

With feet firmly planted, Brown shoots for the top

By Dave Hansen

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When Kevin Brown golfs, people watch.

He has the presence, the poise, the sense of balance that automatically attracts onlookers.

Brown, a 17-year-old Issaquah High School senior playing today in this year's state championship, is one of Issaquah's best young golfers — with grades to match.

On the course, the lean, 6-foot-2-inch Brown handles himself with patience and purpose, spending several seconds above each ball, thinking of the mechanics, the distance, the wind, the landing.

His full backswing is slow yet fluid, and when he reaches the top of the arc, a slight hesitation ignites a powerful descent. The impact is nearly always clean and strong.

He can hit his Lynx Black Cat 4-iron 210 yards.

"I never took a lesson," says the 5-handicap Brown, shrugging at the thought. "I just watch the pros."

The son of a serious recreational golfer — Brown's father, Bill, shoots in the mid-80s — Brown started golfing in fifth grade. By the seventh grade, he was washing golf carts at Tall Chief with his good friend and golf partner, Chris Hedges, who also plays for Issaquah High. The two played the course for free, hitting sand shots in the rain, day after day. By the ninth grade, Brown was hitting in the 60s.

At the July 11 district championships at Sand Point Country Club, Brown came back from a near-disastrous opening round 87 and shot a blistering, second-place 74 to make the state cut.

This comeback exemplifies Brown's determination, says a proud mom, Carol.

"I think he was more happy that he could come back, than that he could win," Carol said. "Kevin is an incredible kid; he's so mature and so stable."

Brown admits he really enjoys golf, but it's not his whole life.

He carried a 3.7 grade point average last semester at school. Before classes, he got up at 5 a.m. everyday to go to seminary. He likes to in-line skate, bike and draw.

As a second language, he studies Japanese. He hopes to go to Japan for two years when he gets out of high school to fulfill a mission for his church, where he is president of a youth group.

And even though it is difficult for him, he truly enjoys math.

"I'm not good at, but it's my favorite," he says. "I like challenging things to push myself."

When Brown says he's had to work hard at math, it's not just a few extra hours between golf games. He's had to spend long hours with a tutor. He's stayed up late cramming for tests. He's sweated more during exams than on the golf course.

"It's paid off," says Carol. "He was math student of the month last year."

Brown hopes his studies will land him a golf scholarship at Brigham Young University, where he'd like to join the Nike Tour for young golfers.

Eventually, he wants a shot at going pro, but he is also accepting the fact that it's OK to have a Plan B.

"If not, I'll just be a dentist or something," he says. Both of his parents work in the dental field.

In the meantime, Brown is focusing on his game, hoping next year to be one of the top five junior golfers in the state. Last year, he missed the state championship, which is sponsored by the Washington Junior Golf Association. He's been fourth in district championships. He wins medals in just about every high school tournament.

"This year he has rededicated himself and wants to be one of the best kids," says IHS coach Steve Anderson, who has watched Brown grow since ninth grade when he easily walked on the varsity team. "Last year he decided education was just as important as sports. But that's great. I think someday it will pay off for him."

Anderson said this school year will be a pivotal one for Brown because of his senior status. Brown and his friend Hedges are considered the top two players on the team.

"I think the emotional and maturing level is obviously growing, and it will push him to become one of the top kids in Kingco," Anderson said. "He's got the ability. Everybody in the league knows he and Chris are the ones to beat."

To get to the next level, Brown continues to golf. This summer, he's mowing lawns during the day, but then golfs until dark.

"I golf everyday except Sunday," he says, waiting in the middle of a fairway at Snoqualmie Falls, his home course.

The sun is dropping slowly in the west, casting a long shadow toward the green, barely visible about 250 yards away.

Brown pulls out a stiff-shaft Taylor Made 3-wood from his bright yellow Ping bag. He takes a lazy practice swing in the thick, trim grass, brushing past his sockless, traditional, brown and white Dexter shoes.

"You want to be the best, but you can't play good forever," he says, peering toward the green. "It's just a game. Sometimes I take it too seriously and I end up doing bad, so I just try to have fun."

He stops and lines up, and the course seems to get quiet along with him.

Once again his swing is clean, deliberate and effortless. The loft is perfect and the ball hits solid near the pin, rolling a little deep.

Brown nods slightly, allowing himself a small smile.

He's putting for eagle.

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