JOHN FEINSTEIN

TALES FROM Q SCHOOL

INSIDE GOLF'S FIFTH MAJOR

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Little, Brown and Company

Hachette Book Group

237 Park Avenue

New York, NY 10017

Visit our Web site at www.HachetteBookGroup.com.

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First eBook Edition: May 2007

ISBN: 978-0-316-00558-6

Contents

Copyright
Introduction
1: Dreams (and Nightmares) Come True
2: Forty Years Ago . . .
3: In the Beginning
4: Nine Hundred and Seventy-three Dreamers
5: Nineteen and Ties
6: On to November
7: Lake Jovita Blues
8: Moving Day
9: The Unkindest Cuts of All
10: What Is, Is
11: Endings
12: Six Days
13: “This Isn’t a Sprint”
14: Cold and Wind and . . . Cold
15: Beginning of the End
16: Go Low or Bust
17: Final Countdown
18: Hawaii, Here We Come
Epilogue: December 2006
Acknowledgments
About The Author

ALSO BY JOHN FEINSTEIN

Last Dance
Next Man Up
Let Me Tell You a Story
Caddy for Life
Open
The Punch
The Last Amateurs
The Majors
A March to Madness
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Winter Games (A Mystery)

This is dedicated to the memory of absent loved ones:
Tom Mickle
Hymie Perlo
Red Auerbach
Vivian Richman
Dad

INTRODUCTION

IN 1995, WHEN *A Good Walk Spoiled* was published, I was thrilled by how many readers seemed to get caught up in the lives the players about whom I had written.

What fascinated me was that most of the comments I received about the book weren't about the sections on Greg Norman, Ni Faldo, or even Nick Price, Paul Azinger, or Davis Love III—all stars who generously shared both time and thoughts with me duri my research.

The names that came up most often in conversation were Paul Goydos, Brian Henninger, and Jeff (not John) Cook. All were PG Tour rookies in 1993 when I began my research; all had to go back to Qualifying School at the end of that year. Goydos got his ca back that December and has remained on the tour ever since, winning the Bay Hill Invitational in 1996 before injuries and a divor clouded his career. He began 2007 with a stunning victory at the Sony Open in Hawaii, capping a remarkable comeback. Henning missed getting his card by one shot at the end of '93 but won the Deposit Guaranty Golf Classic in 1994. He has bounced from t PGA Tour to the Nationwide Tour and back the past few years and found himself back at Q School in the fall of 2005.

Jeff Cook's story may be the one that most clearly defines how cruel a world professional golf can be. He arrived at the 17th ho on the final day of the '93 Q School at PGA West sitting squarely on "the number"—the score that, even though there are n scoreboards at Q School, everyone somehow knows will be needed to qualify for the PGA Tour. After a twenty-minute wait on th tee, Cook hit a perfect six-iron to an island green that flew right over the flag and was probably no more than six inches from sucki back to the pin, which would have set up a possible birdie, an easy par. Instead, the ball just hung on the top shelf of the gree leaving a brutal downhill birdie putt that he rolled four feet past the cup. He missed coming back by about an inch, and that inch w the difference between getting his card back and not getting it back. He had one final chance at the difficult 18th hole, but his 20-fo birdie putt swerved just low of the hole, making it official: he had finished one shot outside the number.

He never played on the PGA Tour again.

After several more years on the Nike Tour, Cook realized his time had passed and made the hard decision to become a weeke golfer. He was hired by Mizuno as a club rep, which allows him to make a good living and spend three days a week at tour sites, s hanging out with old friends.

Whenever I see him, usually standing on the range at a tour event, we talk about the "old days" and laugh about things th happened during Jeff's one full year on the tour, frequently retelling the story about the day Jeff was paired with Tom Watson in th third round in Los Angeles and caught himself wondering what Watson would think of his putting stroke as he lined up a bird attempt on number one. Three putts later, he walked off the green with a bogey and noticed that Watson was standing with his ba turned to the green, practicing his putting stroke. It was then that Jeff realized there was only one putting stroke Watson had a interest in, and it wasn't Jeff's.

"You know, I feel like I'm very lucky," Jeff often says. "There are a lot of guys who are like me: pretty good players, but, for o reason or another, they aren't going to be able to get out here and be consistent money winners. They're going to play t Nationwide [formerly known as the Ben Hogan, the Nike, and the Buy.com Tour] and make some kind of living, or play the Hoote [Tour] or mini-tours until they run out of time and money. I think I knew when it was my time. I never got to the point where I hat doing it but kept on because there was nothing else I could do. That's why I'm lucky."

Cook, who grew up in Indiana and graduated from Indiana University, still dreams of someday being the golf coach at his alm mater. But for now, he enjoys his life, and he doesn't wake up every morning wondering if his golf dreams are nothing more th fantasies.

"If nothing else, I can say I did get there," he said. "I was a full-fledged PGA Tour player. I wish it had lasted longer, but wh doesn't? I think every athlete faces the question at some point about when it's time to quit. It's especially hard in golf because the *are* stories about guys who flail around for years and then find it. Look at Tom Lehman.

"But for every Tom Lehman, there are a thousand guys out there thinking they're Tom Lehman. The problem is, only one of the —if that—is going to be right."

IN THE BACK OF my mind, I always wanted to go back to Q School. In the years after *A Good Walk Spoiled*, Q School became sort of cult story among golf fans and the media. The Golf Channel began televising the finals in 1996, and PGA Tour Productio

put together an annual one-hour documentary that aired on NBC. David Gould wrote a book called *Q School Confidential* t
focused on the 1998 finals but was more about Q School history and lore than one particular year at Q School.

When I went to PGA West for the 1993 Q School finals, three other print reporters were there. In 2005, in addition to the Go
Channel, there were at least thirty writers on the premises of the Orange County National Golf Center and Lodge in Winter Garde
Florida. That isn't exactly a Masters turnout, but it does reflect a quantum leap in interest.

In spite of the growth in coverage and interest, most people who follow golf still think the six-round finals that are on televisi
are Q School. In fact, the case can be made that the finals are now the least pressurized aspect of Q School, because everyone in t
finals knows he will have some kind of job playing golf the next year. If he isn't one of the thirty players (and ties—those tied for t
last available spot) who make it to the PGA Tour, he will have, at the very least, some status on the triple-A Nationwide Tour. Whe
the Nationwide Tour began in 1990 (as the Ben Hogan Tour), the average weekly purse was $100,000. Now it is closer to $550,00
That is still less than 15 percent of what PGA Tour golfers play for each week, but enough for some players to make a living.

That doesn't mean there isn't heartbreak at the finals. Every year, there are players who come up a shot or two short, often for
bizarre or hard-to-envision reason. Almost anyone who has followed golf for more than fifteen minutes has seen Joe Daley's two-fo
putt on the 17th hole at PGA West (the same hole that brought Jeff Cook grief) in 2000 go right in the middle of the hole and the
somehow, pop back out, as if someone had pressed a spring underneath the cup.

"To me that's the quintessential Q School moment," said Casey Martin, the disabled player who successfully took the PGA To
to the Supreme Court so that he could use a golf cart in tournaments. "I still remember seeing that happen and thinking to myse
'There are two days left in this thing, but he's going to miss by one shot.' Sure enough, that's what happened. That's Q School rig
there."

Martin knows about Q School. He went through it eight times, made the finals four times, but was never successful making t
PGA Tour via the finals. His only year on tour, 2000, was the result of a 14th-place finish on the Nike Tour. In those days, the top 1
players on the Nike got PGA Tour cards. Nowadays, the top 20 players on that tour, currently sponsored by Nationwide Insuranc
make the PGA Tour.

The presence of the Nationwide 20 has cut the number of spots available at Q School. Once, 50 players and ties received to
cards. Now it is 30 and ties—this at a time when about 1,200 players sign up each year, even though the fee to play rose from $1
in 1965 to $4,500 in 2005, with a bump to $5,000 for those who would have to play first stage in 2006. The first year of Q Scho
49 players showed up, and 17 cards were issued. But that was a long time ago in golf history.

What makes Q School so fascinating is the breadth of stories. In 2005, the 1,205 players who signed up to play ranged from La
Mize, the 1987 Masters champion, to a guy whose *low* round at first stage was an 89. There was one woman in the field, Isabe
Beisiegel, who played for the second straight year and finished last at her first-stage site. And there were all sorts of names familiar
golf fans. When Paul Azinger decided not to play, Mize was the only major champion in the field, but there were past PGA To
winners, veterans trying to hang on, and, of course, youngsters attempting to make it to "the big tour" for the first time.

Casey Martin was one of those who played in 2005—for the last time. After watching his game go south for several years,
decided to make one final effort to get back to the tour. He worked hard throughout the summer before showing up to play his fi
stage in Rancho Murieta, California.

The chances of getting from first stage to second stage to the finals and the PGA Tour are pretty close to 100-to-1. Martin knew
that. He also knew that his game wasn't nearly what it once was. But, like a lot of players, he wanted one more shot. He failed
make it through first stage, missing by six shots. Unlike some players who never figure it out, he knew it was time to move on.

"Put it this way, it didn't come as a shock to me," Martin said. "I know for some guys, walking away is impossible—especially
you've ever had success. You just *know* you're on the verge of a breakthrough. Guys say, 'I'm hitting it great, but I can't make a
putts.' Well, last I looked, putting is part of the game. There's always a reason. At some point, you have to look in the mirror and sa
'The reason is that I'm not good enough.' That's not easy for anybody."

Never is that more apparent than at Q School. It is toughest to watch players who have been good enough at some point, becau
they can make the case that they aren't fooling themselves. They know they have the ability to play on the tour.

"It's the finding it again that's so tough," said Stephen Gangluff, who played on the PGA Tour in 2002 but bounced all the wa
back to playing first stage in 2005. "I feel as if I have these demons following me around sometimes. I know there's a good play
locked up somewhere inside me, but I've got to find a way to chase the demons and let that player out."

One of my more vivid memories from researching this book is of Gangluff sprawled in a chair outside the locker room at t
Tournament Players Club (TPC) Tampa Bay, having just shot 75 in the third round of first stage to knock himself out of contentio
He couldn't leave the course because the approach of Hurricane Wilma had forced the schedule to be moved up so that the fin
round would start an hour after the third round began. It was too hot to pound balls on the range, and what was the point anyway?
couldn't bring himself to walk into the dining room and sit with other players who were rehashing their rounds and preparing for t
last 18 holes. And he was too much of a professional to do the easy thing and withdraw from the tournament so he could get the h
out of there.

So he sat in that chair, staring into space, hoping, no doubt, that he would wake up at home in bed and find that it had all been
bad dream. Instead, with no chance at all to qualify, he got out of the chair and ground out a 67 in the last round—an effort that s
left him six shots and twenty-one players outside the number.

You have to hope that there are happier days ahead for someone like Gangluff—and for many other players I encountered alo
the way. Q School is filled with sad stories, because, let's face it, most of the players who enter aren't going to make it to the PG
Tour when they hand out the cards in December. In fact, most of the players who enter Q School will never make it to the tour. On

about one-third of them will ever make it to the finals, and about half will never make it out of first stage.

Think about that for a moment. There are no bad players at the second stage of Q School. You might be able to fake your w into first stage—although the tour has cracked down on frauds in recent years—but you can't fake your way through first stage a into second.

Most of those who sign up for first stage are superb players. There are more than 30 million golfers in the United States. Perha 2,000 can legitimately think about trying to make a living playing the game. Maybe 500 of those players are good enough to pl somewhere—PGA Tour, Nationwide Tour, NGA/Hooters Tour, or the mini-tours—and pay their bills. Half of that number are goo enough to play regularly on the PGA Tour or the Nationwide on a steady basis, and, of course, only a handful end up becomi millionaires and owning their own airplanes.

And in case you haven't been paying close attention, there's only *one* Tiger Woods.

Even among that tiny gaggle good enough to make it to the PGA Tour, there is absolutely no guarantee of continued succes Each year, most of the players who make it through Q School to the tour find themselves back at Q School the following year. At t end of 2005, eleven of the thirty-five players who had earned their cards at the 2004 Q School finished in the top 125 on the mon list to retain full privileges for 2006. Three—Sean O'Hair, Lucas Glover, and Jason Bohn—won tournaments, guarantee themselves exemptions through 2007.

It isn't the least bit uncommon for ex–tour players like Martin and Gangluff to find themselves back at first stage and failing make it through. Mike Grob, another ex–tour player, did make it through the same first stage that Gangluff failed in Tampa, but did so carrying his own bag because he didn't want to pay for a caddy for the week. And second stage? The six sites where seco stage events are held each year may be the six most tension-filled golf venues in the world. The number of quality players forced play second stage is staggering. The players in the 2005 second stage included multiple PGA Tour winners. Larry Mize, Bill Glasso Steve Stricker, Dan Forsman, Brian Henninger, and Blaine McCallister, as well as more than a dozen others who had won at least o PGA Tour event.

Success in professional golf is more fleeting than in just about any other sport. When a successful pitcher like Steve Bl suddenly can't throw strikes anymore and sees his career flame out, it is such a big story that thirty years later, any pitcher with sudden case of wildness is referred to as having "Blass disease," and everyone in baseball knows exactly what that means.

In golf, very good players get some form of "Blass disease" all the time. Some get the yips with their putter, others with th driver. Still others simply can't score anymore. Most of the time, there's no explanation for what makes golfers fall to earth. They *think* there's an explanation—a swing change, an equipment change, an instructor change—but if it were that simple, they would straighten themselves out and be back on top in no time.

Some do find the answer. Steve Stricker, who has won three times on the tour and almost won the PGA Championship in 199 couldn't make it through the 2005 Q School finals. But he got a sponsor exemption into the Shell Houston Open in April 2006, sho final-round 65 to finish third, and began to play like the young star he had once been. He finished in a tie for sixth place at the U Open and had made more than $1 million halfway through the 2006 season. He would not have to go back to Q School at the end 2006. "I hope I never have to go again," he said.

Q School is not a place anyone wants to go back to, but most players will tell you they're glad they had the experience at le once. "Think about this," said Steve Pate, a six-time winner on the tour who has been back to Q School several times in recent yea "Have you ever encountered any player who told you he *didn't* have a Q School story?"

The answer to that is no, unless you count Tiger Woods, Phil Mickelson, Justin Leonard, and, more recently, Ryan Moore, current players who were so good coming out of college that they managed to avoid Q School. A number of top foreign players al have been able to steer around it.

But just about everyone else who has joined the tour since 1965 has been there, and they all have stories to tell—some funn some sad, many both. There were 1,205 entrants in the 2005 Q School, and every one of them had a story to tell. Time and spa have limited me to a relative handful of those stories, but watching all three stages and hearing stories about Q Schools present a past was a remarkable experience.

There has been some talk among golf people that Q School's time has passed, that with the growing importance of the Nationwi Tour, it should be the sole proving ground for the PGA Tour. After all, they argue, a full year of golf played on a competitive tou proves more about a player than one, two, or three weeks of Q School in the late fall.

That may be true. But Q School should continue to be part of the PGA Tour. As heartbreaking as it can be, it also produces th most unlikely and uplifting stories one is likely to encounter anywhere in golf. Ask anyone who has watched the last round of major championship up close and the last round of Q School up close which one has more human drama, and the answer will alwa be the same: Q School. And if you, like me, happened to be fortunate enough to be standing next to Jay Haas on the final day of t 2005 Q School while he watched his son Bill line up a four-foot birdie putt that would either put him on the PGA Tour or leave hi one shot away, you wouldn't even have to think twice about your answer.

Watching Jay Haas watch Bill Haas is the kind of moment you can only see at Q School.

The Fifth Major.

1
Dreams (and Nightmares) Come True

THE DREAM IS ALWAYS THE SAME. It starts with Tommy Tolles standing on the ninth tee of the Panther Lake course at Oran County National Golf Center and Lodge on a windy Monday afternoon in December. He has a three-wood in his hands and wondering: “Is eleven the number? Could it slide to ten? Maybe it will go to 12. Do I really need a three-wood? The hole is playi downwind, and the fairways are baked from the wind and lack of rain. A par might very well be all I need.” For a moment, he wish that instead of his pal Jamie Rowland, he had a tour caddy on his bag. Nothing against Rowland, who had walked 18 grueling ho every day for six days just to try to help Tolles, but this is one of those times when talking to someone who has been through this s of golf-trauma would be helpful.

Tolles finally gets over the ball, three-wood in his hands. He takes the club back, and he can hear from the sound as he follo through that he has caught the ball flush, that, in golf lingo, he’s hit it right on the screws. The ball screams straight down the midd of the fairway, several yards to the right of where Tolles was aiming. The left rough, he knew, was safe; he could get the ball on t green from there. But there was water on the right.

The ball drifts a little bit right, and Tolles feels his heart pounding. It hits the ground and bounces—hard—to the right. It bouncing in the direction of the water, and because the fairway is so burned-out, there’s nothing to slow it down. It gets closer a closer. By now Tolles knows what is going to happen. It disappears into the lake. “No!” Tolles wants to scream. It can’t be in t water. Only it is, and he knows, at that moment, that all his work to get back onto the PGA Tour has been for naught.

He wakes up, drenched in sweat. Even sleeping on top of the covers, he’s covered in sweat.

That isn’t the worst part, though. The worst part is knowing he is going to have the dream again.

And again.

IT IS LIKE THAT every single year at what is now officially called the PGA Tour Qualifying Tournament, although to everyo connected with golf, it is known simply as “Q School.” Once upon a time, there was a “school” aspect to the event, with play forced to sit in classrooms to learn rules, etiquette, and teaching techniques, since, once upon a time, all golf pros were expected to teachers as well as players.

Every year at Q School, there are stories of heartbreak. At the 2005 Q School finals, Tolles was one of those stories. A accomplished player who has finished as high as 16th on the PGA Tour money list, Tolles was trying to fight his way back onto t tour after years of swing changes and frustration had landed him in golf’s minor leagues. He had struggled for almost five and a h rounds, staying on the fringes of contention more because of smarts and experience than because of the way he was hitting the ball

“I had pretty much given up hope to get back to the tour midway through the last day,” he said later. “I was just trying to ma sure I had full Nationwide [the tour’s highest minor league] status. Then I birdied 18 [he had started his round on the 10th tee] and a four-iron to four feet on number one. Suddenly, it clicked in. Two hours later, I’m on the ninth tee, and I’ve birdied six of ni holes and I’m right there with that three-wood in my hands.”

Which is where the dream of returning to the tour ended and the recurring nightmare began. After his ball found the water, double-bogeyed the hole. His wife in tears, Tolles was finished except for the dream that would not go away.

For Grant Waite, another accomplished veteran, there was no need to rally late, no reason to believe that the week would end as anything other than a ticket back to the place where he had happily made his living for most of a dozen years. He had stead played his way into a comfortable position, well inside the number that would put him back on the PGA Tour. With nine holes play, he was 16 under par for the event, which, he figured, put him in about 10th place. Among the 165 players who had made it the Q School finals, the top 30 (and ties) would make it to the 2006 tour. There are no scoreboards on the golf course at Q Scho but the players always have a sense of what the number needed to make the top 30 is going to be. With the wind blowing stead and the golf course playing hard, Waite and everyone else knew that the number that day would be around 10 or 11 under par.

Sixteen under, after a very solid 32 on the front nine, certainly felt comfortable. But then Waite somehow four-putted the 10 hole for a double bogey, and he suddenly felt a little shaky. Another bogey and then another, and now he had no control over h golf swing or his emotions. It took him 42 shots to maneuver his way around the back nine, and when he finally holed out on 18, hands were shaking and his face was chalk white. He wasn’t so much angry as stunned. His wife, Lea, who had walked every h with him for six days, was in a state of shock, too.

“People simply don’t understand what this is like unless they’ve gone through it,” she had said earlier in the week. “There’s tension in sports quite like this tension.”

Her husband agreed. “You aren’t asked to do anything at Q School as a golfer that you aren’t capable of doing,” he said. “B you have to do it *this week*. Not next week, not last week, *this* week. There’s no appeal, no way to get a second chance. And there very little margin for error. Too many guys playing for too few spots. You can’t count on playing well for six straight days, but y have to make sure your bad days aren’t really bad. One over, two over, you can survive. You just can’t throw in a six-over or seve under day.”

Waite had followed the script perfectly the first five days, hanging close to par the first two days when he was fighting his swi then playing the next three rounds at 13 under par with one round to play. “The key now,” he said late on the penultimate aftern

"is to not think about any number, just go out and play well tomorrow."

Easily said. Not so easily executed. What is more difficult in life than not thinking? Especially when you tell yourself not to thin

For nine holes on that final day, Waite didn't think. But the instant he double-bogeyed the 10th hole, he started thinking. T result was that he came up one shot short—or, more accurately, one shot long—of where he needed to be. Thirty-two players finish 108 holes of golf in 422 or fewer shots. Waite was one of ten players, including Dan Forsman, a five-time winner on the PGA Tou who needed 423 shots. In many cases, that 423rd shot was less than a foot long, a tap-in that the player knew would doom him to tour where the total prize money each week is far less than the weekly winner's share on the PGA Tour. When the 2006 PGA Tou opened in January, the purse for the first full-field event of the year was $5.1 million, with the winner getting $918,000. When t Nationwide Tour began play in Panama in February, the purse was $550,000, with the winner receiving $99,000. The leading mon winner on the Nationwide Tour in 2005 was Troy Matteson, who made $495,009. There were 151 players who earned more than th on the PGA Tour—including 79 who made more than $1 million in prize money for the year.

The PGA Tour is a dream world of big-money contracts for equipment and endorsements; courtesy cars and courtesy phone people standing by to grant your every wish, whether it is a shopping spree for your wife or luxury box seats to a ball game. T Nationwide Tour is real life: searching for cheap airfares or driving from event to event; looking for the best rate the Fairfield Inn Hampton Inn or Holiday Inn can give you. It is playing in front of hundreds instead of thousands. It is being shocked by how much costs to refuel your car versus how much it costs to refuel your plane.

It is 423 shots instead of 422.

"It hurts, it really hurts," Dan Forsman said. "I think it hurts more when you've known what life is like on the PGA Tour. To sa we don't get spoiled would be silly. We do get spoiled—big-time. Then you put everything you have into getting yourself back ther heart and soul for six days, and you come up an inch or two short. It's tough to take."

Like Tolles, Forsman had rallied late on the final day, making three birdies on the final nine of the week to get to 10 under pa "When you've done this for as long as I have, you have a feel for what the number is going to be," he said. "You don't need scoreboard. You can tell by the weather conditions, by the condition of the golf course. Your gut just tells you. Some guys think the know the number. In my gut, I *knew* the number was going to be 11—just *knew* it. I came to the last hole needing a birdie to get 11. I was between nine and pitching wedge for my second shot and finally hit the wedge. It came up about 20 feet short. I kne exactly what was at stake. The putt just didn't break as much as I thought. It stayed a few inches outside the hole. That was ho much I missed getting my job back by—three, four inches. I'm not sure I can remember feeling quite as crushed as I did at th moment."

Months later, Forsman's voice was soft and sad as he remembered that day. "In March I got to play at Bay Hill [a PGA Tour eve in Orlando]. One day, I'm not sure why, I drove out to Orange County and just kind of walked around. I can't even tell you why did it. Maybe I was looking for some kind of closure with what had happened in December. I just remember feeling a kind melancholy walking around out there again, remembering shots—good and bad—from that week. I had a chance once to win t Masters on Sunday, and hit it in the water at 12 and finished seventh. That hurt. But this was different. I'm forty-seven years old can hear that clock ticking. I know time is going to run out on me—soon. I just want the chance to play against the best players on week-to-week basis again before that clock runs out."

Everyone hears the clock—the old, the middle-aged, the young. When you miss at Q School, people pat you on the back, s "Good playing; you'll get 'em next year," and you don't want to hear it. Next year is never guaranteed in golf, except for an el handful who have won major titles and climbed so far up the ladder they seemingly can't fall down. Tiger Woods, Phil Mickelso Vijay Singh, Ernie Els, Fred Couples, and Jim Furyk are at that level. There may be a few others: Retief Goosen, Davis Love III, Jo María Olazábal, and David Toms are probably safe for the rest of their careers.

That's a short list. In 2004 and 2005, Larry Mize—whose 140-foot chip-in to beat Greg Norman in a play-off at the 1987 Maste is one of the most replayed and remembered shots in golf history—found himself back at Q School trying to regain fully exem status on the tour. In 2006 two-time U.S. Open champion Lee Janzen kept his exempt status only by invoking a one-time excepti granted to those in the top 50 on the all-time tour money list. By the end of 2006 he, like Mize, was back at Q School. Paul Azing the 1993 PGA champion and a Ryder Cup hero on numerous occasions, entered Q School in 2005, then decided part-time status o the tour was enough for him when combined with his work for ABC. Azinger would have preferred totally exempt status but decid in the end it wasn't worth the torture of Q School.

"You do wonder if you aren't pushing the envelope a little bit when you are paired with guys who call you 'Mr. Mize,'" Lar Mize said, laughing, as he hit balls on the range one afternoon. "One day after we got through playing, one of the kids in my gro said to me, 'Mr. Mize, I just have to ask you about the shot at Augusta.' Actually, I kind of enjoy that. I never mind replaying that fo people, because it was such a great moment for me. But then I realized later that the kid who asked me about it, who is now a pe I'm trying to compete with, was four years old when that shot happened. Now *that's* a little bit freaky."

Mize is forty-eight. Like Forsman and Waite (who is forty-two), he has some access to the PGA Tour as a "past champion" – someone who has won at least once on the tour during his career. It wasn't that long ago that a player in that category might get in twenty tournaments a year, but changes in the rules, designed to give younger players more opportunity to play, have made tougher. For Mize, as a major champion, there might be fifteen chances a year to play. Forsman and Waite aren't likely to get th many opportunities. Waite, who first lost his full-time playing privileges in 2002 after ten years on the tour—including a victory 1993 and a dramatic one-shot loss to Tiger Woods in Canada in 2001—spent a couple of years in the netherworld of "wanderers." I tried to get into PGA Tour events wherever and whenever he could, and when he couldn't, he played on the Nationwide Tour.

"At some point, you have to accept the fact that, like it or not, your golf game at this moment is only worthy of the Nationwid

he said. “That’s tough to take when you’ve been on the PGA Tour for a while, but once you accept it, you have a better chance
find your game on the Nationwide.” Waite had done that in 2005, playing in twenty Nationwide tournaments and only six PGA To
events. Even so, it hadn’t been easy for him. He had made only nine cuts and finished 96th on the money list. “It’s a different wor
on that tour in so many ways,” he said. “You’re playing against young guys, who can hit it 50 yards past you and are focused on o
thing: making the top 20 on the money list for the year so they can get onto the PGA Tour the next year without going to Q Scho
You see the kids on the Nationwide, and you realize that they’re *you* fifteen or twenty years ago—fearless, excited to be there, a
playing without any doubts at all.” He smiled. “I would love to feel that way again, but I know I’m not going to.”

Waite wasn’t talking specifically about Peter Tomasulo when he described the young guns on the Nationwide Tour, but he mig
have been. Tomasulo was twenty-four and had been a professional for a little more than a year. He had gone from a barely recruite
barely scholarshipped (books only) freshman at the University of California to an all-American as a senior. He had started 20
without status on any golf tour and had ended it in 35th place on the Nationwide Tour money list after winning the Alberta Class
which gave him full status on the Nationwide. Tomasulo had come to Q School without any fears or any doubts. He knew that it w
going to be just another step on his journey to the PGA Tour.

“My year had just been on an up escalator from the start,” he said. “I’d gone from trying to make it onto the Canadian Tour
playing well on that tour to making it to the Nationwide Tour to finishing fourth in the Nationwide Tour Championship to get the 3
spot on the money list.” That finish was crucial to Tomasulo because it meant he didn’t have to go to the second stage of Q Scho
Each year, there are three stages of Q School. A small cadre of players—those who finish between 126th and 150th on the PGA To
money list and those who finish between 21st and 35th on the Nationwide Tour money list—are exempt from the first two stages.
somewhat larger group—past PGA Tour winners, anyone on the PGA Tour during that year, and those who finish between 36th a
70th on the Nationwide list—are exempt from first stage. Everyone else goes to one of fourteen first-stage sites around the country.
2005 there were 1,205 Q School entries. Those who started at first stage had to ante up $4,500 to play. Once upon a time, the fee w
$200, but inflation and the tour’s desire to scare off those who might want to enter just to say they played in Q School have sent t
price soaring in recent years. If the fee is a deterrent, no one has noticed a drop-off in entries because of it.

Tomasulo was exempt until the third and final stage. Like Waite, he appeared to be in perfect position going into the final day. H
was at 11 under par, right on the number, when he began his round. He was at 12 under par with nine holes to play on that l
afternoon, and he didn’t have a shred of doubt about what was going to happen at the end of the day. But he got an awful break
the 10th hole, when his second shot to the par-five, a perfect layup, somehow landed squarely on top of a loose divot and stay
right there. “All the years I’ve played golf, that’s never happened to me,” he said later. “I had no idea how to play the shot. I end
up chunking it into the rough in front of the green, and the next thing I know, I’ve made a bogey instead of the birdie I was sur
was going to make. That was the first time I got a little nervous. In fact, it was the first time that the thought ‘I wonder what t
number will be?’ crossed my mind. Until then, I wasn’t even thinking about the number; I was just trying to make as many birdies
I could so I’d finish as high up on the final list as possible. Once that thought came into my head, I couldn’t get it out no matter h
hard I tried not to think about it.”

Tomasulo bogeyed the next two holes but managed to right himself long enough to squeeze out a couple of tough pars and th
birdie the 16th hole. He was at 10 under, convinced like everyone else that was probably one off the number. “But I had 18 left,”
said. “A downwind, downhill par-five that I could easily reach in two. I knew I just had to get off the 17th with a par and then
after birdie on the 18th.”

Maybe it was the twenty-minute wait on the tee—there is nothing in the world slower than the last round at Q School—or mayb
was the gusty wind or the difficult pin placement on the small back shelf of the water-protected green. Or maybe it was just nerv
Tomasulo selected an eight-iron, not wanting to come up short. Then he watched in horror as the ball drifted left of where he h
aimed, took one big hop, and spun into a back bunker. “When I saw it go in there, my knees just about buckled,” he said. “I’d se
other guys play out of there during the week, and I knew how tough a shot it was. But I had to try and get it close.”

Trying to hit a perfect second shot to give himself a chance to save par, Tomasulo instead squirted the ball out of the bunker, a
it ran straight across the green, almost rolling into the water. From there he made a double-bogey five and walked off the gre
knowing he wasn’t going to be on the PGA Tour in 2006. “As I was watching my second shot run across the green, the thought w
through my head, ‘Oh, my God, you aren’t making it. *Oh, my God, you aren’t making it!* ’” Tomasulo said. “It was a hollow feeli
that went right to my knees. I just couldn’t believe it.”

The toughest part may have been having to play the 18th hole knowing that he had no chance—unless he could somehow h
out from the fairway for a miraculous double-eagle two. The two men he was playing with, Brett Wetterich and B. J. Staten, h
managed to hang on to finish at 11 under, meaning they would be going to the PGA Tour, while Tomasulo went back to th
Nationwide. “The worst part of the whole day was probably shaking hands with them on the 18th green and telling the
congratulations,” Tomasulo said. “Not because they weren’t good guys, but because they had done what I couldn’t do, and it hurt—
just really hurt.”

He smiled. “I have no memory at all of what I said. I just hope I wasn’t rude.”

Tomasulo wasn’t rude. Staten remembers him saying congratulations, but he also remembers the look on his face. “It may ha
been the happiest moment of my life,” he said. “But shaking hands with Peter, I felt awful. I knew just how close I’d come to bei
exactly where he was.”

Even if Tomasulo had been rude, chances are good neither Staten nor Wetterich would have noticed or cared at that mome
Tomasulo was in shock; they were in ecstasy. The three of them had spent more than five hours that day grinding toward the sa
goal. In the end, Wetterich and Staten had been able to lunge across the finish line. Tomasulo had come up a few steps short.

Because Staten had never made it to the tour before and was one of ten players who had survived all three stages to get his to card, he was surrounded by both well-wishers and media after he signed his scorecard. Tomasulo stood a few yards away with l caddy. He appeared to be staring at Staten, as if torturing himself by watching the celebration. “It wasn’t anything like that at all,” said. “I know I stood there for a while, because I didn’t have the energy to walk back to the clubhouse. It was as if all the life h drained out of my body. But I don’t remember anything about it. I don’t even remember seeing B. J. or anyone around him. I didn see anything. I didn’t hear anything.”

Staten’s memory of those few moments isn’t much better than Tomasulo’s. “I know I was happy, and I remember a lot of peop being there,” he said. “But if you ask me any details—who said what to me, what I said to anyone—I don’t remember much at a It’s all very hazy.”

That’s what Q School does to people. It leaves them dazed— with joy; with utter dejection. A small cadre are invited to a PG Tour–sponsored party that night to welcome them to the tour. The rest go back to hotel rooms to pack their bags and wait till ne year. If, by some chance, one of the nonqualifiers were to wander into the party for the qualifiers—perhaps to congratulate a friend a tour official would very politely but firmly ask him to leave.

When Q School is over, you are either invited to the party or not. There is no in between.

THE ARGUMENT CAN BE MADE that there are more legendary tales attached to the PGA Tour's Qualifying School than to ar other event in golf. This may explain why players refer to it as the fifth major.

The Q School's history isn't very long, dating back only to 1965. That was 105 years after the first British Open—or, as it known in Europe, the Open Championship—was played and 70 years after the first U.S. Open was held. The PGA Championsh was first played in 1916, and the Masters, the baby among the four majors, began in 1934. Each of them has had more than its sha of memorable moments, and most of those moments have been chronicled in print, on film or tape, or orally. Golf fans have heard much about Gene Sarazen's double eagle at the 15th hole in the 1935 Masters that most of them are probably convinced th witnessed it. Is there anyone who has ever touched a golf club—*looked* at a golf club—who hasn't seen the video of Tom Watsor chip-in at Pebble Beach in 1982, Larry Mize's miracle at Augusta in 1987, Tiger Woods's chip-in on the 16th green at the Masters 2005, or Jack Nicklaus's march up the 18th fairway at St. Andrews during his last British Open, also in 2005?

That's just a small sampling, of course.

"The difference between moments like that and Q School is that when golfers get together—pros, I mean—they tell Q Scho stories," said Steve Pate, a six-time PGA Tour winner and recent Q School returnee. "You don't sit around and talk about Watson Mize; you sit around and talk about Joe Daley's putt popping up out of the cup at PGA West or Cliff Kresge stepping backward line up a putt and falling into the water. Or you tell your own stories, because everyone—I mean everyone—has them. If you're golfer, you have a Q School story, with very few exceptions."

Tiger Woods is one of those exceptions. He won in his fourth tournament as a pro and has been exempt ever since. Phil Mickels won a tournament while still in college, so he was already exempt when he turned pro in 1992 and never had to deal with Q Scho Justin Leonard and Ryan Moore each earned enough money playing on sponsor exemptions (in 1994 and 2004, respectively) af graduating from college to avoid having to go to Q School to earn playing privileges. A number of top foreign players earned playi privileges in the United States through their success overseas: Greg Norman, Nick Price, Nick Faldo, and Vijay Singh, to name a fe Everyone else who has joined the tour since 1965 has been through Q School. Most have been more than once. All describe it as difficult, if not torturous, experience. And yet all of them say that they're glad they did it—at least once.

"It's a rite of passage if you're a professional golfer," said Tom Watson, who finished fifth in the 1971 Q School and never looke back. "I'm not going to go so far as saying that I feel sorry for Tiger or Phil or Justin or anyone else who skips Q School complete But I will say that I think they missed something. My memories of that week are as vivid as anything I've ever done in golf, includi the majors that I've won. I remember every round, and I remember going back to the hotel every night, eating dinner by myself, a thinking about what I had to do the next day. I remember thinking I was in great shape the last day and then double-bogeying t 10th hole and having a panic attack for a moment, thinking, 'Oh, my God, am I going to blow this?' And I remember the incredib feeling of satisfaction when it was over, when I'd made it. It was thirty-five years ago, but all those feelings are still tangible now."

Very few people claim to enjoy Q School, although younger players approach it far more optimistically than older ones do. remember the first time I went to Q School, I was excited about it," said Dan Forsman, who first made it to the tour in 1982, the sar year he turned pro. "When I had to go back twenty-two years later, I was bummed—and a little bit scared. The quality of player w so much higher than when I was a kid, it was almost intimidating at first. I had to remind myself that I was still a pretty good player wasn't all that easy."

But regardless of how difficult it may be or how disappointing it can be just to have to be there, most are like Watson. They see School as part of the journey. For some it is a continuing part of the journey. In 2006 Michael Allen played in the finals for th thirteenth time in eighteen years and was successful for the ninth time in getting back to the tour. Allen, who is now forty-eight, h never won on the tour and has succeeded only twice in keeping his playing status for consecutive years without a return to Q Scho "I just put it on my calendar as if it's another tournament," he said, laughing. "I try to look at it as a golfing vacation."

Some of the best Q School stories appear to be apocryphal. Almost everyone tells the one about the guy who walked onto the fi tee on the first day, heard the starter call his name, and raced off the tee so he could get sick in the bushes nearby. No one can nar the player or the year, but everyone swears it happened. In 2000 Joe Daley did tap in a two-foot putt on the 17th hole at PGA We on the fourth day of the six-day competition. He then watched in horror as the ball somehow bounced back out of the cup. Natural he ended up missing his card by one shot. Cliff Kresge did step off an island green and into a lake while trying to line up a putt.

Peter Jacobsen, who won his first event on the tour in 1980 and his last in 2003, had to go to Q School only once, in the fall 1976. Like everyone else, he remembers the pressure and the nerves, and the feeling of relief when he wobbled home on a frig final day in Brownsville, Texas, to get his card on the number. He also remembers the guy who threatened to shoot him.

"I don't even know his name, because it turned out he was using an assumed name," Jacobsen said, beginning the story that always starts by saying, "I'm not making this up."

"The first two days I was paired with this guy who simply could not play dead. He was awful, clearly someone who should have been allowed to play but had somehow gotten in under the radar. This was before they had stage qualifying. It was just o stage, so there was no way for him to have been weeded out earlier. Well, I don't think the guy broke 90 the first day. If he did, was only because he cheated. I mean, really cheated—moving balls in the rough, things like that. When the day was over, I just h to say something to the rules guys, because I thought the guy was dangerous—to me, to everyone—plus he was cheating. I gue

they went and did a little homework, because the next morning they walk up to the guy and say, 'You're going to have to leave.' H asks why, and they say, 'Well, for one thing, we found out you played last year under a different name, and we sent you a lett saying you couldn't come back this year because you were noncompetitive. For another, your fellow competitors caught y cheating out there yesterday on more than one occasion. So we're disqualifying you.'

"I'm standing there watching all this. The guy looks at the officials, then looks at me and says, 'Okay, then, I believe I'm ju going to go out to my pickup and get my shotgun.' He wasn't smiling when he said it. I don't know if the officials called the polic but I spent the next couple of days looking over my shoulder a lot."

There are plenty of Q School stories about guys who couldn't play, which is one reason the rules for getting into even first sta are far stricter now than they once were. A player has to be a professional and has to show some evidence that he has playe competitive golf someplace in order for his application to be accepted. "A truly bad player can make life miserable for the guys he paired with," explained Steve Carman, the Q School's tournament director for the past seven years. "It really isn't fair to ask someo who has paid $4,500 to play for his life to play with someone who can't break 90. It doesn't happen nearly as often as it used to, b we still get one or two every year who slip through the cracks."

Most of the time, the horror stories are self-inflicted—the kind of stories that make players cringe rather than laugh. Many invol guys who simply couldn't make it to the clubhouse on the final day or had one awful moment—à la Tommy Tolles or Pet Tomasulo—on the last few holes. Some are funny because they have happy endings, such as the time in 1983 when Jeff Sluman caddy showed up on the first tee with the wrong golf bag, or the moment years later when Shaun Micheel thought he had made t tour by tying with nine others for 37th place. Micheel thought that the low forty players and ties made the tour. So when he heard t announcement, "All players at six under par please report to the 10th tee for the play-off," he panicked, thinking he had to play off get onto the tour. Micheel was the most relieved man on earth when he learned that the play-off was simply to determine in wh order the ten players would be ranked when they began playing on the tour in January. "I was so relieved, I birdied the first hole a got number 37," he remembered, laughing.

The story that everyone knows but almost no one wants to bring up involves Jaxon Brigman. In 1999, after five years on the Ni Tour (now the Nationwide Tour), it looked as if Brigman's time had finally come. On the last day of the finals, played that year Doral Golf and Country Club in Miami, Brigman played the round of his life, shooting 65, to make the tour right on the numb Elated, he walked into the scorer's tent, signed his scorecard, and left to join friends and family and let the celebration begin. He w standing near the scoreboard, with the widest smile of his life on his face, when Steve Carman approached. "Of all the things I' ever done in golf as a rules official, this had to be the toughest," Carman said.

"Jaxon," Carman said softly. "I need you to look at this card for me."

Carman still remembers the look on Brigman's face—even before he said another word. Brigman looked at the card and, instant later, was prone on the ground, crying. At all golf tournaments, a player's official scorecard is kept by another player in h group. Nowadays, there is also a walking scorer who keeps track of all scores in the group as a backup, and each player keeps h own score unofficially. That day, Brigman's card was kept by Jay Hobby, who had made certain to circle each birdie so that it wou be easier for Brigman to track how far under par he was: seven circles and no squares (for bogeys) would make it pretty clear that was seven under par. Most players make some kind of mark on the scorecard to make clear any score that isn't a par.

Hobby had circled all of Brigman's birdies, including the one he had made at the par-four 13th hole. The problem was, he h written down a 4 and circled it instead of recording a 3. Especially in the crucible of the last day of Q School, it isn't surprising th someone could make that kind of mistake. When Brigman had gone into the scorer's tent, he had simply counted the seven circl and written down 65 as his score—which was what he had shot, even though the hole-by-hole numbers added up to 66. Then he h signed his card without asking the walking scorer to go through her card and confirm his score. When the scorekeeper at t scoreboard went through the card, he noticed the discrepancy and took the card to Carman. When Carman added up the numbe Brigman had signed for, he felt sick to his stomach, but he knew he had no choice but to take the card to Brigman.

"The only sliver of good in the whole thing was that he initially thought he was completely disqualified—which would ha meant he didn't even have a spot on the Nationwide the next year," Carman said. "That would only have happened if he had sign for a score lower than his actual score. I told him that he wasn't disqualified but that his official score had to be the 66 that t numbers added up to on the scorecard."

That left him one shot above the cut line for the tour. It meant returning to the Nationwide Tour for a fifth year instead of being rookie on the PGA Tour. It also meant becoming the poster child for sad-but-true Q School tales.

A year later, forced to play second stage, Brigman was in a four-way tie for the final three spots. Today, all four players wou have advanced to the finals; there are no play-offs for a final qualifying position at first or second stage. Back then, however, th played off. Brigman made a bogey and was the one player among the four who didn't advance. "After seeing that, I decided it w time to get rid of the play-offs," Carman said. "If you shoot the number over four days, you should move on. We have the flexibil to handle a few extra players—whether it's at second stage or at finals. I just hated the idea that a player could go 72 holes and th be in a position where one poor swing—or, even worse, a lucky shot by someone else—made him wait another year for his ne chance."

Q School has changed a lot since 1965. At the first School, forty-nine players showed up in Palm Beach Gardens, Florida, to pl the PGA National Golf Club. They didn't even know how many spots they were playing for, because the event was brand-new. As turned out, seventeen players qualified for the 1966 tour. "Qualifying" had a very different meaning then than it does now. At th time, only the top 60 money winners at the end of each year were guaranteed spots in every tournament during the next twel months. Everyone else had to take part in Monday qualifiers, which filled out each week's tournament field. Players who had

qualify were known as “rabbits,” because they were constantly hopping from city to city hoping to get into the next week’s field. F the rabbits, making the cut on Friday was critical because everyone who made the cut was automatically in the next week’s fie without having to qualify.

That system, referred to now as “the non-exempt tour,” remained in place until 1982, when Commissioner Deane Beman, push by the rank and file players on tour, created the “all-exempt tour.” Now, the top 125 players on the money list are exempt for t following year, along with any tournament winners from the previous year who failed to make the top 125 and a number of playe who received medical exemptions because of injuries. The Nationwide Tour, which was created in 1990 as a developmental tou now sends its top 20 money winners to the PGA Tour the following year. Because the number of players who make the tour off t Nationwide list has grown (it was originally only five), the number of players who make the tour out of Q School—once as high fifty players and ties—has shrunk to the current thirty and ties. Ranking on both the Nationwide list and the Q School list is importa because players from both groups fall below the top 125 money winners, the tournament winners, and the medically exempt playe in the pecking order for spots in tournaments. Early in the year, when everyone wants to play and tournament fields are smaller, t bottom half of the Q Schoolers frequently have trouble getting to play.

By the time the all-exempt tour was born, Q School had gone through many incarnations. In the fall of 1968, there were two Schools—one run, like the first three, by the PGA of America, and the other put on by the Association of Professional Golfers (t category then used within the PGA to describe tour players). That was at the height of the battle between the PGA of America and t tour players for control of the tour. Eventually, the players were allowed to break off and form the PGA Tour. Until then, those wh wanted to play on the tour had to go through the same testing as teaching pros who were members of the PGA of America (all pr were PGA members). The late 1960s were not that far removed from the days when most tour players also worked as club pros. A late as 1955, Jack Fleck, a club pro by trade, won the U.S. Open, beating Ben Hogan in a play-off. For most of his career, Hogan w the pro at La Quinta Country Club in Palm Springs, California (although one suspects he didn’t do a lot of teaching or spend a lot time doing inventory).

The split between the PGA of America and the PGA Tour— to this day, people frequently refer incorrectly to the PGA Tour as th PGA—made perfect sense because the lifestyle of a pro on tour could not be more different than that of a pro working in a golf sho a touring pro’s life is consumed by trying to improve his golf game; a teaching pro’s life is consumed by trying to improve *othe* golf games. For many years, however, Q School contained a classroom element. In the early years, when it was still an eight-rou event, the classroom portion came smack in the middle of Q School. In the later years, it came after the golf had been played and w required only for those who qualified for tour cards.

From 1969 to 1971, there were two Q Schools a year, the thought being that players shouldn’t have to wait a full year to try qualify for the tour. There was more flexibility in terms of handing out cards in those days, because a card only gave a player rabl status—the ability to enter Monday qualifiers. The holy grail was making the top 60 on the money list, because it got you out of t Monday qualifiers. Those who didn’t make the top 60 had to earn at least $5,000 in prize money each year to avoid going back to School. That wasn’t an overwhelming amount of money, but it wasn’t as easy as it might sound. Purses were a fraction of what th are now, and making the cut didn’t guarantee a player a check. Seventy players and ties made the cut each week, then as now, b only between forty-five and sixty actually got paid. Some players perfected the dubious skill of making it through the Mond qualifier and through the cut, but then failed to cash a check. That meant they had played five rounds of golf (plus a practice roun had paid their expenses for the week, and yet hadn’t earned a nickel. Today’s players would find that totally unacceptable.

Tom Watson played well in his rookie year, 1972, when he was a rabbit, making $30,413 in thirty-two tournaments. That w good enough for 74th on the money list. (In 2005, just for comparison purposes, J. L. Lewis finished 74th on the money list a made $1,031,159.) It kept him safely away from Q School but meant he had to start 1973 still playing on Mondays. Watson was t son of a successful Kansas City insurance agent and had a degree in psychology from Stanford. “I remember telling my dad whe was a senior that I wanted to at least try the tour because I wanted to find out if I was good enough to play out there,” he said. “In t back of my mind, I was going to give it two or three years, and if I hadn’t established myself by then, I’d go back to Kansas City a probably go to work with my dad.”

To Watson, establishing himself meant getting out of Mondays. By the end of 1973, he had done that by finishing 35th on t money list. From there, he never looked back, going on to become the number one player in the world while winning eight majors.

Watson’s approach—make it or go home—was fairly typical in the 1960s and 1970s. That’s because there really wasn’t a viable fallback position. The PGA Tour did establish a satellite tour in the mid-’70s, and there were some semi-organized mini-tou where players could play, but there really was no way to make a living playing golf unless you were on the PGA Tour. Overse tours were just starting to pay decent purses, but the idea of going overseas to play golf rarely occurred to players. Most were li Watson: two or three years of the PGA Tour or bust. And if it was bust, go look for a job.

Now it’s entirely different. Although the money on the Nationwide Tour is a fraction of the money on the PGA Tour, it is both way to make a reasonable living (fifty-six players earned more than $100,000 in 2005) and a potential route to the PGA Tour. The are now tours all over the world that pay players well, and there are mini-tours all over the United States that pay well enough allow a player to hang on to the dream for a few more years. “You don’t get rich, that’s for sure,” said Garrett Frank, who has be playing mini-tours for close to a decade. “But you can make enough to live on and keep playing golf.”

In many ways, Frank is symbolic of how different golf is today than when Q School was launched. He grew up in Ohio, a go athlete who played all sports well. “In some ways, I was too good for my own good because I never worked all that hard,” he said. actually worked harder at basketball than golf, because golf came easily to me.”

Frank played for four years at the University of Akron, still not taking the sport all that seriously. His father had made a go

living selling hearing aids, and Frank got his master's degree in audiology. He worked for a year as an audiologist, then decided th
wasn't meant to be his life's work. “I just didn't think I wanted to spend forty or fifty years digging wax out of old people's ears,”
said. “I'm not putting it down, and I know it's important work. It just wasn't for me.”

Still a very good amateur player, he turned pro at the end of 1999 and gave himself five years to work at his game and make it
the PGA Tour. He moved to Florida, made some money by investing in real estate, and began playing mini-tours. He failed to make
through the first stage of Q School at the end of 2000, then made it successfully through first stage each of the next four years.
2003 he was paired the last day of second stage with Gary Nicklaus, with whom he had played on the mini-tours. One of those mi
tours was the Golden Bear Tour, named for Gary's father, Jack, and sponsored by his company.

“I'd never really played in front of a gallery before,” Frank said. “We had about a hundred people following us. It was differe
but it was a lot of fun.” Among the spectators were Jack Nicklaus and his wife, Barbara.

“That's the closest I've come to getting through,” Frank said. “I played well that day. I think I shot three under for the round, an
I had good looks at three putts coming in. If I'd been able to make them, I'd have gotten through. Burned the edge on all of them a
finished one over. The number was one under, so I missed by two. Somehow, Jack thought I'd finished one under and made it. H
came over and congratulated me and told me he really liked the way I played. I was thrilled he said that, but a little embarrassed I h
to tell him I hadn't made it. I could tell he felt badly about the mistake.”

Frank went back to the mini-tours. He was still playing there in 2006, even though his self-imposed five-year deadline had passe
He had gone home at the end of 2004 intending to work with his father. By New Year's, though, the itch was back. “I knew m
friends were down there in Florida playing,” he said. “The weather was awful. I wasn't doing what I wanted to do. I still wanted
play golf. I had made decent money in '04 [about $50,000, offset by $18,000 in entry fees], and I still thought I could get better.”

He made a little bit less money in '05 but still put up the $4,500 entry fee for the 2005 Q School, to give it one more go. “I
thirty-three,” he said, stretching in the locker room before starting his final round of first stage. “I know I can't keep trying forev
but it's hard to walk away.”

ONCE THE PGA OF AMERICA and the PGA Tour split, Q School continued to evolve. After three years of biannual qualifiers wi
twenty-five spots open in each, the tour decided to go back to an annual event with fifty spots. That lasted until 1976, when t
decision was made to go back to two qualifiers a year. In the spring of 1977, the qualifier at Pinehurst had 408 entrants. That w
when the regional qualifiers were begun, or what is now known as second stage. In 1982, when the all-exempt tour was created, t
tour went back to an annual qualifying event, which has been the case ever since. In 1986, with the number of entrants continuing
grow, first stage was established, making it a three-step process to get to the tour for those with no prior status.

The birth of the Ben Hogan (now Nationwide) Tour in 1990 changed the face of golf for those going up and down the ladder
the game. The new tour gave players who made it to the final stage but didn't get a PGA Tour card a place to play for the next yea
with prize money that began with purses of $100,000 a week and has now risen to an average of $550,000 a week. No one gets ri
on the Nationwide Tour, but players can make a living while keeping their dreams of playing on the PGA Tour alive. Fifty playe
and ties come out of Q School each year with fully exempt status on the Nationwide Tour. The remaining players—usually about ha
the field—have what is called conditional status, meaning they get into tournaments on a space-available basis. Most will get in
enough tournaments during the year to have a chance to make a mark.

What that means, quite simply, is that getting to the finals nowadays means you have some kind of job playing golf for the ne
twelve months. That's why, for most players, second stage has become as much of a crucible as the finals were prior to 1990. “It isn
as if you feel relaxed playing in the finals,” said David Sutherland, who has played on both the PGA Tour and the Nationwide To
during the past fifteen years. “But you do know there's a safety net there if you don't make it to the big tour. I think there are som
younger guys who, their first or second time in the finals, they aren't even thinking that much about making the PGA Tour. They ju
want to be sure they get a good number on the Nationwide Tour.” He smiled. “Some of those guys are probably the ones who pla
well because they don't feel the kind of pressure we older guys [Sutherland is forty] feel. Second stage is a completely different de
There, almost everybody is playing for a job. No one wants to go back to mini-tours, paying to play, just trying to keep your he
above water for another year so you can get another shot at Q School.”

Of course, Q School is no longer the only route to the tour now that the top 20 on the Nationwide money list go straight to t
PGA Tour. In fact, that is now considered the better way to get to the tour, because it is a reward for playing well for an entire year
opposed to playing well for one week. Every year, after the last round of the Nationwide Tour Championship, when the money list
finalized, there is a card presentation ceremony in which PGA Tour commissioner Tim Finchem presents the new “class” with the
PGA Tour cards for the next year. There is no such ceremony on the last day of Q School.

Q School does have the feel of a tournament now, especially the finals, which have been televised by the Golf Channel sin
1996. There is roping around the golf courses to give the players some distance from the handful of spectators who come out
watch, and the leaders each day are usually asked to do some postround interviews. There's prize money, although not enough
make it really matter.

“Put it this way, if you have a chance to play for that prize money or stay home that week and watch, you'd much rather st
home and watch,” said Brian Henninger, a two-time winner on the PGA Tour who has been forced to go back to Q School in rece
years and has played the Nationwide Tour for most of the past four years. “But there's no question the tour has tried to make you fe
more comfortable, at least when you make the finals. It does feel more like a real golf tournament than when I first started playing
the early '90s.”

A lot of that can be traced to Arvin Ginn, a veteran rules official who was put in charge of Q School in the late 1980s. Ginn didn think it was right that Q School was treated almost as a punishment for players. As if going back to Q School wasn't purgato enough, players also had to deal with second-rate golf courses in fourth-rate shape and no amenities at all. Ginn pressed the tour try harder to find good golf courses for all stages and to have the tour assign as many of its full-time rules officials to the events possible. In the past, prior to the finals, almost all the officials working Q School were local officials supplied by the PGA of Ameri and local PGAs. Ginn also came up with the idea of making the final week a qualifier for both the PGA Tour and the Nationwi Tour. He thought it would be cruel and unfair to require those who didn't make the PGA Tour to go through yet another qualifier f the Nationwide.

When Ginn retired as a full-time official in 1999, the Q School mantle was passed to Steve Carman, a computer whiz who h worked in a hospital setting up computer systems before being hired to do a similar job at the tour. He had decided he didn't want sit around an office programming computers and had gone through all the various tests required to become a rules official. He h worked with Ginn on Q School and had come to respect its importance for everyone involved. Since Q School finals are always he the week after Thanksgiving, Carman spends the holiday at the finals site making sure everything is in place for the players, many whom will show up on the weekend to begin playing practice rounds before the start of play the following Wednesday.

"You know how tough a week it's going to be for everyone," Carman said. "You know most guys are going to walk awa disappointed. I just want to be sure they don't have any hassles to deal with beyond what they have to go through by being in t event."

Carman and his staff do everything they can to have the golf courses in the best possible shape and to handle all the logistics f the players: there are plenty of range balls to go around, the pin placements are fair, and any question can be answered in an insta But there's only so much you can do.

Donnie Hammond still holds the record for the greatest margin of victory at the Q School finals: he won by 14 shots in 1982, t first year players were qualifying for spots on the all-exempt tour. Hammond won twice on the PGA Tour and became eligible for th Champions Tour in April 2007, when he turned fifty. He went back to Q School in 2005 because he wanted to have full status durin his last full year on the PGA Tour. "I want to pick and choose my spots," he said during a second stage held at Lake Jovita Golf an Country Club in Dade City, Florida. "I don't want to be waiting around finding out which eight or ten or twelve tournaments I mig get into. There are some events, like the Memorial and the Colonial, I'd like to go back to once more."

Still, the pressure on Hammond at second stage wasn't anywhere close to what it was on those who had no status, righ Hammond laughed. "There isn't a minute during Q School that you're awake that you don't feel uncomfortable," he said. "And y don't sleep very well either."

As Kelly Gibson, another tour veteran back at second stage, put it, "I've seen the pressures of Q School make a grown man cry.

Who have you seen cry at Q School? Gibson was asked.

Gibson smiled. "Me," he said. "And I'm not making it up."

Indeed, very few Q School stories are made up. There's really no need.

3

In the Beginning

TO MOST OF THE GOLFING PUBLIC, Q School is something that takes place each year in December over a six-day period either Florida or California. Some may know that there's a second stage that takes place in November, although very few peop understand that those second-stage events take place at six different sites around the country. Even fewer know that Q Scho actually begins in October with first-stage qualifiers at fourteen different sites over a period of three weeks. In fact, in 2005 Ste Carman decided to add a fourth stage—tentatively called the preliminary stage—that was meant to be a prequalifier for players w could not show evidence that they were qualified to play in the first stage.

According to the entry form, a player had to play in the preliminary stage if he hadn't taken part in Q School for the past thr years and couldn't provide evidence that he had played "successfully" in at least two tournaments—either sanctioned by the PGA America or a recognized mini-tour or state open—that were at least 36 holes long. If a player was an amateur, he had to show that had played reasonably well in two college events, two tournaments sanctioned by the U.S. Golf Association (USGA), or two sta regional, or metropolitan championships. The tournaments had to be stroke play, and being club champion or having won a membe guest somewhere didn't do the player any good.

A player also had to take part in the preliminary stage if he received a "noncompetitive" letter from any tour around the world any national federation. Such a letter is sent to any player who participates in Q School and plays, well, noncompetitively. "Genera speaking, if someone plays four rounds and doesn't come close to breaking 80, they're going to get a letter," Carman said. "They c certainly write back with an explanation of some kind, but in all likelihood they're going to have to show proof that their play was aberration before they can enter first stage again."

In 2005 the tour had about 400 players in its noncompetitive file. That, along with the growing number of entrants despite t higher entry fee, led Carman to create the preliminary stage. It was planned for two sites in September, and Carman expected betwe 100 and 150 players to participate. As it turned out, though, there were fewer than 50 entries, and the preliminary stage was put hold until 2006.

"We've tried a lot of things to make sure that we don't have guys who simply don't belong," Carman said. "Most of the guys first stage these days are good players, guys who have a legitimate chance, if they play well, to at least make second stage. But still run into the occasional player who has somehow faked his way in or, in some cases, might have been a reasonably good play once upon a time but just isn't good enough now. We figured by adding the preliminary stage, we might scare some guys off guess, based on the entries, we did—at least for one year."

In 2005 a total of 1,205 players entered the PGA Tour Qualifying Tournament. Forty-two of those players met at least one of t six criteria that allowed them to go straight to the finals.

1. Any player who had finished between 126th and 150th on the 2005 PGA Tour money list.
2. Any nonmembers who had earned enough money to finish at least 150th on the money list. (This category rarely came int play. When it did, it usually involved someone who had graduated from college in the spring, turned pro, and, playing on special exemptions, made as much money as the 150th player on the money list but not as much as the 125th player. If a player made as much as the 125th player on the list, he went straight to the PGA Tour. In 2005 Ryan Moore, the 2004 U.S Amateur champion, made it straight to the 2006 tour by earning $686,250 in twelve events after turning pro. That would have placed him 117th on the money list if he had been a tour member and put him $60,000 clear of Nick Price, who finished 125th on the list.)
3. Any player on a medical exemption whose earnings in 2004 (assuming he was healthy at the time) would have put him between 126th and 150th on the money list.
4. Any player who had finished between 22nd and 36th on the 2005 Nationwide Tour money list.
5. Any player who had finished in the top ten on the money list of a major foreign tour (e.g., the European, Australasia, or Japan tour).
6. Any player in the top 50 of the World Golf Ranking. (It is highly unlikely that any such player would need to go to Q School. The only time it might occur would be if someone who played strictly on an overseas tour decided he wanted to play full-time in the United States.)

Among those who were exempt into the finals were past tournament winners Notah Begay (who had won four times on tou Neal Lancaster, J. P. Hayes, David Peoples, Tom Scherrer, Ian Leggatt, Frank Lickliter, and Garrett Willis. Also on that list was Bo May, who had never won on the tour but was vividly remembered by most golf fans because of his final-day duel with Tiger Woo in the 2000 PGA Championship, which Woods finally won in a play-off. May had undergone major back surgery in 2004, and School would be his first tournament since the surgery. Other notable names who would go straight to the finals were Bill Haas (t twenty-three-year-old son of longtime tour star Jay Haas), who had finished 23rd on the Nationwide money list, and Joe Daley, w had not made it back to the PGA Tour since his two-footer had somehow bounced out of the hole in Palm Springs. Daley, who hadn turned pro until he was thirty-two (he'd worked as a credit manager in a bank until then), was forty-five and running out of time. had finished 24th on the Nationwide money list.

There were nine ways to get out of playing first stage.

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1. Any member of the PGA Tour in 2005.
2. Any player who had won a tournament on the Nationwide Tour since 2000.
3. The top ten finishers in the PGA Club Professional Championship who chose to enter Q School (down to a floor of 25th place). (Most didn't have time to leave their jobs to do so.)
4. Any player who had made a cut at one of the four major championships or the Players Championship. (The PGA Tour is clearly trying to put the Players in the same category as the four majors.)
5. Any player from a major foreign tour who had finished between 4th and 10th among those entered from his tour.
6. Any player who had made at least fifty cuts on the PGA Tour.
7. Any player who had finished 37th through 71st on the 2005 Nationwide money list.
8. Any player ranked 51st through 100th in the World Golf Ranking.
9. The top two players from any secondary foreign tours (e.g., Canadian, South Africa, or Asian)—which is different from Australasian, for those keeping score at home).

A total of 190 players were exempt into second stage. Some of those who were exempt to second stage but not to the finals we eye-popping. Larry Mize, who had won the 1987 Masters, would play second stage. So would past tour winners Steve Stricker (w had won the Match Play title in 2001 and had finished second to Vijay Singh in the 1998 PGA Championship), Bill Glasson (sev tour wins), Dan Forsman (five), Blaine McCallister, Mike Hulbert, Donnie Hammond, Guy Boros, Brian Henninger, Tom Byrur Matt Gogel, Jim McGovern, Rick Fehr, Mike Springer, and Grant Waite. There were others who'd had significant success on the to but were now back playing second stage, such as Tommy Tolles and Skip Kendall, who had finished second on four differe occasions and had been in the top 50 on the money list (with a high of 32nd) from 1999 to 2001.

In all, 232 players were exempt from first stage. They would also save a little money on the entry fee: those exempt to the fin paid $3,500; those exempt to second stage paid $4,000; and everyone else, 973 players in all, paid $4,500 and headed for first stag knowing that the chances that they would tee it up in golf nirvana, the 2006 PGA Tour, were slim. But they also knew that in 200 nine players had started at first stage and ended up on the tour. In addition, 19 players had made it from first stage to the finals a had played on the Nationwide Tour. Each of them was convinced that he was going to be among the handful of players who wou beat the odds.

Most of them would, of course, be wrong.

ONE OF THE FEW PLAYERS who wasn't thinking he was going to beat the odds was Casey Martin.

It hadn't been that long since Martin had been one of the best-known golfers in the world. At the 1998 U.S. Open, the only play in the field with a larger gallery was his onetime Stanford teammate Tiger Woods. Back then, everyone who followed golf—a many who didn't—knew who Martin was. He was the talented, bright, outgoing kid who had something called Klippel-Trenauna Weber syndrome, a degenerative disease in his right leg. He had been born with the disease, which caused him to walk with noticeable limp and made walking golf courses for a living close to impossible, especially as he got older and his leg got worse.

In 1997 Martin petitioned the PGA Tour to allow him to use a golf cart. The tour's rules were clear: everyone walked. The on exception had been during Q School, when players were allowed to ride because it was a six-day tournament and frequently the on caddy a player could afford was his wife or girlfriend. Some players didn't use a caddy at all. But that loophole had been closed 1996, and Martin was told that if he wanted to play in the Q School finals in 1997, he would have to walk.

That was the first time Martin took the tour to court, and he won. He got a court order saying that the tour had to let him use a c based on the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). He used a cart during the Q School finals in 1997, and although he miss qualifying for the PGA Tour (by two shots), he did play well enough to gain full status on the Nike Tour. Still using a cart, he won h first Nike Tour tournament early in 1998. That was when the attention—and the controversy—started to build.

The tour decided to take a hard line against allowing Martin to use a cart. Commissioner Tim Finchem and many top players to the position that walking was part of the game and allowing someone to ride could give him a competitive advantage (since ridi isn't as tiring as walking). Martin's position was twofold. Legally, he said, the ADA gave him the right to a cart the same way disabled person who bought a ticket to a golf tournament was allowed to use a cart while a healthy person could not. Logically, added, watch me walk from my cart onto the tees or the greens or into a bunker, and see if you think I'm not going to be tired at t end of a round.

Martin wasn't even on the PGA Tour when the controversy began making news. But after he qualified for the U.S. Open on searingly hot day in Cincinnati, riding 36 holes while everyone else in the field walked, he arrived in San Francisco for the Open the most talked about player in the tournament other than his old friend Tiger Woods. "I remember feeling incredible pressure bo that week and that year because I was under the microscope all the time," Martin said. "The interesting thing is, I probably played m best golf during that period. I seemed to thrive on the attention and on the pressure."

"Cart-gate" divided the locker room. Some players were adamant that no one should be allowed to play from a cart. Veterans wi their own physical problems, like Fred Couples and Scott Verplank, said that they would apply for carts, too, if Martin was grant one. Legends like Jack Nicklaus and Arnold Palmer said that the traditions of the game would be violated if players were allowed play in carts. Others saw it differently. The late Payne Stewart argued that there was a clear difference between something that caus

discomfort (such as Couples's sore back) and a degenerative disease that made one legally disabled. "We should give the kid t cart," Stewart said. "It makes us [the tour and the players] look bad to be fighting him on this. You take one look at him trying walk, and there's no doubt he's hurting."

What's more, those who met Martin almost immediately jumped on board (or on cart) with him. He is bright and has a disarmin self-deprecating sense of humor. The players who knew him best, notably Woods and Notah Begay, another Stanford teammat were adamantly in his corner. "If you had seen Casey try to walk 18 holes on a regular basis like we did at Stanford, you would fe differently," Woods told doubters. "Plus, he's a guy who would be great for golf."

No one doubted that. Martin's is the kind of story the tour would have latched onto and publicized if not for the cart issue. I grew up in Eugene, Oregon, and never thought he would be good enough or strong enough to play even college golf. But blossomed as a high school player and was recruited by all the national golf powers. He chose Stanford and was part of a nation championship team in 1995, when he was a senior. Although his leg hurt when he walked, he was able to handle it. But he knew t leg was getting worse. Doctors had told him there was a chance that, at some point in his life, he would face amputation.

Martin turned pro after graduating with a degree in economics and sailed through the first stage of Q School. But he miss making it through second stage by two shots and was devastated. "It meant I had no status at all for '96," he said. "I wasn't ev focused on making the PGA Tour that year. I just wanted to get to the finals and get on the Nike Tour. I thought I was good enoug to at least do that, and I didn't. It was definitely a setback."

He ended up playing most of his golf the next two years on the NGA/Hooters Tour, with some mini-tour events thrown in. T Hooters Tour (named for the restaurant chain famous for scantily clad waitresses and mediocre food) is at least a level down from t Nationwide (then Nike) Tour. For one thing, as on mini-tours, players have to pay fairly substantial entry fees each week. The purs are less than half of what they are on the Nike Tour, and the golf courses and locales are second-rate as well.

"It is not a fun way to live," Martin said. "After a while, you get sick of the towns and the hotels and the places you go to eat. I a lonely life, and it certainly isn't a lucrative life, even if you play well. By the summer of my second year out there, I was sick a tired of the whole thing, and my leg was getting worse. I quit midway through the summer to rest my leg. I figured I'd take one mo shot at Q School, and if I couldn't at least make the finals, I'd be done. I'd go get a job."

This time, he sailed through first stage and in second stage went into the last round at the Bayonet Course at Fort Ord, Califor (considered one of the toughest Q School courses) right on the cut line. "I knew I needed a good round to get through," Martin sa "I shot 69, one of the best rounds of my life under pressure. I was thrilled. After the round, I started talking to one of the tour offici about needing a cart to get through six rounds at the finals. The guy had just been telling me how happy he was for me, and when brought up the cart, his face just turned to stone. 'There's no way,' he told me. 'Don't even bother applying.' It really took m aback."

As it turned out, the official was right. Martin's request for a cart was immediately rejected, despite the facts that players had be allowed to use carts in the finals for many years and carts had been allowed during the first two stages that year.

"When the court ruled in my favor and gave me the cart for the finals, that's when my life changed," Martin said with a laug "You know, all kidding aside, the PGA Tour made me. If not for them making such a big deal out of the cart, no one would ev have heard of me. I probably wouldn't have gotten the endorsements I got, the attention I got, and I *certainly* never would have se the inside of the Supreme Court."

PGA Tour v. Martin ended up in the Supreme Court after one lower court ruled for Martin and another ruled for the tour. T Martin case became front-page news, one of those stories that the nonsports media latched onto. It had just about everything y could want in a story: a young athlete taking on what appeared to be a heartless bureaucracy; political implications; and supers athletes divided over a kid whom they never would have known anything about if not for his bad leg and his golf cart.

The cart controversy not only changed Martin's life; it also changed his outlook on life. "I grew up a dyed-in-the-wo conservative Republican," he said. "Heck, if it had been someone else in my shoes and I was just an observer, I'd have probab been one of those guys saying, 'He can't have a cart. If he can't walk, get him out of there.' But I wasn't. I was the guy living it. Th made me rethink a lot of things, like, just as an example, how I felt about welfare. I couldn't help but wonder if I was the one livi *that* life, I might feel differently on that subject, too. I found myself looking at things through a different lens.

"To tell the truth, the Republicans really disappointed me. I'll be completely honest and tell you I was appalled by the positio taken by Justice [Antonin] Scalia and Justice [Clarence] Thomas. I just think they're completely heartless. Bob Dole was t exception, but his experience was like mine—he'd been through it, knew what it felt like to be handicapped. I remember going Bill O'Reilly's show and walking away thinking, 'This guy is a complete schmuck.' It pains me to say it, but most of the people wh showed compassion for me, who seemed to want to help out someone who was downtrodden, were Democrats. I came away fro the experience with a lot of different feelings on a lot of different subjects."

The case was heard by the Supreme Court on January 17, 2001. Martin remembers most of that experience as being thrilling. "N that many people get to have a case tried in the Supreme Court with their name on it and [that] doesn't involve life or death," he sa "That was an amazing, once-in-a-lifetime experience to sit there. I came away with so much respect for the lawyers on both sides mean, arguing before the Supreme Court is the Super Bowl or the Masters for them. They're getting grilled from all directions, a they better be right when they answer a question. Eight of those nine judges were intimidating and impressive, regardless of whi side they came down on. Watching the whole thing just made my jaw drop."

The one justice who wasn't intimidating or impressive was Thomas. He never asked a question. In fact, throughout most of t arguments, he sat back in his chair with his eyes closed. "My lawyer had warned me about that before we went in," Martin said. " told me, 'Don't be shocked if you see Judge Thomas napping. He does that.' Even so, it was shocking to see."

Martin had finished 29th on the Nike Tour money list in 1998, fading down the stretch when he'd had a chance to make the t 15 and earn a trip to the PGA Tour in 1999. (In those days, the top 15 made the tour.) A year later, while his case was still winding i way through the courts, he put together a more consistent year and finished 14th on the Nike money list. His ticket to the PGA To was punched for 2000. He was twenty-seven years old, and now he had his chance. He didn't play horribly on the tour. He had so good rounds and some tournaments where he went into Sunday with a chance for a big check. But it never quite came together f him. He made fourteen cuts in twenty-nine events with only one top-25 finish (tied for 17th in Tucson). That left him 179th on t money list, sending him back to Q School and then to what had now become the Buy.com Tour.

On May 29, 2001, four days before Martin's twenty-ninth birthday, the Supreme Court ruled 7–2 in his favor, his friends Scal and Thomas dissenting. He no longer had to worry about losing his cart. In his dissent, Scalia accused the majority of looking at t ADA far too liberally, saying that the law was intended for "no such ridiculous thing" as Martin's case. By then, just about everyo in golf had accepted Martin and his cart as part of the scenery, and even players who had come out against him in the pa congratulated him on his victory. In the movies, he would have won the U.S. Open shortly thereafter. In real life, his golf game we south.

"I wish I could figure out why, but the fact is, my golf has sucked since the Court ruled for me," he said. "I've thought about i lot, and I honestly don't have any answers as to why. Has my leg gotten worse? Yes. There are times when I make a swing tha know is good and the teachers I'm working with say is good, and I feel pain. When I make a swing that's completely pain-free, isn't a good golf swing. So most of the time when I swing a club I feel pain—mental or physical. But I don't think that's why haven't played better. With me, [the problem] has always been my putter. When I was playing my best golf, my strength was m ball-striking. If I could make some putts, I played very well. The last couple of years, my ball-striking hasn't been as good as it w when I was younger, but it's still good enough—if I can make putts. I haven't made putts, and that has nothing to do with my leg."

He sighed. "Maybe I just couldn't live up to people's expectations. When I was uncertain about whether I was going to be able keep the cart, I was just thankful to be playing golf. I know I felt pressure, but it was different. When the Court ruled for me, it f like expectations just exploded. I remember people saying to me, 'Dude, you're going to tear it up now.' But I didn't. I kept grindin kept trying, but I couldn't play the way I wanted to—or the way people expected me to. It's disappointing."

Martin became a Q School regular after the ruling, but he never made it back to the PGA Tour. "I've thought about Q School lot," he said. "It's interesting how my attitude toward it changed through the years. At first it was exciting; it was an opportunity. A the years went by, I began to feel as if I was taking golf's version of the bar exam—except that [I] didn't just take it once; I took over and over." He laughed. "It's almost as if you're working in a law firm, and if you don't bill enough hours, they make you take the bar again. And if you don't pass, you spend the next year working in the law firm—as a janitor.

"It *is* like a final exam, because you can't rationalize or fool yourself or anyone else. If you aren't good enough, you can't sa 'But I'm getting better' or 'I'll do better next week or the week after.' You're either prepared and you come through or you don't.

"Before I played on the tour, it was like an adventure. But afterward, it was different. I felt like I had worked hard to get to t tour, very hard, and it became a part of my identity—one that I wanted. So when I ended up back at Q School, I felt like I w playing for my identity. Part of it was the perks and the money, but it was more than that; it was my identity. When I was young a first played Q School, I thought I felt pressure. But I didn't, certainly not compared to the pressure I felt when I had to go back. I' heard guys who have won on tour and had to go back talking about how tough that is, but at least they know they have *some* kind status if they don't make it, as past champions. Guys like me have nothing if we don't play well.

"It's tough sometimes to explain what has happened to your life to people who aren't golf knowledgeable. They tend to thi because they've seen you on TV that you're a big star, that you have it made forever. Of course, that isn't even close to being tru When you first come out of college, if you don't make it, you don't feel as if you've lost anything—because you've never had When you go back, though, there is a feeling of loss—something you once had is gone."

After the Court ruling, Martin never again finished in the top 100 on the Nationwide money list. He played less and less, par because he didn't have full status, but more because he knew his game wasn't there. He could have applied for sponsor exemptio and probably gotten them because, especially on the Nationwide, his name would still sell some tickets. But he thought it pointless take a spot in the field from someone else when he was likely to miss the cut.

In the summer of 2005, he made a decision: he would work hard at his golf game one more time to try to prepare for Q Scho He would have to go back to first stage, but that was okay. "I figured if I wasn't good enough to get out of first stage, there was message there," he said.

He had quietly been told by people at the University of Oregon that there would likely be a coaching change for the school's g team in the spring of 2006, and if he was interested, he would be a prime candidate for the job. That was nice to know, but he want to take one more crack at Q School. Most golfers don't quit the first time they think about it. They go back and forth. On the o hand, they know they aren't playing well enough to compete. On the other hand, playing golf is all they know, and they still love t game. And, the last few times out, if a few more putts had fallen . . .

Martin had already played the back-and-forth game. "My approach going in was PGA Tour or bust," he said.

He signed up to play first stage and spent a lot of time on the range looking to find his swing. When he got to his first-stage si he was struck by two things: "I felt kind of old being there at thirty-three," he said. "It was hard to believe it had been ten years sin I'd been one of those kids just out of college so excited and eager to tee it up. The other thing was the overall quality of play. Ev ten years ago, you would go to first stage, and probably half the field simply had no chance. You didn't really feel as if you had beat seventy or eighty guys; you had to beat maybe forty. Now you go to first stage, and there are a lot of good players."

Martin had chosen San Juan Oaks Golf Club in Hollister, California, for first stage. He wanted to play at San Juan Oaks in p

because it wasn't that far from Eugene, but also because he believed it was a golf course where the scores wouldn't be that low. player who is a good ball-striker but not that good a putter usually wants a golf course where hitting fairways and greens isn't th easy, because he doesn't want to find himself in a putting contest.

San Juan Oaks wasn't a pushover, but the scores were lower than Martin had anticipated. Two days in, having shot 72–71, knew he was going to have to come up with a low round to make it into the top 20 and ties who would advance to second stage. wasn't all that different than the kind of golf I'd been playing for a while," he said. "I was hitting the ball well but not scoring well sort of the story of my golf game the last five years."

Martin knew that, barring a radical change in weather conditions, the number was probably going to be somewhere in the vicin of five under par. Starting the third round at one under, he was certainly in the hunt, but he knew that another round around even p would put him in a hole going into the last round. Needing to make a move, he did—backwards. "I just couldn't make a putt all day he said, remembering the disastrous 75 he shot in the third round. "I think because I wasn't making putts, I tried to be too prec with my shotmaking, and I ended up hitting the ball worse. I found myself starting to think, 'I'm not going to spend my entire l being a struggling golfer.'"

He went to bed that night knowing he would have to go low—way low—to have any chance on the last day. The thought al occurred to him that he might be about to play the last meaningful round of his professional career. "I wasn't terribly emotional abo it," he said. "It wasn't as if it crossed my mind for the first time then; it had been there for a while. But I did want to go out and gi the round everything I had. I figured if I could shoot five or six under, maybe get to four under, I might have a shot."

Martin would have needed to shoot a seven-under-par 65 to get to the number, which turned out to be five under par. The last d was a lot like the many days before it: a lot of birdie chances, very few putts going in the hole. "With about four or five holes to pla I was even par for the day, and I realized it just wasn't going to happen," Martin said. "Even if I birdied in at that point, I knew wasn't going to be enough. The conditions were perfect. I knew people were going to score; they weren't going to be coming bac Those last few holes, I just kind of took everything in. I wasn't so much emotional as I was numb."

He signed for a 72—even par—which left him at two-over-par 290 for the week, tied for 46th place in the seventy-one-man fie That left him seven shots behind the four players who tied for 20th place. One of them was another ex–tour player, Joel Kribel. Ma Wurtz, another player who had once been on tour, didn't do much better than Martin, finishing in a tie for 33rd place. Martin knew was time to go home and stay home.

"At that point, it wasn't that tough a decision to make," he said. "The farther I get from it, the more I think about some of t heartbreak and how close I came to really making it. But I also think how lucky I was to do the things I did, to be involved in t things I was involved in. Part of me wakes up in the morning and thinks 'comeback.' Fortunately, there's a bigger part of me th knows better."

The coaching job at Oregon became a reality in May 2006—a big story in Eugene, a couple of paragraphs in most newspape around the country. Most of the stories began something like this: "Casey Martin, the handicapped golfer who took the PGA Tour the Supreme Court and won . . . "

Which is true. "I wish people would remember me for more than just that," Martin said. "I would rather be remembered as a U Open champion or something like that."

Perhaps. But there is no doubt golf people will remember Casey Martin not just as the guy who beat the tour inside the hallow halls of the Supreme Court, but as someone who dealt with adversity—*real* adversity, not the kind that comes because of a waywa tee shot—with dignity and grace.

THERE WERE TWELVE first-stage Q School sites in 2005 after Steve Carman decided to make the two preliminary-stage sites in first-stage sites. A total of 973 players were required to play first stage. Since the weather in October is still relatively mild almo anywhere south of the Mason-Dixon Line, the tour spreads the sites out across the South. The farthest north it ventured w Kannapolis, North Carolina. There were three sites in Florida, three in Texas, two in California, and one each in Georgia, Arizon and South Carolina. Most players chose their sites based on geographical convenience, although some were willing to travel a lo distance to play a specific course they knew, liked, or had had luck on before. Some wanted to stay west to play on Bermuda gra greens; others wanted to stay east to play on bent grass greens.

Some of the courses are almost always part of the Q School rota. In recent years, Carman has made an effort to find new sites an attempt to improve the quality of the courses. Also, the event has become old hat to the locals in some places that have hosted for a long time, making it tougher to find volunteers to help out during the week.

"It isn't that easy to go to a club and ask them to give up their golf course and a lot of their facilities for a week," Carman said. " all, we need nineteen sites [twelve for first stage, six for second stage, and one for finals], so it isn't as if we can pay them a ransom rental. They make money, but the more high-end the club, the less likely that kind of money is going to make the members eager have their course taken over—especially at a time of year when the weather is usually nice for playing. You go to new places whe it's a novelty and say 'PGA Tour' and you're more likely to get a positive response."

One place that has become a traditional first-stage site was the TPC Tampa Bay, which has the advantage of being owned an operated by the tour. It is also one of only eight courses within the twenty-nine-course TPC system that isn't fully priva Technically, it is a public course, although the club sells memberships for $1,600 annually to people, which allows them to pl unlimited golf and receive advantageous tee times. Still, TPC Tampa Bay is not a place where angry members are going to walk and wonder what the heck all these guys are doing inside their locker room.

To say that the TPC Tampa Bay is located off the beaten path is something of an understatement. It is a twenty-minute drive nor of Tampa, through numerous stoplights, to a turn that takes you another three miles down a two-lane road filled with nearly identic homes before the PGA Tour's logo comes into view. The clubhouse is unimposing—one story, with a small dining room and equal small locker rooms. It is anything but pretentious, although there are photos throughout the building of players like Arnold Palm Jack Nicklaus, Gary Player, and Hale Irwin. That's because the TPC Tampa Bay annually hosts a Champions Tour event, and tho men have taken part in the past. Nicklaus won the tournament in 1996; Irwin was the champion in 2005.

The TPC Tampa Bay is also home to a very good golf course. It has become a popular first-stage site for just that reason. "I very straightforward," said rules official Dillard Pruitt. "There are no tricks. It's all out in front of you, and it's fair. The players lik that, especially under this kind of pressure. They don't like surprises."

Pruitt knows how players feel about Q School golf courses because he played in six Q Schools during his professional care which lasted from 1984 to 1996 and included a victory in Chattanooga in 1991 and a tie for 13th in the Masters in 1992. He fi made it to the tour in 1988 after playing in Europe for a couple of years. "I played horribly that year," he said. "I missed at Q Scho at the end of the year and took a job as an assistant pro and played some mini-tours. I qualified for the [U.S.] Open in '89, got m confidence back, and made it through Q School again in '89. After that I played well enough that I never had to go back."

Pruitt retired in 1996 because, at thirty-five, he didn't think he was ever going to putt the ball well enough to be a consiste winner on tour. "I bounced around a couple years, because when you quit young, no one really believes you're retired," he sa "They think you're going to go back. I was lucky the rules guys gave me a chance." In 1998 he became a rules official, and ev though he now has enough seniority that he doesn't have to work Q School, he chose to work it in 2005 because he thought it w important. A lot of rules officials who are ex-players work Q School because they remember what it was like for them as players, an they want to make it as painless as possible for the current players. "There are a lot of guys playing here this week who have stor pretty similar to mine," Pruitt said, riding around in his cart on a muggy Tuesday morning. "I can relate to their struggle."

Most of the sixty-eight players arriving in Tampa for the week would be delighted to have their careers follow the same path Pruitt's. To reach the PGA Tour at all would be a major victory. Two players in the field had accomplished that goal: Mike Grob, a easygoing forty-one-year-old from Billings, Montana, and Stephen Gangluff, a not-so-easygoing thirty-one-year-old who lived Ponte Vedra Beach, Florida, headquarters of the PGA Tour. Even though he was an ex–tour player, he had no access to the TP Sawgrass, the tour's home club, not even to practice.

"I guess if they let every guy who ever played the tour practice there, they'd be overrun," Gangluff said. "I understand."

Gangluff has loved golf since he was little. As a boy, he played a municipal golf course in Marysville, Ohio, with his father, a assistant prison warden, and his friends. He played as much as he could and watched the tour on TV all the time. Being from Oh he had to be a Jack Nicklaus fan, but he also admired Payne Stewart. "I liked his style, the way he dressed, the way he acted, b most of all the way he played," Gangluff said. "I remember saying to myself, 'Someday, maybe I'll be good enough to wear pl fours on the golf course.'"

He was a good enough player to get a scholarship to Ohio State, but left after three years to try mini-tours, thinking that playi golf full-time would better prepare him to make a run at the PGA Tour. The problem was, when he thought he was ready, he hadn saved enough money to pay the entry fee, and he couldn't find any sponsors to step up and pay it for him. So he spent a ye

working as a cart boy at Wintergreen Resort in Virginia and saved enough money to play Q School at the end of 2001. Remarkabl
he made it through all three stages and found himself on tour in 2002—a long way from jockeying carts at Wintergreen a year earli

"Just to be out there was an amazing experience," he said. "What a life! I mean, the whole thing—the courtesy cars, the phones the locker room, the food, and the golf courses. Once you've seen what that's like, you don't want to go back and play anyplace el But you have to earn the right to stay out there."

Gangluff made a little more than $187,000 and finished 176th on the money list in 2002, went back to Q School, and miss getting back on the tour by two shots at the finals. That was disappointing, but he didn't think a year on the Nationwide Tour wou necessarily hurt him. He was wrong. "Bomber's paradise," he said with a laugh. "They play a lot of short, outmoded courses, and lot of the young guys can hit it nine miles. Even if they miss the fairway, they've got a wedge in their hands. I just couldn't ma enough birdies out there." He finished 90th on the Nationwide list, then didn't make it back through second stage at the end of 200

"Now," he said, "I was in full reverse. I'd gone from the tour in 2002 to the Nationwide in 2003 to nowhere in 2004." He play mini-tours in 2004 and then decided, on the advice of some friends, to try the Canadian Tour in '05. "Better golf courses, dece money, and it feels like a real tour," he said. "The only problem was, I needed a place to practice during the winter, and I needed make some money because I didn't have any."

He had moved to Ponte Vedra Beach at the end of 2003, thinking at the very least he would have access to places to play an practice. When the tour told him he couldn't play at Sawgrass, he made a deal with Ponte Vedra Golf and Country Club: he'd g back to jockeying carts but would have complete access to play and practice when he wasn't working. "I had to swallow my pride he said. "Most of the members had no idea I'd been on the tour, but a few recognized the name. I had to deal with it because it w my best chance to get through the winter and get back to playing."

He had played reasonably well on the Canadian Tour, finishing ninth on their money list, making about $37,000. His standing o the Canadian money list had gotten him into the Nationwide event in Calgary, and he'd finished fifth, a boost to his confidence. T top-ten finish there had gotten him into the following week's event in Utah, but he missed the cut.

"I need the Jason Gore effect," he said with a smile. "I need about three hot weeks to get on a real roll again."

Jason Gore had become the new poster boy for all struggling golfers in 2005. He had been one of those players good enough compete on the Nationwide Tour, good enough to make it to the PGA Tour (twice), but never good enough to make a dent once h got there. He had played horribly the first half of 2005 but had managed to qualify for the U.S. Open at Pinehurst. There, for thr days, he was blessed by the golfing gods and found himself playing in the final group on Sunday with two-time Open champi Retief Goosen. The wheels came completely off on the final day—he shot 84—but his easy smile, his paunch, and his sense humor had made him an instant star. He returned to the Nationwide Tour and, as if the 84 had never happened, picked up where h had left off on Saturday at Pinehurst. He won three times in five weeks, actually winning three straight starts since he took off tw weeks after the second win. Prior to that streak, he had won only three times on the Nationwide in eight years and not at all sin 2002. The third victory earned him a "battlefield promotion" to the PGA Tour. (Any Nationwide player who wins three times in th same year is immediately promoted to the PGA Tour.) To prove that neither Pinehurst nor the three-tournament string on th Nationwide was a fluke, Gore won the 84 Lumber Classic playing with the big boys in September, earning a two-year tour exempti and a slew of sponsorships. In less than four months, he had gone from 668th in the World Golf Ranking to 89th. He had gone fro being a struggling thirty-one-year-old journeyman trying to support his wife and infant son to being a folk hero—a suddenly ve financially comfortable folk hero.

Every player going through the Q School experience wanted to become Jason Gore. Every one of them was convinced he was ju one good round away from getting on that kind of roll. If it could happen to Jason Gore, why couldn't it happen to them?

"Of course you need a shot of confidence," Gangluff said. "My problem right now is, I'm playing scared. I'm letting the g course intimidate me. I feel like I'm fighting all sorts of demons, and I know, even if they go away next week, it will be too late have to figure something out *now*."

Gangluff started the first round on Tuesday feeling as if he had the demons under control. He was two under par walking to t 17th tee and thinking he was on his way to putting himself in good position after 18 holes. But he missed the green at 17 and made bogey. He could feel the demons encroaching. "I should have been thinking, 'Okay, let's just play 18 well and get inside, one und is just fine,'" he said. "But I wasn't thinking that. I was losing it again. I hit my drive about 500 yards to the right of where I need to be."

From there he hit one ball in the water, and by the time he tapped in and limped off the green, he had made a quadruple-bog eight. What should have been a comfortable one-under-par 70—or, at worst, an even-par 71—had become a 74 that put him w back in the pack. "This is what I've been doing for a while," he said, sitting in the clubhouse eating lunch. "I've got to fi something to get my confidence back." He forced a smile. "And I've got about forty-eight hours, max, to find it."

He stood up to head back to the range to pound balls and continue his search. The midday temperature was about 90, and t humidity was thick enough to peel. Gangluff, like almost everyone else, didn't notice. He had too many other things to worry abo at that moment.

GANGLUFF'S DAY HAD ENDED BADLY, but not nearly as badly as Chris Wisler's. Wisler was a twenty-five-year-old pro fro Dover, Delaware, who had teed off on the 10th hole in the fourth group of the day with Jon Turcotte and R. E. Winchester, a youn player from Great Britain who was giving U.S. Q School a shot.

Dillard Pruitt was patrolling the front nine, checking on the pace of play among the early groups, when he got a call on his rad

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