



While Pressel (far right) and Tseng (near right) struggled, Lewis earned the winner's dip, during which mother Carol (blue shirt) broke her leg.

THE ODDS DID NOT FAVOR

Stacy Lewis. They never really have. A titanium rod and the screws holding it in place to support her misshapen spine rendered her a long shot in perpetuity. That's where her story should have ended. Instead, it's where it begins.

Scoliosis, severe curvature of the spine, is not a quality one looks for in identifying a potential professional athlete. Her torso uncomfortably squeezed by a cumbersome brace up to 16 hours a day for the better part of eight years portends nothing but misery. "She'll tell you she didn't have a great time in high school," her mother Carol said.

She will also tell you that it has made her who she is. "My parents always said: 'Your sisters never would have been able to do what you do,'" Lewis said. "It's my personality and the way I can just grind and get through things. That's just what I do."

Perseverance is an overused word in sports, but is there another that so aptly describes an athletic journey that ought to have ended with back surgery at 18? "When life throws you a curve ball," Carol said, "how you handle that will dictate how you handle a lot of things in life."

Last week, Lewis, 26, handled things expertly. She played the best in the world, Yani Tseng, even over the final 36 holes of the Kraft Nabisco Championship, bettering her by five strokes in the final round to secure a three-stroke victory, the first of her professional career.

She celebrated with the traditional winner's dip in Poppie's Pond surrounding the 18th hole of the Dinah Shore Tournament Course at Mission Hills, accompanied by, among others, her mother, who in the process suffered a broken fibula. This is the story of Lewis' life, of course. Nothing is ever easy. As though this point required additional emphasis, she won while mourning her grandfather, Al Lewis, who at 84 had died on the eve of the tournament.

"He lived via my golf," Lewis said. "He loved watching it on TV. He recorded it every week so he could watch it over and over again."

Al was the first in the lineage of Lewis golfers. He taught his son Dale who, in turn, taught his daughter Stacy, each generation producing a better player than the one preceding it. At that, Stacy was only a moderately skilled junior who was defined more by her scoliosis than her golf.

"Why me?" she'd ask herself while enduring the hours of discomfort wearing the brace. "Why am I going through this? I struggled with that for a long time. It wasn't until I got to college, after I'd worn the brace, after I'd had surgery, that it was like, 'OK, I'm here to play golf. That's my purpose.'"

Only the compassion of a coach allowed Lewis her moment of discovery. A month after Lewis had accepted a scholarship offer to play at Arkansas, Carol was on the phone with the Razorbacks' coach, Kelly Hester, to inform her that Lewis had to undergo back surgery.