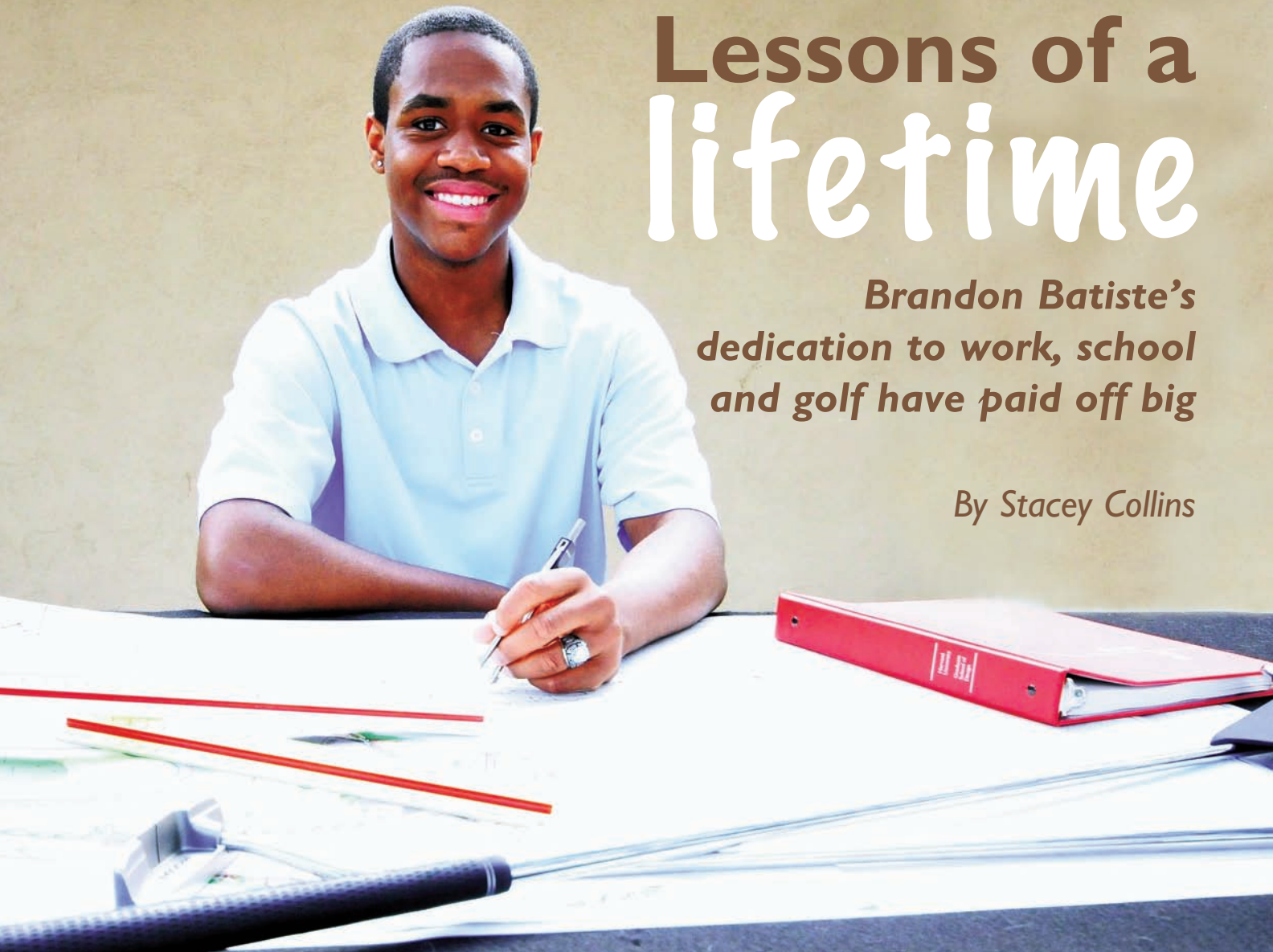


Lessons of a lifetime

Brandon Batiste's dedication to work, school and golf have paid off big

By Stacey Collins



Brandon Batiste is just 18 years old, but he knows a lot about golf. He started playing when he was 9 years old, and five years ago joined The First Tee of South Los Angeles. This program, sponsored by the SCGA Foundation, uses the game of golf to impact the lives of young people in high-risk areas. It provides educational programs which teach life-enhancing values.

"We hook them in with the golf game to learn life skills," said Betty Wimberly, director of the program. "It's that type of game."

A golfer herself, Wimberly emphasizes the time and commitment — playing on the course for four to five hours — that keeps students on the course and off the streets.

Batiste agreed and said golf changed his life for the better. He graduated with the class of 2009 at Gardena High School, where temptation and bad

influences are prevalent in the area. The golf course is "the place to keep me out of trouble," Batiste said. His closest friends are the ones he's made through golf.

When asked how he feels about golf, his fierce attachment to the game comes across.

"I love golf. It helps me through the daily challenges in life," Batiste said. "It takes me to another peace of mind, especially if there's stress."

Like any teenager, he has the pressure of juggling school work, keeping grades up, and working a part-time job, but he also experienced the painful separation of his parents. Hitting the links helped him overcome the hard times. "The golf course is the only quiet place I have to get my focus back," Batiste said. "I turned to golf to get through it."

Batiste impresses simply by being himself. Quietly confident and self-aware, he possesses a poise and a focus rare for young men his age. The first one in his

family to go to college, Batiste will be attending his dream school, the University of Texas at Arlington. A \$6,000 scholarship was awarded to Batiste by the SCGA Foundation. He considers the scholarship to be “a blessing,” because it will help him achieve his goal of becoming a civil engineer.

Only in its second year of inception, the scholarship program is designed to support the students’ education by providing funding for tuition, room and board, and educational supplies. The scholarships are based on academic and personal achievements, not golf ability, but all applicants are recommended by one of the SCGA

Foundation’s grantee organizations, such as The First Tee of South Los Angeles. This program has received more than

\$50,000 in the last six years from the Foundation.

Batiste flew to Kansas for The First Tee Leadership Academy the summer before his senior year. The only one from the area to attend, Batiste joined fellow golfers from around the world. Students learned golf skills while there, but more importantly gained an education on social and leaderships skills. His friends at camp were from countries as far as Asia. Although they learned golf lessons, the “whole focus was interacting with others,” Batiste said.

Clearly golf has been a healthy influence on his life. His passion for the game comes across in his understated way, and he has gratitude on all the gifts that the game has provided him. When asked what life skills Batiste learned from golf, he said it taught him to be a leader. “If you’re a leader,” Batiste said, “you can take on anything thrown at you.”

Batiste said golf is an interesting game. He couldn’t be more right.

In addition to Batiste, six additional students were awarded scholarships through the SCGA Foundation Scholarship Program. These individuals comprise a tremendous group — all of these students are very unique but are united by the love for the game and a desire to work hard to earn their college degree.

For their interviews with the scholarship committee, all students arrived on time, in business attire, and some drove up to three hours for their meeting. The committee was impressed with each candidate’s ability to communicate their goals, passion for golf, how they overcame obstacles, and the impact the scholarship would make in their lives.

Gary Nelson II, a member of Grandfathers for Golf, attends Mt. San Jacinto College and works at Soboba Springs Golf Course. He would like to transfer to CSU San Bernardino and become a physical education teacher, or “start a program for children with special needs like myself” to play golf.

“The golf course is the only quiet place I have to get my focus back.”

— **Brandon Batiste**

Michelle Hoefker is a recent graduate of San Luis Obispo High School and plans to attend Cal Poly San Luis Obispo to study business and marketing. A member of The First Tee of the Central Coast, she is passionate about golf and regularly volunteers at The First Tee.

Mark Taylor, a member at Pro Kids Golf Academy, attends Helix Charter High School and plans to attend San Diego State University to study Physical Therapy. He volunteered 100 hours of community service at Pro Kids last year

while also being active in school and community clubs.

Cameron Scott, a 2008 scholarship recipient, is a fifth-year student at UC San Diego studying Visual Art/Media/Film. He has been a member at Pro Kids Golf Academy in San Diego since seventh grade, where he works on weekends as a golf course starter.

Jose Valdez is a member of The Tiger Woods Learning Center and is finishing his first year at Fullerton Community College. He currently interns at The Tiger Woods Learning Center.

Brent Edelman of Paso Robles High School plans to attend the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in the fall to study aerospace engineering. He has been a member of The First Tee of the Central Coast since 2003 and would like to become “a force for good” with his work. ■

Touch a student’s life...

If you or your company would like to contribute to the SCGA Foundation’s Scholarship Program, please contact foundation@scga.org or call (800) 554-7242. Your entire contribution can go directly to supporting the student’s education.

