tighter you feel when you don’t have as much face rotation going on. It’s easier to control spin and trajectory.”

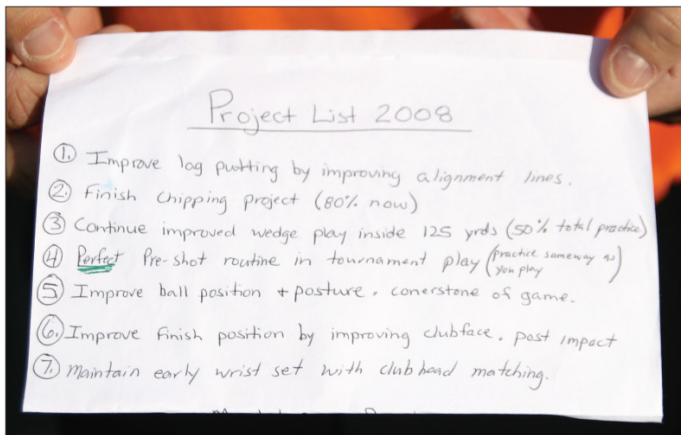
“When we started, Jeff had just one stock shot – a low, hooking wedge played off his right heel that he would aim 5-10 yards right of his target,” Barden said. “Any time the flag was on the right side of the green, he literally had to aim off the green if

he wanted to get it close. With better ball position, pivot and clubface (action), he can now take dead aim, or have the ball come in softly to the right. The toe of the club isn’t turning as fast; he can even have the heel of the clubface come into the ball before the toe gets there. We’ve expanded his menu options with the wedge.”

Though generally a range rat, Klauk said that playing almost every day this past offseason with touring pros at his home club, TPC Sawgrass, instead of parking himself at the practice tee was another key to his improvement.

“I really changed it up to practice on the course,” he said. “I learned you don’t pay attention on the range. The quality of time isn’t as good.”





The project list

Klauk and Barden emphasize the latter's role as a coach (rather than instructor), which has grown in importance as Klauk's mechanics have improved. One important example is Barden's insistence on starting each year with a "project list."

"We talk about everything we want to improve, and we prioritize that list," Barden said. "At the bottom he writes his annual goals and objectives. We both sign that list and keep a copy on our refrigerators at home. It keeps us on point all season long. We don't change what we're doing. We work the list."

Added Klauk: "I've had goals, but I've never (focused on them) to that extent. It got me narrowed in. Instead of being all over the place,

I'm focused on a few items I need to improve."

The pair also underscored the boost a player gets from someone else who is committed to, and rooting for, his success.

"Cody's really passionate and loves to help me out," Klauk said. "We've become great friends through all of this. It's not a business relationship anymore."

Said Barden: "Jeff needs me because he trusts my eyes and I communicate well with him. But at the end of the day, the thing that makes me most valuable to him is that I'm his biggest fan. I couldn't be more proud of the guy, or believe in him more. And he's believing in himself more."

No doubt they'll enjoy devising a 2009 project list for the PGA Tour.

Set, ready to go

Klauk works often on wrist-set because it has been a habitual bugaboo and is crucial to his full-swing mechanics. To set the club early rather than drag it back inside the plane, he practices with a shaft in the ground behind his right foot (how far back varies with the length of the club) and tries to make a normal swing without the club touching the shaft (pictured).

When he takes the club back properly, it moves over the top of the shaft. When he snatches it inside, he smacks the shaft.

"When I play poorly, I tend to set the club late," Klauk said. "It throws off the sequence of my swing and my weight transfer. It almost feels like a reverse pivot. When I set the club early, it feels like it pulls me back to my right side; when I don't, I go the other way."



Speeding up improvement

Klauk long has struggled with slow pace of play, and his medical troubles only exacerbated the problem.

"My mind was all over the place," Klauk said.

Unlike many overly deliberate players, Klauk decided to do something about it — not only for his sake but also for his fellow competitors.

"Jeff was very troubled by his inability to play a shot without backing off four or five times," said Barden, who described Klauk as "shocked and embarrassed" when the instructor showed the player a videotape of his (in)action during a competitive round.

Klauk told Barden he liked to take two rehearsal swings behind the ball; using a stopwatch, Barden established that Klauk's optimal routine took between 19 and 22 seconds from the first rehearsal until the actual swing. Caddying for Klauk in the first Nationwide Tour event of the 2007 season, Barden asked the player to concern himself only with his pre-shot routine. Though Klauk missed the cut, the week still proved to be a turning point.

"I told him, 'Get into the shot, focus on your target and trust your talent.' Back off if circumstances force you to, like a bug flies in your way or the wind gusts up," Barden said. "But don't back off because you're worried about something beyond your control, or if you've lost the picture in your mind. Make a decision."

"I'm playing better because I'm playing faster," Klauk says. "It's one of the most important things we've worked on. Your routine should relax you, and that's what we've tried to do."

Strike the pose

"I didn't have good form pitching and chipping before (working with) Cody — I used too much wrist," Klauk said. "He wants me to use my big muscles more. It's still a work in progress, but having Cody there to see that I'm doing it right helps. Really, it's just practice, practice, practice."

Said Barden: "Every chip shot he used to hit had backspin on it, and backspin is a killer for chipping because it's unpredictable — you don't know how it's going to react."

"We taught him to firm up his hands and wrists and move the club with his pivot to generate shaft speed, rather than cocking and uncocking the wrists. We taught him how to hold his finish (pictured); we call it 'the pose.' I don't want to see the toe of the club turned, or the elbow buckled or the (left) wrist cupped. I want everything firm on the left side." ○

