

Separated by life, bonded by golf



Pete Kowalski

In a classic opposites attract model, Tug Maude and John Sawin have forged a lifelong brother-like relationship that began on the practice range at a junior clinic at Merion Golf Club.

"Tug was a whole lot bigger," said Sawin. "He'd already had his growth spurt and was 6-feet tall and hitting the ball over the fence. I was a lot smaller and could barely hit it out of my shadow."

Aside from the physical differences at the time, the burly Maude was the hard-to-miss extrovert and the lithe Sawin was a self-proclaimed introvert.

"From my perspective, Tug was the coolest kid in school," said Sawin. "All the girls wanted to hang around with him. I thought, 'How do I become friends with this guy?' He said come join the golf team when I could actually help the golf team as a seventh grader. That was a huge confidence booster that Tug took me under his wing."

As former teammates at The Haverford School with deep résumés in the Golf Association of Philadelphia (GAP), the pair could not live farther apart with Maude in Atlanta and Sawin in Pebble Beach.

Both have made golf an intrinsic part of their lives. Sawin just experienced a historic week in his career as the U.S. Women's Open was contested last week for the first time at Pebble Beach Golf Links, where he is vice president and director of golf and served as general chairman of the USGA Championship. Maude, after a post-college career as a pro, serves as the director of market development at Intown Golf Club, a private social club in downtown Atlanta, and plays a competitive schedule that includes many of the high-profile events for elite mid-amateurs.

Maude, 40, and Sawin, 38, traversed the world of golf with Maude two years ahead.

They both believe that their college years were the most influential on their friendship – Maude graduated from Wake Forest in 2005 and Sawin from Princeton in 2007.

"We spent more time together in college than any other parts of our lives because we were competing full-time," Sawin said.



John Sawin at Pebble Beach for 2023 U.S. Women's Open preview

JED JACOBSON, USGA



Tug Maude at the 2018 U.S. Amateur Four-Ball
DARREN CARROLL, USGA

Maude was the GAP Player of the Year in 2005 and took the Patterson Cup the same year. Sawin, as a Princeton sophomore, won GAP's Silver Cross.

Maude agrees: "We were caddieing at Gulph Mills, we were playing the GAP events, the PA golf events. There were a ton of reasons why we were together. It was a pretty cool little stretch."

While they each have decorated careers, they both remember, with deep disappointment, not qualifying for the 2005 U.S. Amateur at Merion Golf Club. In fact, both ended up caddieing at that Amateur for friends.

"That's a sore spot," Sawin

said. "We were both playing some of the best golf of our careers that summer. There were really high expectations for us going into the qualifier."

Later that summer, Maude moved to Sea Island, Georgia, to play golf professionally after his graduation from Wake Forest. He suffered from injuries in his time at Wake and was not able to play for the Demon Deacons.

Sawin would visit Sea Island as Maude worked on his game with residents the likes of Chris Kirk, Brendan Todd, Brandt Snedeker, Davis Love III, Zach Johnson, Jonathan Byrd and Lucas Glover.

After seeing the level of play of that crew, Sawin reacted accordingly: "When I saw that I figured I better keep going to class and interview for jobs."

Maude, still playing mini tours, was in attendance when Sawin won his only college event at the 2007 Princeton Invitational, where he edged out Keegan Bradley of St. John's for the win.

As their lives broadened with careers, marriages and children, the duo still attempted to maintain touch – through golf, of course.

"We created an event that we held every two years at Merion," Sawin said. "The combination of COVID and my new job kind of killed that. It was called the Wicker Cup and it was a great way to get my West Coast friends and Tug's southeast friends together."



Maude (left) and Sawin team up to reach the round of 16 in the 2018 U.S. Amateur Four-Ball.

USGA

They were both good for each other's games. Among Sawin's victories is the 2014 Pennsylvania Amateur, where he beat legendary mid-amateur Nathan Smith in the final round. Maude won the Pennsylvania Mid-Am in 2021.

"We made for some really good practice partners because our games were so different," Sawin said. "Tug hit it long, could scramble, and was an athletic, point-and-shoot kind of player. I was more cerebral, a little straighter and more consistent. So, we balanced each other out. I learned how to hit it farther and make more birdies from Tug and he learned how to hit it straighter from me."

In typical fashion, Maude countered: "It took a while since I'm a slow learner."

Their most recent competitive experiences together were in 2022 at the [Bridges Cup](#) at Nine Bridges in Jeju, South Korea, and the [East West Matches](#) at Maridoe Golf Club in Dallas in back-to-back weeks. Additionally, Maude played three events in three weeks with an appearance at the [Concession Cup](#) in Spain.

Both admitted that they connect in "waves" but realize that life itself can be a barrier for friends whose children call them "Uncle John" and "Uncle Tug." They both rue the fact that each other's children have not yet met.

"In between those times, I probably spend more time on the phone with Tug than anyone else in the world besides my parents," Sawin said. "We keep in good touch."

To which Maude doubled down: "John's a brother to me. My kids call him Uncle John and I'm Uncle Tug to his kids. John is my longest friend."

Family obligations prevented Maude from visiting his friend during the U.S. Women's Open. But as sure as Maude is long and Sawin is straight, you can bet they'll talk all about it.

[E-MAIL PETE](#)

Top: Haverford teammates John Sawin (left) and Tug Maude at Merion Golf Club in 2005

COURTESY JOHN SAWIN