In college they were known as Buffie, Schizo, and Pooh Bear. Not exactly Mo, Larry, and Curly, though the three certainly shared plenty of laughs, toasts, and impromptu shenanigans.
It didn’t start that way for Tim Petrovic ’88, Jerry Kelly ’89, and Patrick Sheehan ’92. In fact, the University of Hartford teammates could be downright testy with each other. Like at the opening tournament of their one spring season together in 1988, when Sheehan, the upstart freshman, and Kelly, the free-spirited junior, got into a verbal joust. Yet today they are one of only seven trios from the same college team to play in the major leagues of professional golf (see box, page 23).

Fifteen years and many miles in the minors have passed, but Petrovic, Kelly, and Sheehan remember their Hartford days when they were team captains and cover boys on media guides. And they haven’t forgotten the role that the University played in their lives.

Kelly is an honorary chair of the Home Field Advantage arm of the University’s $175 million Campaign of Commitment. Joining him as honorary chairpersons are fellow former Hartford sports stars Jeff Bagwell ’90 (baseball) and Vin Baker ’93 (basketball); current women’s basketball coach and former National Collegiate Player of the Year, Jennifer Rizzotti; and NBA Hall of Famer K. C. Jones. The Home Field Advantage will provide funding for new athletic fields on campus. When Pat Meiser-McKnett, the University’s director of athletics, asked him to be on the board, Kelly says he decided, “It would be nice to try to give back. I did get a good business degree out of the school and sure had fun.” Kelly received about $100,000 in November for playing in his first international golf competition, the Presidents Cup, and donated a significant portion of the prize to his alma mater to support the Home Field Advantage.

In addition to his Campaign of Commitment donation, Kelly is discussing with Petrovic and Sheehan a joint gift to sustain and expand the University’s golf program, according to Meiser-McKnett. The three want to ensure that future University of Hartford alumni will be seen on the PGA tour for many years to come.

Anyone who has followed Petrovic’s career, says Gargano, can see how that strong belief in himself has gotten the golfer where he is today.

Stan Domian, who was the golf coach at Hartford in the late 1980s, says the team always provided surprises and anxious moments. But Petrovic, Kelly, and Sheehan each showed that the talent was there. “Tim was always serious because, from the start, he wanted to make something of golf,” says Domian. “His endurance has been amazing. A sane person would have given up, but he stuck with it.”

From left: Jay Sondhi, Dave Gunas, Tim Petrovic, Patrick Sheehan, Jerry Kelly—the 1988 golf team

“We were the misfits, or Bad News Bears, as I called us. We all had different personalities, but we had a lot of good times.”
Petrovic: A Late Bloomer
Petrovic started playing golf seriously during his sophomore year at Glastonbury High School in Glastonbury, Conn., and applied to Houston and Florida State, both collegiate powerhouses in golf. Then, coach Gargano showed up for a match at Glastonbury Hills Country Club and liked what he saw in Petrovic. Florida State was up in the air, Petrovic recalls, “so when Hartford offered me a scholarship, I said, ‘Why not?’ I got to play in my own backyard, and Hartford turned Division I that year [1984], which was perfect because I wanted to play at the highest level. I went into Hartford as a boy and left as a man. There were big-time changes in everything in my life.”

When he arrived at the University, Petrovic wasn’t sure how good he could be. Countless hours spent beating balls on the driving range at Blackledge Country Club in Hebron, Conn., helped improve his game. Then, winning the New England Amateur in 1986 had him feeling that pro golf might be for him. He won four of seven tournaments that fall, including the Yale Invitational. Still, the PGA Tour remained a pipe dream.

“Nobody talked about the tour. We were the misfits, or Bad News Bears, as I called us. We all had different personalities, but we had a lot of good times.”

Petrovic turned pro in 1988 and took 13 years to qualify for the PGA Tour, with stops in Australia, Canada, and the American developmental tours. Along the way, he delivered The Hartford Courant, sold cell phones, and managed a Pizza Hut in Tampa, Fla. Having Kelly and Sheehan on the PGA Tour with him, he said, is impressive. “You get a lot of guys from the same school, but you don’t very often have three who were on the same team,” Petrovic says.

In his rookie tour season in 2002, Petrovic finished second in the St. Jude Classic and won $797,206, making him 114th on the PGA money list for that year. In 2003 he finished in the top 10 in four tournaments and moved to 36th in winnings ($1,739,349), earning his first start in the legendary Masters Tournament for April 2004. With that achievement came a temporary membership at prestigious Augusta National Golf Club in August, Ga., the official home of the Masters, which began there in 1934. “I said I’d never go to the Masters until I played, and now I’m going,” Petrovic says. “It’s the hardest club to get in, and now my name is at the gate and I can waltz in and say, ‘Hey, how ya doing?’ It’s exciting.”

Kelly: No Hockey, Just Golf
Growing up in Madison, Wis., Kelly played golf and hockey. He came to Hartford largely because of the perseverance of Gargano, who flooded Kelly’s home and his father’s office with faxes and telephone calls. Hartford was one of Kelly’s last stops on an East Coast recruiting tour that included Vanderbilt, Duke, Clemson, Princeton, and Yale. He wanted to play golf and also become part of a Division I hockey program, but before he arrived, Hartford decided not to form a hockey team. So Kelly played for the golf team, which had reached the NCAA tournament the previous spring.

“None of us were too serious, but if I had to choose which three would make it on the PGA Tour, it would be us three.”

Though Kelly clashed with Petrovic and Sheehan at first, their stick-to-itiveness off the course produced a special appreciation for one another. “Jerry is a very tough individual who doesn’t take anything from anybody, which is a pretty admirable personality trait and why he’s done so well,” Petrovic says, alluding to Kelly’s winning his first two PGA Tour titles in 2002 and finishing sixth on the money list with $2,946,889.

“Jerry was outrageous, just wild, and not afraid of anybody,” adds Sheehan. “Both he and Tim were very confident in their own skin, but Tim was very low key with a dry, warped sense of humor.”

The University honored Jerry Kelly with a reception at the home of President Walter Harrison in June 2002. Shown left to right are Pat Meiser-McKnett, director of athletics; Tim Petrovic; President Harrison; and Kelly.

Kelly says the year [1993] that he and Petrovic spent together on the Nike Tour helped both, especially after Petrovic nearly won the first event in Yuma, Calif. “It spurred me to be Player of the Year [in 1995] and gave him additional direction,” says Kelly, who joined the PGA Tour in 1996. “And it was great to see Tim come back [in 2000] because he had gone back into the abyss. It’s when you get there and get a taste, and then you lose it and come back, how you take that. That’s when you find out who the guys are with heart. Do you give up or try harder?”
Kelly didn’t win in 2003, but he finished in the top 10 in 10 tournaments and earned $2,158,342, increasing his career winnings to nearly $9 million. His performance earned him the spot in the Presidents Cup, which was held in George, South Africa.

Sheehan: Basically a Walk-on
Sheehan grew up in Warwick, R.I., and concentrated on baseball before beginning to take golf seriously in high school. After spending countless hours on the driving range at Potowomut Golf Club in East Greenwich, R.I., he won the state junior title, was named All-State, and had success in a number of national events.

He came to the University, “mainly because of coach Gordon McCullough, who died after my sophomore year.” Sheehan says. “He called me a lot, and I liked the school. I wasn’t a good enough player to get any scholarships, so I was basically a walk-on. He said I could try out, and I was lucky because I ended up starting right away.”

While a freshman, Sheehan says he followed Petrovic and Kelly around “like a dog. Everybody was different, and that’s what was great about our team. We had some fights and we had some good times, but no matter what happened, when it was over, we were still together.”

“No one really knew what to make of Sheehan at first.”

Petrovic says, “We thought, ‘What’s this guy all about?’ We gave him the rookie ribbings and pulled some practical jokes to try to make him play harder, but we quickly learned he could tee it up.”

Asked the odds of three guys from the same Hartford team playing on the PGA Tour at the same time, Sheehan chuckles. “We were a pretty close bunch and hung out together a lot,” he says, “but I never dreamed we’d be on the tour when we were in college.

“Tim was talking about going overseas, and he did go to Australia. He definitely had a plan, but he and I took a long time to get [to the PGA Tour], so it’s weird how it all played out.” Sheehan, who turned pro in 1992, joined the tour in 2003.

Sheehan’s rookie season “played out” well enough to put him among the top 125 money winners on the tour. “I’m really getting up in the world,” says Sheehan, who won $618,019 and placed 104th on the PGA money list in 2003. “It was a very successful year, but with room for improvement. I wasn’t disappointed because I know you always have to take the good with the bad. And I achieved my number-one goal: finishing in the top 125.”

Like his former teammates, Kelly says he isn’t surprised that all three are on the tour. “None of us were too serious, but if I had to choose which three would make it on the PGA Tour, it would be us three,” Kelly says.

The only colleges with at least three players on the same team to play on the PGA Tour:

**BRIGHAM YOUNG:** Keith Clearwater, Rick Fehr, Richard Zokol, Bobby Clampett

**GEORGIA TECH:** David Duval, Charlie Rymer, Jimmy Johnston, Michael Clark II

**UNIVERSITY OF HARTFORD:** Jerry Kelly, Tim Petrovic, Patrick Sheehan

**OHIO STATE:** Jack Nicklaus, Tom Weiskopf, Ed Sneed

**UCLA:** Corey Pavin, Steve Pate, Duffy Waldorf, Jay Delsing

**UNLV:** Edward Fryatt, Chris Riley, Chad Campbell

**WAKE FOREST:** Curtis Strange, Jay Haas, Scott Hoch

Source: 2003 PGA Tour