

Faith in Christ Sustains Defending US Open Champ Webb Simpson

Most people know Webb Simpson as the golfer who hoisted the U.S. Open trophy last year at the Olympic Club in San Francisco.

And to the casual sports fan, this guy had it all. His supportive wife, Dowd Simpson stood by his side, still smiling somehow. At 35 weeks pregnant, she had following him all 72 holes on one of the hilliest golf terrains in the world.

Yes, this happily married couple was about to have their second child, Willow Grace. And Webb Simpson had just won a major at age 27.

Could life get much better than this?

But what most people don't know about is that less than five years before that victory moment, Webb Simpson sat at a Bruegger's Bagel shop in Raleigh, N.C., brokenhearted.

He had just broken up with Dowd, the girl he thought for sure he would marry, and was home on Christmas break during his senior year at Wake Forest.

"My lowest point," is the best way Webb could describe it. "I was so down."

But it was at that moment, over bagel and a coffee – and if you follow him on Twitter, you know he's a coffee junkie – that Webb's mentor, Dave Owen, did what every good mentor would do with a depressed college student.

He challenged Webb to press into Jesus.

Taught him how to really read the Bible, how to pray, how to live for Christ.

“I think the Lord was doing a great work in both of us,” Webb told the BGEA about himself and Dowd.

It didn't seem possible at the time, but Webb would find out soon enough.

‘I Wanted to Know Jesus’

He didn't know it at the time, but Christmas break 2007 was a turning point for Webb, both in his relationship with Dowd – and with Christ.

Sure, he grew up in a Christian home with godly parents (Sam and Debbie Simpson), but Webb will tell you he hadn't really made his faith his own.

But shortly after that Bruegger's challenge, Webb felt God speaking to him in a real way: “I remember sitting on the couch and the Lord was saying, ‘You can live your life with me or without me. But if you live it with me, it'll be so much better.’ ”

Webb had gone from brokenhearted to simply broken.

“I told Him, ‘I can't live without you, God,’ ” Webb said. “For the first time, I wanted to know Jesus more.”

In many respects, late 2007 is when Webb's journey really began. And did it ever.

By the fall of 2008, his relationship with Dowd had been restored. Engaged the next July. Married the following January. A dad by early 2011 (hello, baby James). And his first Tour win later that summer – in his home state, no less.

If life had not made much sense a few years before, it was starting to make perfect sense now.

'I Looked At My Wife'

Webb will freely admit that it's his wife who makes him a better man, encouraging, challenging, communicating – "I didn't know how to communicate early in our marriage," he said, point-blank.

Sure, Webb's the one who crushes the ball 285 yards off the tee and sticks his fairway irons a few feet from the pin. But if you think a golfer can become a major champ on his own ... ha.

Webb will tell you it's quite the opposite.

"I know for a fact, I couldn't have won the U.S. Open without her being there," he said. "My wife knows me better than anybody else. She knows just the right way to ask questions and press in."

And when there's a 3-foot putt on the line to win the U.S. Open, hands sweating, mouth dry?

"I was extremely nervous," he said. "That was the first time I had a putt to win a major championship."

"But I looked at my wife and that put things into perspective for me."

'I Didn't Have Any Game'

So much was running through his mind on the 18th green that Sunday evening. It was nearly impossible to block everything out.

If Webb's life were to flash before his eyes – like a Jason Bourne movie – surely there would be quick snippets of the first time he met Dowd. It was on his second day at Wake Forest and a mutual friend, Maggie, had called wanting to come by and say "hi."

"I was sitting in my chair like A.C. Slater from *Saved By the Bell*, " Webb said. "In walks this beautiful blond-haired girl and I about fell out of my chair."

There would be other flashes racing through his mind, too. Scenes of the two hanging out as "friends." Webb wanting to ask Dowd out like crazy, but lacking the nerve for months on end.

"She thought I was playing it cool, but really I didn't think she would date me because she was so much better than me –at everything," he said. "Let's just say I didn't have any game."

'I Felt So Incredibly Weak'

But Webb had a golf game. And he was showing the world just that.

Webb will tell you the nerves he felt on that 3-footer at Olympic's No. 18 were some of the worst he can remember. But it's not much different than the jitters that creep in during an amateur event. Or trying to beat a buddy on a Sunday afternoon.

"Golf is funny," he said. "Everybody gets nervous at any level that you play."

But facing the biggest putt in his golf career, all it took was one glance over at Dowd to get his mind right. "It meant the world to me that she was there," Webb said. "A 35-week pregnant woman walking 72 holes – she was my inspiration that week."

Keeping Webb grounded, he meditated all week on 2 Corinthians 12:9 – "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."

"I wrote that verse in my yardage book," he said. "I felt so incredibly weak and inadequate on that back 9 (of the final round). I remember I was on the 11th hole in the fairway and

it finally hit me for the first time all week – I don't need to win to be fulfilled. He is all-satisfying.”

“It was a great reminder that when you are weak, God will show His power through you.”

Webb was quick to deflect the glory to God, talking to reporters after the match – “I sent tons of prayers to Him, and that's what got me through,” – but he feels the comment may have been taken out of context.

“I think some people took it the wrong way, like I was praying for a win,” he said. “I was praying I would honor and glorify God. That I could finish strong and be at peace with whatever happened.”

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