

cover story

**Lisa DePaulo** is undaunted after 15 attempts to qualify for the LPGA Tour. **She wants to know:** What are you complaining about?

*By Rebecca MacDonald*

**T**he first thing you notice about Lisa DePaulo is her smile. It lights up her face, stretching from ear to ear in a genuine, no-holds-barred grin that compels you to smile right back. That smile, along with her unwaveringly positive approach to life, has seen DePaulo through some difficult times.

Photos by Julie Farias Photography.  
Shot on location at The Golf Club  
at Circle C. Lisa's top courtesy of  
Golf...Austin Style

A rising star as a junior and amateur golfer, DePaulo has attempted to make it through the LPGA's notoriously difficult annual qualifying tournaments (known as "Q-School") 15 times, earning her Tour card just twice. She's built a successful business as an independent sales rep for Club Glove, selling over a million dollars in merchandise annually for the company, only to have her salary cut by 40% last year to "help keep her motivated."

Yet DePaulo's irrepressible spirit continues to shine. The bottom line, says DePaulo, is that she believes in herself. "I don't believe in giving up. I believe in hard work, and following your dreams. They came true for me. I'm a very happy person, and I have a great set of friends."

For DePaulo, developing a positive attitude about golf began with her very first round, at age nine, when her grandmother took her out to play 9 holes. DePaulo scored a 51. "When we got home, she showed the card to my entire family, and made a big deal about the fact that I shot such a good score my first time out. "The next time DePaulo played, she shot a 50. "My grandmother showed me the two cards and really emphasized how I'd improved. That made a huge impression on me."

### **Growing into golf**

DePaulo's love for golf was cemented shortly thereafter, when she took her first real golf lesson while in Palm Springs with her grandfather. "The golf pro was so cute. His name was Scott and I had the biggest crush on him. You know when you're little, and they come up behind you and put their arms around you to show you how to swing? He had the greatest arms I'd ever seen."

Later, DePaulo's family moved to San Diego, where she started working at a local driving range, picking range

balls to earn money. One of the pros at the range began giving her free lessons. "I started to get better, and it got to the point where people would stop hitting when I was working, because they didn't want me to get hurt. Finally, the guys said, "Lisa can't pick balls any more, she's going to get a college scholarship." So they gave me a job working in the pro shop."

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DePaulo later met PGA Tour pro Jim Ferree, who watched her swing, and referred her to nationally renowned instructor Chuck Cook (now teaching at Barton Creek Country Club in Austin). The lessons paid off. In 1984, she won the American Junior Golf Association (AJGA) Desert Junior Championship, and was a two-time San Diego Women's Amateur champion. At 16, she was considering scholarship offers from universities in California, Arizona and Texas. She was leaning toward Texas, she said, because "At the golf camps I went to growing up, the counselors from Texas were always so nice and so pleasant. And I thought, Texas has to be the greatest place in the world to be!"

### **Star struck at sixteen**

The clincher, she says, came one weekend when the PGA Tour was in town playing a tournament at Torrey Pines. DePaulo had just been named

San Diego's Junior Golfer of the Year, and was scheduled to appear on the morning show at a local radio station. Also appearing on the show that morning was legendary PGA professional, Tom Kite. During the live interview, Kite asked DePaulo what college she wanted to attend. She told him she was still trying to narrow down her choices. Kite told her, "Look, you grew up playing golf in California, where you have perfect weather, bent grass greens, and no rain or wind. If you really want to play on Tour, you need to come to Texas, and learn how to play on Bermuda grass, in the wind and weather. It's a different game."

The interview was on a Wednesday, and the following Saturday, DePaulo was at the tournament, trailing Kite as he played. "I was following him like a puppy dog. I felt like I just had to get near him, so I darted across the path in front of him. He saw me and called out, "Hey Lisa, how are you doing?" He was in the middle of a tournament, and he remembered my name! I was so excited, I decided then and there that I was going to UT!"

### **A different kind of challenge**

DePaulo attended the University of Texas at Austin on a full scholarship, where she played under the guidance of Coach Pat Weiss, and was named most valuable player in 1987. In 1988, she turned professional; and began competing on the Futures Tour, Players West Tour and Pacific Tour, as well as on the Asian and European tours. During that time, she also began competing in the LPGA's qualifying tournaments in an attempt to win a place on the LPGA Tour. But even with her impressive record, DePaulo found the LPGA an entirely different challenge. While she didn't make it through Q-School, she qualified to play in nine LPGA events

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from 1990-1998, making the cut in only three of them. Her total earnings from LPGA tournaments over those years was \$7,398.

DePaulo says she thinks getting her Tour card meant so much to her that it made it impossible to perform her best. "In the beginning of my career, my life was so out of balance. Qualifying for the Tour was my life, it was out of bounds

way too important to me, and I put so much pressure on myself that I couldn't possibly make it."

## The turning point

After years of trying, DePaulo finally realized she had to make a change. "I missed the cut to get to the 1997 finals, and that was the big turning point in my life. Before, I would always at least

make it to the finals, and that year I didn't even get that far." After the tournament, DePaulo's friend, PGA Tour pro Dave Stockton, invited her to his home in Palm Springs for lunch. DePaulo says they chatted for a couple of hours, until finally Stockton said "All right, I'm going to have this talk with you. If I could give you anything in life, give you your Tour card, or the perfect guy and the perfect guaranteed relationship for the next 25 years, which would it be?"

DePaulo didn't hesitate. "I said I'd take my Tour Card. And he took my head in his hands and said, "Lisa, that's too much pressure. You can't do that. You need to get another job, you need to find out there's more to life than getting your Tour card." He explained to me how I had my life out of balance."

Heeding his advice, DePaulo began working for West Coast Trends, Inc., selling the company's Club Glove brand of golf travel bags. DePaulo's outgoing personality made her a natural at sales, and soon she was selling over a million dollars a year in merchandise for the company. "It was the perfect job for me," says DePaulo. "My territories are the college and LPGA tournaments, and they only buy once a year. That left a lot of time to work on my game."

## Making the cut

Her boss at Club Glove noticed her prowess, and encouraged her to compete in the 1999 LPGA qualifier, even offering to pay her way, but with one caveat. "He said I should treat it as a vacation, and made me promise to relax and have fun," recalls DePaulo. "I'd never approached Q-School with that attitude before. I started wondering what it would be like to play in those qualifiers just for fun?"

The mental change worked. On her twelfth try, DePaulo tied for 40th at the 1999 LPGA Final Qualifying Tour-



DePaulo practices her game at The Golf Club at Cirlce C in Austin, where she teaches at the Golf Academy.

nement to gain non-exempt status for the 2000 season. That year, she played in all 18 events and made 10 cuts. Her best finish was a tie for 31st at the First Union Betsy King Classic, where she carded career-low 70s in the first and second rounds.

The next few years were bumpy. DePaulo was unable to earn her Tour card again for the 2001 season, and in 2002, she tore a calf muscle, an injury she thought meant the end of her professional playing career. But in 2003, having recovered from her injury, she competed in and won the Colorado Women's Open "by six or seven strokes." Later that year, she went on to compete in the LPGA Teaching and Club Professional (T&CP) Central Section Championship, and finished second. At the airport, a friend asked if she was going to use the money to pay for her

Q-School application. "I thought, are you nuts?" says DePaulo. But the idea persisted, and as luck would have it, DePaulo was attending a friend's wedding in Sea Island, Georgia that spring, not far from where the LPGA first round qualifier would be played in Venice, Florida, the following weekend. "Part of the wedding was a two-day golf tournament. I decided that if I played well in the wedding challenge, I would go to Venice."

Once again, DePaulo avoided putting too much emphasis on the event. "I didn't tell anyone what I was trying to do. I told my Mom I was going on a sales call. I didn't really expect to qualify, I hadn't made it through Venice in years. So I hung out with my friends and stayed up late, drinking wine. I had the attitude that I was on vacation, and I was just going to have fun."

She made the cut. "I didn't tell anyone that I'd made it through the first stage. When my boss saw my name on the list of players that made the cut, I told him it was the other Lisa Depaulo." (There is another LPGA player by the same name.) DePaulo went to the finals, and tied for 12<sup>th</sup> place to earn exempt status for the 2004 season. "I couldn't believe it. Once again, I just decided to have a good time, and I got my card."

### Playing the LPGA

DePaulo competed in all 22 LPGA tournaments in 2004, but only made one cut. "Coming from someone who's been through Q-school 15 times, then finally making it, 2004 was probably the most frustrating year of my life. It was the depths of depths. Every week, I started out with the best attitude I could, and every week I just couldn't

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She says the pressure was incredible. “What made it hard was that, because of my work in the business world, it felt like five times as many people knew that I had made it this time. I felt all this pressure. Even though everyone was very supportive, I felt like a different person, and I couldn’t shake it.”

In addition to the pressure, DePaulo found that the level of competition in the LPGA had changed. “There was a huge difference in the talent pool from 2002 to 2004. The cut level went from four to five strokes over par to one over.” Adding to the competitive pressure, says DePaulo, is the fact that the LPGA holds only half the number of tournaments as the PGA Tour does. “You have 22 weeks to make a living on the LPGA Tour. This year you only have 18 weeks in the U.S. to make a living. There’s so little room for error there.”

## A strong mental game

DePaulo credits her ability to stay positive in the face of adversity to her strong mental attitude. In 1993, she began working with Dr. Deborah Graham, one of golf’s most respected mental-game coaches and founder of GolfPsych, a system for evaluating a competitor’s personality. Graham and GolfPsych’s co-founder, Jon Stabler, are co-authors of *The 8 Traits of Champion Golfers* (Simon & Schuster, 1999), an in-depth study of the personality traits that separate major champions and frequent tour winners from others.

“The mental game is so overlooked by most players,” says DePaulo. “Amateur golfers allow any number of things to affect how they play. They worry about who they’re playing with, the weather, the fact that they didn’t show up in time to warm up before a round, the pace of play—anything can throw them off.”

These negative thoughts almost always lead to a negative result, says DePaulo. “It drives me crazy when a player approaches a tee box and says, ‘I hate this hole, I always hit it in the trees over there.’ Then she’ll walk up and hit it into the trees, and she’s shocked!”

**DePaulo recommends asking yourself just four questions after every shot:**  
**Did I visualize the shot?**  
**Did I feel it?**  
**Did I commit to it?**  
**Was my tempo good?**

DePaulo says players would do well to relax and focus on what they do want to happen. “People don’t walk into a restaurant, thinking, ‘Gee, I hope I don’t walk into that door.’ When you’re driving a car, you don’t grip the wheel and try to avoid hitting the car next to you. But that’s what people do on the golf course. Sometimes your brain gets in the way of your ability to succeed. You need to focus on the result you want. Focus on the target.”

To develop a stronger mental attitude on the course, DePaulo says she recommends asking yourself just four basic questions after every shot: Did I visualize the shot? Did I feel it? Did I commit to it? Was my tempo good?

“When you’re out on the course, it’s not the time to question your equipment, your relationship with your teammate or your swing mechanics. Of course you have to commit to the time to develop good mechanics, but once you’re out there, you need to picture a good result. That’s so basic. How can you enjoy it if you don’t approach it with a positive attitude?”

## Life outside the ropes

Despite her own setbacks, DePaulo’s own mental attitude remains strong. She plans to compete in this year’s LPGA national Teaching and Club Professional championship, where she placed second in 2003. A win there would gain DePaulo an exemption to play in the 2006 LPGA McDonald’s Championship. There is also the LPGA T&CP Team Championship, an event she won with teammate Stephanie Comstock in 2002. And finally, there’s the T&CP Central Section Championship in New Mexico, where the winner also gains an exemption to play in the McDonald’s championship. “That’s about as far as I’m looking ahead right now—I’m happy to be competing in a different fish bowl.”

In the meantime, DePaulo isn’t sitting still. She recently began selling a new line of merchandise called “College Coozies,” with exclusive rights to logo the popular can wrappers with logos from UT, A&M University and Texas Tech University, among others.

In addition, she is in the midst of launching a new business called Tournament Treasures, which will offer a complete set services, from tournament merchandise to booking famous Tour players, to event coordinators. And she has begun teaching part-time, joining Tina Bradley-Mayers and Buck Mayers at the Golf Academy at Circle C in Austin.

“When they say that one door closes and another door opens, I think that’s so right. Last year was really the lowest point for me, between losing my Tour card and having my salary cut. But it actually opened up doors. It made me think, ok, what else can I sell? What about teaching? Having challenges in your life makes you think outside the ropes. That’s how I got to where I am, understanding that there’s life outside the ropes.” 