

Parker McLachlin won his first PGA Tour event in 2008, the Legends Reno-Tahoe Open, and the Hawaii native—who now makes his home in Arizona—doesn't expect to stop there. Before heading off to his first Mercedes-Benz Championship in his home state, McLachlin spent some time reflecting on what it took for him to win in Reno and how that became the most important part of his game.



CHICKEN *or* THE EGG

If you've never won before, how do you get the confidence to know you can?

By PARKER MCLACHLIN

I don't know if my life has changed that much. But I do know that having the security that comes with winning is nice, and having more tournament invites is nice, but getting my first PGA victory was something I intended to happen and it hasn't changed my desire to win again at all.

To be honest, going into that week I had planned on taking a break. It was July 27th and I had played the last five weeks in a row. Being on Tour after qualifying through Q School meant I played in as many tournaments as I could. That's the part a lot of people looking in from the outside might miss, that most of the guys coming up on Tour don't have the talent, or sponsors, of Tiger and Phil. We're playing for our livelihood each week. When you add in the travel time and the hours spent practicing, there's a lot going into that putt on Sunday that may or may not get you a bigger check. Sometimes the putt comes on Friday afternoon when most of the fans are gone. It can be really quiet then, when the sun's going down and there isn't a TV crew in sight, and you're standing over a putt that will determine whether you'll get to play over the weekend and collect a check. It can be just as intense as any stroke you'll make all year.

I do have a greater sense of belonging now that I've won on Tour. Once you qualify for the Tour, you can experience a bit of a let down. I mean, everyone who's ever made it here started by dreaming of the moment they'd get their card. Once you accomplish that goal, there can be a feeling of, "Now what?" By last summer, I was pretty happy with how my season was going. I started strong by finishing 10th in the Sony Open in January, then fifth at the AT&T Classic in May. By the end of July, I thought it was time to take a break the week of the Reno-Tahoe Open.

But the week before, while playing in Canada, I felt some good things in my swing. I felt confidence. So, after getting home on Sunday night and talking with my wife, Kristy, I woke up Monday morning and changed my plans. By Wednesday I was in Reno and playing in the pro-am. Kristy didn't make it, but when I got back she said she knew what was going to happen before I even left Arizona. She could see the confidence in the way I walked and the way I talked. To me, it's that confidence that propelled me to win.

You hear commentators, golfers and anyone who hangs around the course long enough talk about how the Tour pros are all evenly matched in terms of skill, and for the most part I think that's true. With the exception of Tiger and Phil and a few others, we're all consistently

able to make a golf ball do a lot of the same things. But I really believe that it's having that confidence—being able to see myself winning instead of just hoping for it to happen—that put me over the rest of the field that week.

Golf is a mental game. That holds true at every level. If you think you'd be lucky to break 90, it's going to take luck to do it, but I believe that if you have the mental toughness to look at your game and see your challenges as opportunities, if you can control your mind to not just hope you'll break 90, but instead intend to break 90, then you're already over the hardest hazard on the course.

For me, that's when things really started to change. I went from being

a pessimistic, but pretty good college player to being an optimistic Tour player and tournament winner. I went from having a lazy mental approach—someone who let his thoughts come and go without much attention—to being someone who works on conditioning his mind as much his muscle memory.

It's one of those things that I'm still learning to apply as best as I can, and my friend and mentor, Dr. Don Greene, has been exceptional in leading me down this path. When we met six years ago, I was recovering from wrist surgery and wasn't sure if I'd ever play golf again, much less compete. I broke my wrist in high school and a fragment that chipped off had been bothering me ever since. Over eight years, it calcified and got bigger. With every swing I made, that small piece of bone rubbed up against a tendon in my wrist. Eventually, it cut the tendon away from where it attached to the bone.

Four months out of surgery, Don took me with my putter onto a small par-three course in Hawaii. It was the first time I had touched a club since before the operation. He talked about wanting me to use my practice strokes to feel the putter hit the ball, to see the ball travel on the line, and to know the ball was

going in the hole. When I could see all that, it meant I had the green light to step up to the ball and hit it without thinking. It sounds simple enough, but that day started my path toward a Tour victory.

That week in Reno I had the green light, and that is what made the difference. 🐣

