



“IT GAVE ME A NEW PURPOSE TO WHAT I’M DOING. I APPRECIATE THE LITTLE THINGS MORE.”

—STACY LEWIS ON HER TRIP TO RWANDA

“She easily could have said, ‘Well, we don’t want you,’ ” Carol said. “Had Kelly Hester not been so gracious to say, ‘It’s OK, we’ll redshirt her. I’ll come up for the surgery; everything’s going to be fine,’ it could have been over.”

Lewis eventually became a star at Arkansas, winning 12 tournaments, including the 2007 NCAA Championship. In June 2008, she nearly won the U.S. Women’s Open in her professional debut, convincing many that she was heading toward immediate stardom. Instead, she made a couple of detours, one to mediocrity, the other to Africa.

“I thought coming off that Open it would be kind of instant success and I’d be rolling right along,” she said. “But I kind of hit a rut at the end of my rookie year, and I was kind of lost. I didn’t really know what to do.”

She regrouped. She took on a new swing coach, added a strength-and-conditioning coach, took a putting lesson from the coach for whom she ended up playing at Arkansas (Shauna Estes-Taylor) and answered a call from Betsy King.

A retired Hall of Famer, King asked Lewis to go to Rwanda, as part of her Golf Fore Africa charity. King, who was in town for the Kraft Nabisco Championship last week to participate in activities commemorating the 40th anniversary of the event, recounted what she told Lewis: how for some players embracing a cause contributed to better golf and that it might do the same for Lewis.

“Looking back, it made it easier to play,” King said. “I felt that if you found a cause greater than yourself that you’re playing for, it’s very helpful.”

In Rwanda, Lewis encountered life that she was unaware existed. “Alongside the road, you see kids with these huge buckets of water, bigger than they are,” Lewis said. “They had to walk probably miles to the wells to get water. That picture doesn’t really go out of your head, especially when you go to turn a faucet on.

“It changed me a lot. It was such a shock to me that people live the way they do, yet they’re so happy and grateful. It just makes me thankful for everything that I have, and it gave me a renewed purpose of what I’m doing out here. The better I play golf, the more I can help other people, the more I can inspire people. It gave me a new purpose to what I’m doing. I appreciate the little things more. I’m happier. People have noticed the difference in me since I’ve been back. When I came back, I said, ‘You could just see the joy in these people’s faces. They were just so happy and so appreciative.’ I want people to see that joy in me as well. That’s my goal.”

She needed a reminder of that late Sunday afternoon, after hitting an indifferent approach to the 18th green that nonetheless had no bearing on the outcome. “I was still kind of upset about that shot,” she said, explaining why she was approaching the green with her head hanging.

The walk along the pathway between Poppie’s Pond and the grandstand is memorable even for those for whom it isn’t a victory stroll. For those en route to their coronation, it’s considered the greatest walk in women’s golf.

“Not many people get to make this walk,” her caddie, Travis Wilson, told her. “You’d better smile.”

She called it “the best walk I’ve ever had,” one that for once in her life was not an uphill climb. **GW**