

*In 2009 the US Bank Championship played its final event at Brown Deer Park Golf Course in Milwaukee. I volunteered to serve as a starter for Friday afternoon's tee times. Arriving early at the course, I meandered about and freelanced the following story. After the event I submitted it to Gary D'Amato of the Milwaukee Journal. He liked the article and wished he had thought of it.*

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## Paying A Price

A picture is said to be worth a thousand words. To Jesper Parnevik it might instead be fifteen years.

Sitting alone in the dimly lit player's dining room at the US Bank Championship early Friday morning, Jesper stared at the televised coverage of the Open Championship half a world away. The fanfare highlighting Tom Watson's first round as well as the possibility of Tiger Woods missing the cut played out before him at Turnberry. Yet it's doubtful this is really what he was seeing. There were simply too many unfulfilled storylines in his way.

Fifteen years earlier, the last time an Open was played at Turnberry, a young, flamboyant Swede, with the unique turned up bill on his cap came so close to a life event that would have changed everything. Certainly it would have changed his present locale. Jesper sat there in a white rented folding chair, the type you'd see at an outdoor wedding, munching granola and yogurt as he watched the telecast. At 44 years old and ranked #450 in the World Golf Rankings, it's difficult to visualize the setting. Yet in 1994 the wispy swinging, Swedish phenom had one hand on the Claret Jug.

He remembers it all too well. This major field included eventual champion Nick Price, he of the into-the-wind hair style, Fuzzy Zoeller, a younger Watson, Faxon and Forsbrand, even TV golf's funny Irishman, David Feherty. As the final round drifted by the contenders fell away. Zoeller and his Kmart staff bag hit discounted shots, Watson experienced uncharacteristic back-to-back double bogies and Feherty got a few unsolicited laughs from a putter that failed him down the stretch. At day's end Parnevik stood on the eighteenth tee believing he needed birdie to kiss the Claret Jug. A par may have done it. His bogey altered golf history.

Inexplicably it was reported Jesper failed to look at a leader board to assess his position. Gambling for the birdie he thought he needed, his second shot from a decent lie in the second cut came up short of the tucked flagstick. Three shots later he picked his ball out of the hole, doffed his funny cap, and disappeared from major contention. Now he sat in a Park District clubhouse in Milwaukee waiting to follow his opening round of 70 with one that might give him a chance to make a cut.

He sat there for a few more minutes looking at the large screen television. Finally, perhaps having digested too many painful memories, he rose from his chair and headed off to do battle with players in an opposite field event, hardly a glorious task for one who had come so close to a major title. Sure, he has five career wins under that skinny belt. These days the flipped bill cap is gone. In its place rests a black, non-traditional fedora. Jesper's face is weathered from chasing dreams in the sun. His gaze is distant, perhaps searching for his magic touch from an earlier decade. Playing on a one-time Top Fifty Tour Money List exemption, the pressure of just keeping his card weighs on his narrow shoulders.

Golf is a fickle game. It cares not who you are, the type of clothes you wear or what equipment manufacturer is tattooed on the side of your bag. It cares only about numbers, preferably low numbers. It's hard to say where the man, who perhaps is better known for introducing Tiger Woods to his wife Elin, might end up. Once a top ranked player, a successful Ryder Cup member and recognizable talent at venues like Muirfield Village, Riviera, and Harbour Town, you have to hope this is not the last time we see Parnevik's name on a leader board. Unfortunately, barring a final hour miracle it may be the last time we catch him at Brown Deer Park watching televised coverage of an Open Championship. Indeed if Price didn't eagle his seventeenth hole that final round in 1994, Jesper might be playing across the pond thousands of miles away instead of struggling for his card at a minor PGA Tour event many locals still call the GMO.