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posted September 13, 1997

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Robert Damron gets bent out of shape more from errant shots than from the pressures of playing with the big boys on Sunday.

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Rookie Robert Damron has a veteran attitude

By [Patrick Cohn](#)
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Many PGA Tour rookies who qualify for the PGA Tour via tour school never play well enough to retain their playing privileges. They play well enough to get on tour, but once they get there it's not what they expected. For different reasons, many rookies do not keep their playing privileges on the PGA Tour. More than half (24) of the rookies lost their cards in 1996 and even more in 1995 (30). Many of these players become intimidated by the likes of Norman, Price, Watson, and other great players. Watching these players on TV and then having to play with them can be a frightening experience. Other players just don't have confidence in themselves that they can go head to head with Norman or Faldo on Sunday afternoon. You also see rookies on tour who fiddle with their swing and try to "swing like a tour player" instead going with the swing that got them on tour. Whatever the reason, many players never reach their potential or play well enough to retain their playing card for the following year.

Robert Damron is a rookie with a different attitude than most. Ranked in the top 50 on the 1997 money list, he decided that he was good enough to be a regular tour player and see himself as a tour player even before the season began. His goal wasn't to just make it to the PGA Tour; he felt he was good enough to win on tour. Damron states: "I said to myself I am good enough to make it through the tour school and I am good enough to earn my way on tour, so I'm good enough to stay on tour." Other rookies take a different approach to being on tour--they are just satisfied to be playing. He looks at himself as a mainstay for years to come. "You know, there is no reason why I can't keep playing on the PGA Tour the rest of my life

and win my share of tournaments."

At first, making it through tour school was a dream come true for Robert. But when it came time to play with the big boys, he understood that he must accept that he is a tour player.

"When I first got my tour card, I couldn't believe I'm on tour. It was like a dream, but then I committed myself to think that I am a tour player. I tried to just accept it, I am a tour player and I am going to go do my job. And that helped me focus myself on just doing my job."

Rookies worry if they fit in and feel they have something to prove before other players will accept them, which makes it hard to focus on doing their job. But Robert believed that he is accepted. "I play with some pretty good players out here and have never felt intimidated," he said.

Many unknowns or rookies play themselves into contention on Saturdays and then shoot 76 on Sunday. Playing well in contention on Sunday is the hardest thing to do for many players. Robert has handled himself well when he gets into contention. He is genuinely confident in his game because he has played well on Sunday. He said, "So far I have held together on Sunday, I haven't let the score board or the player's intimidate me, and I've been pretty comfortable with my surroundings late Sunday. That just helps my own confidence."

What a difference a year makes. A year ago Robert was playing on the mini-tours trying to raise his game to another level. His confidence has skyrocketed and he is not just whispering to himself that he is good enough to play the tour.

"I didn't make any specific changes but I am showing up on Sunday and this shows me that it's a genuine confidence because I am holding together. It reinforces my confidence in me. I must really believe in myself, I must really be good because I am holding together on Sunday. I'm not just telling myself I am a great player, I actually deep inside believe it."

You think you have a good game after surviving tour school and getting a chance to play on tour. You believe you are a good player when you play well on tour and make a good

check on Sunday. You know you can play when you get in contention on Sunday, go head to head with the best, finish in the top ten four times in 15 tries (including two 3rd place finishes), and make almost a half million dollars. That is confidence of a veteran tour player.

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