

Child's Play

'Koala' Karl Vilips isn't going to shoot his age anytime soon, yet he can tie his laces as easily as he can drain 30-foot putts. **Luke Dodemaide** gets schooled by golf's brightest 10-year-old...

Karl Vilips bounces in from the distance, like a pitched-shot announcing itself on the green. "Hi," he says, with a hop in his step. "I'm Karl." You may not know who he is, and just why we're talking to him, but you will soon enough. This is the boy with the matured swing of a veteran three times his age, and the scorecards to envy. Recently, he shot a 79 at the Southern Golf Club. And there, he says, he putted badly due to the greens being freshly cored. In short—no taller than five foot—this two-time under-10s world champion is on pace with Tiger Woods, and leaves prodigies like Rory McIlroy in his wake. This is a little boy going places. So Karl flashes an unfulfilled smile, a few adult teeth there and a few baby teeth missing, and scoots back into the clubhouse before anybody else. "He's so competitive," his father, Paul, says. Potential never achieved so much before its 11th birthday. Vilips may be the next big thing, but he certainly is small.

Paul Vilips sits quietly in the clubrooms. He hasn't worked for a number of years, and survives on a disability pension. Yet, almost defiantly, when talking he tends to use the word "ultra-portable" quite a bit. And it is true; the Vilipses—made up of a father and a son—certainly do get around. "We were in Perth," Paul says. "Being in my situation, we're able to move... *ultra-portable*. I don't have a wife or anything else to worry about, nothing rooting us

down to anything in particular, and we thought we'd check each of the major cities and see what was best." Vagabonds looking for their next 18 holes. "In Sydney, Karl wasn't allowed to play with children his own age," he says. In Perth and Queensland, they just didn't have the support. So here they are in Melbourne, where they've been made honorary members of the Southern Golf Club. "You know, sometimes all the planets come into alignment," Paul says. "So my situation, as dire as it was, had the silver lining of us being able to explore the best options for Karl." The boy will drift down here for about an hour after school, hit a few balls, and be off. Just two weeks ago, he was at Pinehurst No. 8, North



Carolina, where he just won his most recent under-10s world championship. Karl had to get sponsorship from the Southern Golf Club to cover that trip. He had missed the year before, unable to defend his title for financial reasons, and the club members gave him a chance to go back and reclaim the title he never lost. In the budget, there was just enough for Subway for lunch and dinner. Every day. "I hate Subway," Karl says. No ordinary kid.

Last year, he won 12 events ('gross' and 'net')—competing against 14-year-olds. Not bad for a career that began on mishits. Shanks at a Perth golf course, which couldn't make it on the driving range's expansive

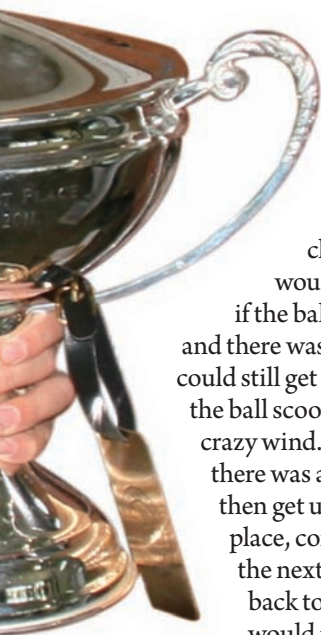
fairway, found their way into Karl's five-year-old arms.

"When we would go to find balls," he said. "We would have this ball scoop.

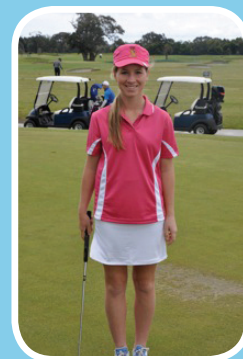
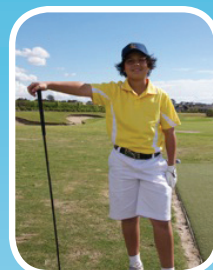
And if my dad couldn't climb under a branch, he would get me to do it. And if the ball was a long way away, and there was branches blocking, I could still get under... I would use the ball scoop. That course was crazy wind. It was really bushy, and there was an ocean." Karl would then get up from under his hiding place, come back to the course the next day and sell those balls back to the club. The price would range from 30 cents to a dollar—"Sometimes more on

eBay!"—and he used the money to buy his first set of clubs. He took those and began swinging at the golf ball like he once had to his tee ball. At age six, he won his first event in Perth, the Royal Fremantle Junior Open and backed it up by winning the Mandurah Bowl at the Mandurah Country Club—both against eight-year-olds. Then at eight, he won 12 events—often competing in the under-14 division. There he really began to take off. Karl added discipline to his pocket-rocket power—now able to blast it 200 metres—and a short game to his repertoire. After winning the world championship held at Pinehurst, on his second attempt, he became a bona fide prodigy. At the Callaway Junior Worlds in 2009, he hit a hole-in-one at Sycuan Resort, San Diego. "Driving and long putts are my strength," he says, and admits to rushing the occasional three-footer in a big tournament. While that is by no means a problem causing him to resort to a belly putter—"It would go up to here!" he says, reaching far beyond his head—it is simply an example of a 10 year-old displaying the patience, and attention-to-detail, of a 10 year-old.

"I don't watch a lot of golf," Karl says. "This morning I watched *Ben10*. And tomorrow I'm going to watch *Transformers: The Dark Side of the Moon*—which I'm really excited about." And when talking about golf courses, he occasionally draws childlike comparisons to those he enjoys. "Pinehurst No. 8 is probably better than Pinehurst No. 2. I think I liked No. 8 more than Disney Land. But in America, there's this theme park called 'Soak City', which is the best."



CENTIMETRE PERFECT Vilips possesses power that belies his size.



SANDLOT KID Vilips plays in a different kind of sand to most of his classmates.



Clearly, he gives you more in an interview than Tiger Woods ever did. Who he tells me (almost by-the-way) is a guy he has met. "I didn't say much. My favourite player in the world is whoever is No. 1. So, Luke Donald." Donald is someone he may too get the chance to brush shoulders with at Australian Masters this year, where he will play the Pro-Am and attend as the No. 1 ticketholder.

"I understand most parents are seeking how far they can push their kids," Paul says. "I'm focusing on him enjoying it." Karl's body may yet grow into his game; and he may yet grow into Australia's next great golfer, though it is worth remembering, for now, he is just a kid carrying a set of clubs across the globe. "I love it," Karl says. "I just want to play." ■

Where Were They Then...

Tiger Woods

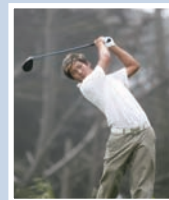
As far as prodigious young sporting talents are concerned, it is just about impossible to look past the iconic Tiger Woods. Introduced to the game by his father at age two, many expected the young Tiger to succeed following his early magazine and television appearances. Tiger went on to win six Junior World Golf Championships including four straight from 1988-1991. He followed up these victories by becoming the youngest ever player to win both the U.S. Junior Amateur and U.S. Amateur Championships as well as compile a glittering college career at Stanford University. After a lazy 14 majors and over hundred worldwide tournament victories, it seems that Tiger has done more than enough to justify his early promise.



to his inclusion in various European junior Ryder and Walker Cup teams. In late 2008, Rory became the youngest player ever to break into the top-50 in the World Golf Ranking (a record later broken Ryo Ishikawa and Matteo Manesaro) as well as pick up his first European Tour victory at the Dubai Desert Classic a few months later.

Danny Lee

In 2008, South Korean born Kiwi Danny Lee became the youngest ever player at 18 years of age to win the U.S. Amateur Championship (a record held previously by Tiger Woods). Lee also holds the record the longest reign as the world's number one amateur with a 34-week stay at the top before he turned pro in 2009. Still 18 at the time, Lee's greatest career achievement to date came as a swashbuckling young amateur where he managed to hold off a strong field to win the 2009 Johnnie Walker Classic in Perth. Unfortunately, Lee has had an inconsistent tenure on the European tour as well as having failed to secure a card for the US PGA Tour. Currently a member of the Nationwide Tour, Lee hopes to bounce back and hopefully play his way onto the main tour.

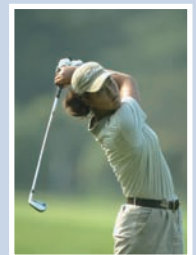


Prior to his senior college year in 2004, Moore won the U.S. Amateur, Western Amateur, U.S. Amateur Public Links, NCAA Division I Championship as well as the Sahalee Players Championship.

Moore has perhaps under performed since he turned pro in 2005 having been stifled by injury as well as inconsistent form. However, Moore managed to secure his first and only PGA tour victory to date at the 2009 Wyndham Championship and has placed in the top 35 of the money list for the past three seasons—suggesting that maybe he can live up to his early career promise.

Michelle Wie

Has there ever been any female golfer that has carried more expectation and hype than the 'Big Wie-asy'? In 2000, at the tender age of ten, she became the youngest player ever to qualify for the Women's U.S. Amateur Public Links Championship. As a teenager, Wie also went on to break various LPGA records; including being the youngest player to ever qualify for an event as well the youngest to ever make a cut. Still only 21-years-old, Wie could be mistaken for a Tour veteran given the time she has spent in the spotlight of women's golf. Now the holder of two LPGA tour victories, the first of which coming in 2009 at the Lorena Ochoa Invitational, Wie has taken steps towards living up to the mammoth expectation.



Rory McIlroy

Yet another young golfer burdened with the 'next Tiger' moniker. The Northern Irishman has lived up to early promise by securing his maiden major victory at the 2011 U.S. Open at Congressional, ousting Aussie Jason Day by a whopping eight shots. A former amateur world No. 1, McIlroy enjoyed unrivalled amateur success in Europe claiming five wins in his teens. This led



Ryan Moore

Perhaps one of the most successful amateur golfers of all time, Ryan Moore can be credited with having one of the greatest amateur seasons on record.



BRAD BACK IN THE SWING

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Brad Kennedy plans on the Japan Golf Tour

The rigours of elite golf can take their toll on a player, as Sanctuary Cove touring professional Brad Kennedy knows only too well. The treadmill of constant tournaments, living out of a suitcase and dealing with jetlag can sap the energy levels of even the fittest of sportsmen.

Brad has been dealing with all of that for the 14 years he has been a professional golfer, but two years ago he found an answer to the fatigue. He started taking the natural herbal tonic G'Wellness and says he has never felt better.

"It has lifted my energy levels in general but it has also helped with my recovery from training," Brad says. "I follow a much more physically demanding training program than I used to and I find I can do a session in the

afternoon and still feel fresh to play golf the next morning."

G'Wellness, manufactured by D'G Biocare Group, is a preservative-free, natural wellness tonic made according to the ancient principles of Siddha Medicine.

Brad binned all the multivitamins and other supplements he used to take and now relies solely on G'Wellness to keep him physically and mentally alert.

Brad's improved sense of wellbeing is also paying dividends on the course. "I never thought I'd make it to the British Open or perform so well on the Japanese tour. It was only after I'd started taking G'Wellness, that I gained that competitive edge which now sees me playing the best golf of my life!"

Last November Brad won his first Australian PGA title, the WA Open, and in June this year posted a top-three

finish in the lucrative Japan Golf Tour Championship Citibank Cup.

"That's down to a combination of things," Brad says of his run of good form, "but G'Wellness has certainly helped. Golf is a tough game and I'm not getting any younger so it has helped me get physically where I need to be."

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D'G BIOCARE GROUP OFFICE
 Shop G9c, 47 Ashmore Road,
 Bundall, QLD, 4217
 Phone: 07 5699 9910
 or 1800 220 061
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 www.dgbiocaregroup.com

