

Even dark clouds have silver linings

When faced with seemingly impossible situations, some will rise to the challenge, others will crumble – something Tamie Durdin knows well and has overcome.

Story by BRUCE YOUNG

One Sunday afternoon in February of 2008, South Australian golfer Tamie Durdin walked to the 1st tee for the final round of the ANZ Ladies Masters to do battle with her playing partner and long time idol Karrie Webb.

Webb and Durdin were tied in the lead with Korean Shin Hyun Ju and for Durdin this was what she had been striving for. “This was what I had always wanted,” said Durdin. “I had never played with Karrie before and so here I was tied in the lead with her. It was my dream come true, to play with Webbie in the final round of the Ladies Masters, and my initial thinking had been ok let’s get it through nine holes and see what happens.”

Unfortunately that dream very quickly turned into a nightmare. While on the surface she had what she wanted, underneath Durdin was falling apart even before she got to the course. “I remember when we left our accommodation that morning, my mum and others were just so excited for me but in myself I was petrified and nearly burst into tears. I just wanted to run away and hide. I was that wound up that I knew I was in trouble even before I got to the golf course.”

It was a day that promised much but one that would deliver little although the cloud that was her disintegration that day would eventually yield a silver lining. Durdin shot a final round of 76 and finished 22nd. It was to become potentially, however, the most significant day in the career of the then 31 year old.

All smiles. Tamie holds aloft the Fujisankei Trophy in Japan in 2009. Picture: Fujisankei

That very public demise was the straw that broke the camel’s back for Durdin and the catalyst for a decision that would see her return to Royal Pines 12 months later, far better equipped to handle that which she had been unable to in 2008. Durdin knew she had to do something to come to terms with her almost uncontrollable nerves at crucial stages in tournaments and to change her mind-set when confronted by that situation again.

“I had a friend of mine who works at the University of Queensland who had been with us that day and said that while he did not want to butt in as such, he knew someone at the University who he felt might be able to help. At that point I was prepared to try anything as I felt so desperate. That someone turned out to be Jonah Oliver who is a sports psychologist. I made the appointment to see him the following day and we started working together almost straight away.”

Roll the tape forward 12 months and Durdin would find herself in an almost identical situation going into the final round of the ANZ Ladies Masters, a scenario that would provide the ideal litmus test to assess her progress in that time. Leading into this year’s final round of that very same event, Durdin had put together a third round of 66 and would again play in the final group on the final day.

This time however it would not be Webb as her opponent but Australia’s hottest player at that point, Katherine Hull, and American Mollie Frankhauser with whom she would play.

Hull would go on to win the event but Durdin held up very well to finish second. Durdin was round in 70 that day and, although she lost a little ground to the ultimate winner, Hull, she had not disgraced herself and came away as a winner in her own mind.

“Katherine holed a few more putts than me that day and deserved the victory but although I did not win the tournament I felt I had won my own battle. It was so important for me to see if I could stand up in that particular situation without having happen to me what had happened the previous year.”

So what was it that she and Oliver worked on in the interim to allow her to withstand the pressure and face her demons of 12 months earlier? I decided to call Oliver himself to get his thoughts.

“Tamie and I met the day after the ANZ Ladies Masters in 2008 in order that I could get a picture of what was happening to her,” said Oliver. “When we first talked and Tamie explained her situation I responded by saying ‘oh yes I am dealing with that with other athletes every day’. She was surprised at that and I think she said something like ‘oh so there is nothing wrong with me,’ discovering that she was not alone in the issues she was facing.”

“Some of the main work I did with Tamie was firstly to try and normalise her anxious experience. She had worked with a few others who had told her that she couldn’t be nervous out there and that she needed to get rid of the nerves if she wanted to go to the next level.”

“The theme I took with her however was to recognise that she would and could still get nervous but to learn how to play with the nerves rather than waste energy on trying to get rid of them. It was a case of making the nerves your friend rather than your enemy. Previously she had tried to control these anxious thoughts and had done everything to run away from them.”

“I told Tamie that it was alright to think anxiously and feel anxiously on the golf course but that it didn’t mean that she



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needed to play anxiously. It was a case of separating those things. We have worked on a number of drills to aid this but that was the main theme.”

“It was a unique opportunity for her to be able to get back to that very situation a year later. It wasn’t that she was less nervous than the previous year but back then she had bought into the nerves and made them a focus instead of working with them. Hopefully now it would be different. We were even able to joke about it the morning of that final round.”

Durdin had also put in place other changes to help her move on. After essentially having two coaches in her life until that point, she made the decision to make the switch to a Japanese coach she had met in Adelaide a few years earlier. Ezure Tadashi was experiencing success with the likes of Momoka Ueda and Shinobu Morimazato, both extremely successful on the Japan Ladies Golf Tour where Durdin now plies her trade. The decision was made that it would be in her best interests to work with someone she could have more ready access to.

While Durdin had worked closely for a number of years with highly successful Brisbane based coach, Ian Triggs, and before that the highly regarded, Ross Herbert, she felt the need to take on a coach with a Japanese base. Tadashi played the occasional event on the Japan Men’s Golf Tour but he has a teaching facility in Kobe and Durdin now often finds herself there when she has time off.

“I just felt that I needed a change and so it was a combination of Tadashi’s success with JLPG players and the tyranny of distance that forced me to make the switch,” said Durdin. “It was a difficult decision to make as Ian and I had worked very hard together over a long period of time but looking back I think this arrangement works best for me.”

Durdin played collegiate golf at Pepperdine University in California between 1998 and 2000, blazing a trail which fellow countrywomen Katherine Hull and Lindsey Wright would follow two years later. Durdin then finished second at the LPGA Tour School in 2000 but in January of 2001 her long time coach and friend, Ross Herbert, who she had started working with at the Australian Institute of Sport while a promising amateur, passed away. It left her floundering. “Ross was such a focal point in my game and I began to struggle,” said Durdin. “We had a great working relationship and felt that we were making great strides. It was a goal of mine for him to be part of me playing my first LPGA Tour event but he passed away before I did which was really sad. A lot of the confidence I had built with Ross was lost.”

After two years on the LPGA Tour, Durdin found herself faced with the prospect of playing the secondary Futures Tour in the US which she began to despise. “I thought about quitting altogether on several occasions. There was virtually no money and yet you had to pay US\$400 per event just to play and it was very hard to get motivated.”



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By mid 2004 Durdin had had enough and a suggestion by Australian professional Jenny Sevil in early 2004 to consider Japan prompted her to try the Japan Ladies Tour School later that year. “I won the first stage of four qualifying stages that year but tried out at the USLPGA Tour School also in an attempt to cover my bases. I missed the cut there and so dedicated all my intention to Japan. I think if I had not got through that year and had nowhere to play in 2005 then I may well have quit the game altogether. I got through to the final stage however and was eventually the medallist there.”

Durdin loves playing in Japan. “It was intriguing early on. I have had my share of issues with the LPGA here but they run the tour very professionally, there is good money, a continuity of events and there is a lot of public support for the events. Things are run like clockwork in this country. Importantly for me also is that it is so close to home. To be honest I just can’t work out why more Australian players don’t try to get their cards for this tour.”

Retaining her status each year since her rookie season in 2005, Durdin’s comfort zone in Japan and her growing self belief this year led to her first victory in that country and indeed her first significant victory in professional golf. Against a field that included the brilliant Shin Jai Yi, Durdin would win the weather shortened Fujisankei Classic at the famed Kawana Golf Club and earn a cheque for A\$140,000 in the process. It was a yet another milestone for her but one that had its genesis that disastrous day 15 months earlier on the Gold Coast.

The changes she put in place that day, and since, led to her maiden victory and with that behind her, and with her nerves in the right perspective, Durdin’s growth as a player is set to prosper.

Ironically, now that she is well and truly established in Japan she is keen to have another attempt at getting her USLPGA Tour card but she would not burn her bridges in Japan. She wants to play both tours but still with a focus on Japan if she is fortunate enough to play her way on to the LPGA Tour in 2010. “There is part of me that wants to see if I can do it again. I want to play in some majors and play against some of the better players and it is about time I tested myself at that level.”

The 1995 Australian Junior Champion is one of the most impressive players in the female game. Durdin has the same piercing ball flight which, amongst the females, only golfers such as Yani Tseng and one or two others possess.

Karrie Webb once said of Durdin during a recent ANZ Ladies Masters, “I think Tamie is the biggest underachiever in Australian golf. She has more talent in her little toe than 90 % of the players in this field.” It was meant as a compliment and was taken as one by Durdin.

It might be that Durdin will now begin to fulfill that talent and when she does then Australian golf could potentially see another, if perhaps unlikely, major winner.