

# Spieth has the 'it' factor

I texted John Fields, the University of Texas golf coach, before the most recent Masters started and reminded him that six years ago I predicted one of his former players one day would be on this kind of national stage. Fields texted back that he remembered my prediction. Then, a few days later, 20-year-old Jordan Spieth of Dallas played his heart out and finished in a tie for second at Augusta.

Jordan Spieth has "it" and I saw "it" when he was only 14 years old. You may have been watching him for the first time this season—maybe the Masters was the first time you ever watched him play for four consecutive rounds on national TV. But I saw him back when he was playing in the AJGA tournament at Carlton Woods about six years ago.

What caught my attention? Everything. He had poise. He had talent. He had a great attitude. Plus, you could tell he loved to play golf, to compete, to improve.

Jordan Spieth had "it" and I don't see "it" often. I saw something, for instance, in a young Ben Crenshaw when I first watched him putt. I saw something in Lorena Ochoa in 2001 at The Spirit International at Whispering Pines when I was captain of the United States team and Lorena was playing for Mexico. I called my friend Dick Harmon back then and told I had just seen something special in Lorena, who had one of the best putting strokes I had ever seen. She would go on to the LPGA Tour and become the top-ranked female golfer in the world for more than three years.

I have always seen something special in Jordan Spieth.

At the U.S. Open in 2012 in San Francisco, he was paired with Angel Cabrera, whom I coach. I met Jordan's UT coach there. I talked with Jordan's mom and dad, who are so nice. His dad asked me what I would recommend Jordan should do, how long Jordan should stay in college? I told him he should stay in school until he won the U.S. Amateur and got a chance to win the Masters as an amateur. Wouldn't that be something? I knew he had the ability to do it.

That didn't happen, but in this year's Masters that I attended, Jordan came close to winning it as a professional. He could have become the youngest winner ever at the Masters and the youngest to win a major since the Depression. Did I think Jordan was going to win it after leading by two shots after seven holes on Sunday? No. He had played remarkably well after those seven holes, but I kept thinking it would have been better to finish that way than to start that way.

He gave a great effort, but lost by three shots because Bubba Watson's experience paid off. Plenty of people say Bubba is always going to be one of the favorites to win the Masters because he knows where not to hit it. But Bubba knows where to hit it once he misses it. His recovery shots are unbelievable and creative. He fears nothing.

Bubba will win more Masters. But he's not going to win the next 15 Masters.

Jordan has a lot of good golf in him. There is no telling what he can accomplish. He has a great home environment. His mom and dad are wonderful people and his sister, with special needs, taught him about life the hard way and helps keep him grounded.

He was an exceptional junior golfer and amateur. Then, to go out on tour last year and do what he did was impressive. Not surprising to me, but impressive. He has the patience of someone like Bernhard Langer, or Jose Maria Olazabal. It takes more than just talent to succeed at the PGA Tour level.

Jordan Spieth has the pedigree to become a Jack Nicklaus-type player. **TL**



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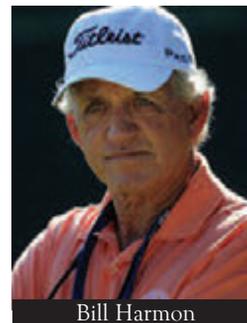
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