



DOTTIE PEPPER

Late Bloomer

MY SHOT

By hanging in there, Jeff Klauk gets to play where he once mowed the grass | BY CODY BARDEN

EVERYBODY HAS been talking about 2009 as the Year of the Young Guns, and maybe Ryo Ishikawa, Danny Lee and Rory McIlroy will catch an elevator ride to the top, although history suggests otherwise. For every Tiger Woods there are lots of Ty Tryons—and, less dramatically, blue-chip prospects who never justify the hype. Golf is a fickle, many-sided game, which is something pundits forget in their endless search for the Next Big Thing.



This week, my student and close friend, 31-year-old PGA Tour rookie Jeff Klauk, will be the most excited entrant in Players Championship history. Qualifying for the tournament was Jeff's top goal for 2009, ahead of winning rookie of the year. The TPC Sawgrass is where Jeff cut his teeth as a golfer—and also where he cut the grass. His dad, Fred, was the course superintendent for two decades before retiring last year, and Jeff used to work on the grounds crew. The TPC was literally his backyard.

But what makes this one of the season's best feel-good stories is where Jeff came from more recently. When he graduated from Florida Southern, where he won more collegiate titles than alums Lee Janzen and Rocco Mediate combined, Jeff was a can't-miss prospect. Well, Jeff missed. By the time we joined up at the end

of 2005, he was finishing his fourth year on the Nationwide tour, and he didn't even register among the 1,300 players in the World Ranking. His game was in tatters, and his confidence was shot. His health was no better than his golf, as he was ravaged by a bad back and two seizures that have still never been explained.

OLD NEWS

Klauk, a 31-year-old rookie, was a can't-miss kid who missed.

We changed some things—ball position, leg action, practice routines and other stuff you read about in magazines—but maybe more important were the things that we didn't change: Jeff's tireless work ethic; his desire to maximize his ability; his passion to compete against the best. Jeff will get to do that

this week, and after what he's been through, the island-green 17th won't scare him.

We love shiny new stars, and the game needs them, but there's something possibly even more compelling about guys like Jeff—or '09 winners Michael Bradley, Brian Gay and Pat Perez—who lost their way, then found it again. Whose success took longer than expected. Who worried it would never come. Those are adversities almost every golfer can relate to.

Cody Barden is director of instruction at White Columns Country Club in Alpharetta, Ga.

Saving Grace

There are times when life gives us a speed bump, but slowing down for that moment allows us to jump into the fast lane once we get going again. I believe that's what's going to happen for **Grace Park**, who last week announced she had undergone successful arthroscopic surgery for a torn labrum in her hip. Grace has battled neck and back issues since her college days at Arizona State, where she dominated for two years before moving on to the LPGA in 2000. A six-time winner, she began to suffer burnout in 2004, not long after she won that year's Kraft Nabisco. She started spending more time in South Korea—seemingly trying to find out who she really was after being sent as a child to live with a nanny in the U.S. so she could develop her golf skills. Her recovery is expected to take four months, and I encourage Grace not to push it. After August there simply aren't that many events remaining on the schedule. She should come back when the healing is complete, both physically and emotionally, when her heart wants it. I made the mistake of returning too soon after my first shoulder surgery in '02. I set a calendar date that my mind and body weren't even close to being on the same page with and ultimately paid the price with more extensive rehab and a major blow to my motivation and confidence. The LPGA needs the personality, wit, beauty and talent of Grace Park. I hope she uses this surgery as a means to restart her promising career.



ILLUSTRATION BY KAGANI MCLEOD (PEPPER); DAVID WALBERG (KLAUK); ROBERT BECK (PARK); FRIEDRICH SAWGRASS

GOLF MAGAZINE TOP 100 TEACHERS POLL



IS THE ISLAND-GREEN 17TH AT TPC SAWGRASS A GREAT HOLE OR A GIMMICK?

Great..... 78%
Gimmick 22%

“Neither. It’s a made-for-TV spectacle that creates interest because of the chance to see a train wreck” —Ed Ibarguen, Duke University

Dottie Pepper is a 17-year LPGA veteran and an on-course analyst for NBC and Golf Channel.