

# A Summer on the LPGA Tour

By Scott Wendels

After graduating from UW-Madison on May 13<sup>th</sup> this past spring with a B.S. degree in Soil Science with a specialty in turf management, I headed for the Milwaukee airport to start my new job. I flew to Nashville, Tennessee to start caddying for my sister, Shelley Wendels, in the U.S. Women's Open qualifier. Shelley is a professional golfer on the LPGA tour. She missed qualifying for the Open at Old Waverly by one stroke, so the Open will have to wait until next year in Chicago.

My first official LPGA tournament of the summer was in Austin, Texas the next day, so I jumped onto a plane and headed for the

lone star state. The weather was hot and humid, in the 90's all week. I learned a valuable lesson in Austin. The sun is much harsher than it is in Wisconsin. My legs went from out of bounds stakes to lateral water hazard stakes in a day! I suffered second degree burns on my legs in one short day. That happened on a Thursday, so I was forced to wear pants for the rest of the week in the 90( heat. Shelley made the cut in Austin, so my second degree burns were worth it.

After Austin I flew home to Fond du Lac and had two weeks off, which I spent working at Rolling Meadows on the maintenance staff.

Dave Brandenburg allowed me to work on my off weeks to help keep my brain fresh on maintenance practices and earn some extra money. I would like to thank Dave for allowing me to work when I was home and also allowing me to come and go when I needed to. Thanks again Dave.

After the two-week vacation from the tour, it was time for Shelley and me to leave for a five-week road trip. We loaded up her 1999 Dodge Grand Caravan and headed for Rochester, New York. Shelley and I switched off driving so the 12-hour trip didn't seem too long. Once we arrived in Rochester it was off to meet the family that

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The caddies doing their Monday duty of walking the golf course and checking yardages and green sweeps and breaks.



Me caddying in McDonald's Tournament practice round.

was nice enough to house us for the week. Shelley and I arrived at the house and found that our hosts had three cats. Shelley is allergic to cats, so we headed off to find a hotel. We found a Red Roof Inn that was our home for the week. While in Rochester, I got the opportunity to play Oak Hill, site of the 1998 U.S. Amateur. Shelley's 23rd place finish was her best of the year. Right after she finished her round on Sunday it was time to load up the car and head out to Atlantic City for the next tournament.

Atlantic City was not one of my favorite cities that I visited this summer. It was dirty and very expensive, except around the casinos. The boardwalk was very pretty and worth the walk down. While in Atlantic City I was able to change cups on the practice green and on the 18th hole. I met the superintendent and was asked if I wanted to work in the mornings before I had to caddy. I turned him down because I wasn't sure if I was allowed inside the ropes before I caddied on tournament days. I later found out that I am allowed inside the ropes, but not allowed on the greens. The gambling casinos were nice to me that week in

Atlantic City; I left a winner.

Next stop was the third major of the year, the McDonald's LPGA Championship in Wilmington, Delaware. The DuPont Country Club was in fantastic shape and one of the nicest courses I have seen since Pumpkin Ridge in Portland, Oregon, home of the 1997 Women's U.S. Open. Shelley missed the cut here so we left Sunday morning for Toledo, Ohio.

Toledo was the site of the Jamie Farr Kroger Classic. While Shelley was playing in the Monday Pro Am she met Jamie Farr, but didn't know who he was. She just knew that he looked like the guy "Klinger" on MASH. She was later informed that the man that looked like Klinger was in fact Jamie Farr, the host of the tournament. On Thursday Shelley had a good start to the tournament, shooting 68, which put her two strokes off of the lead. Second day jitters took over and she finished that tournament in 50th place and we learned a little on how to handle the pressure of being in the top ten. When the pressure builds up next time, we will be better prepared to stay in the hunt and chase the leader effectively. St. Louis was the next stop on the tour so it was time to



Jan Stephenson putting.

pack the minivan and head to the gateway to the West.

St. Louis was a tough week for me as a caddy. Shelley was not playing well and the five weeks of living out of a suitcase was getting to both of us. The life of a professional golfer is not as glamorous as it seems. You are in a different city each week, sleeping in a different bed, eating at restaurants, and away from your family and close



My sister Shelley.

friends back home. Shelley missed the cut here in St. Louis, so it was time to head home for a week off.

My week was spent working at Rolling Meadows and Shelley's week was spent practicing and getting a lesson from her golf coach. The off week flew by and soon it was timed to head to Warren, Ohio.

Warren was the site of the annual caddy tournament for the tour caddies. I played in the tournament and took fourth place. The tournament was a lot of fun and a chance for me to get to play golf instead of just watching and carrying the bag. Shelley missed the cut in Warren so we headed to Milwaukee to catch a plane to Calgary, Alberta, Canada, for the fourth major tournament of the year, the du Maurier Classic.

The du Maurier Classic was held at Priddis Greens Golf and Country Club, by far the best golf course I have ever seen. Priddis Greens was in excellent shape. The golf course was located in the heart of the Canadian Rockies. The views were breathtaking and no pictures did them justice. Priddis Greens was a



Jan Stephenson trying out a new putter.

tough but fair golf course, unlike some courses I have been on. The rough was long so hitting the fairway was a necessity and the greens were fast but fair. My other sister Angie joined Shelley and me for the trip. It was nice having a familiar face in the crowd for Shelley and myself. While in Calgary the three of us went down the Luge track from the 1988 Olympics, whitewater rafting on the longest stretch of class four rapids and saw a lot of beautiful scenery. Calgary was one of my favorite places that I visited this summer.

Boston was the next on the schedule, so Shelley and I headed for Boston and Angie headed home to Fond du Lac. While in Boston I had the opportunity to go to a player/caddy clambake. I learned that there is a right way and a wrong way to eat a clam. My first bite was a lot of grit; I didn't know I had to clean the clam off before I ate it! Boston was a great place to visit too, but I do not think I would want to live there.

Twelve hundred miles later we arrived in Springfield, Illinois. Shelley played well enough to hang

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in there with Nancy Lopez and had the honor of playing with her in the second round of the tournament. It was a great experience to walk down the fairway with a legend like Mrs. Lopez. Shelley and I learned a lot from Nancy. We quickly learned why she is so good by watching the way she handles herself around the golf course. Nancy was a great inspiration to both my sister and me; we will always treasure the experience. Caddying for Shelley in the same group with Nancy Lopez was by far the highlight of the summer.

The next two tournaments were held on the West Coast in Washington and Oregon. The first stop on the West Coast was Seattle, Washington for the Safeco Classic. I had the opportunity to help set up the golf course for the tournament. I rode in a cart with LPGA rules official Robert O.; we picked out the pin placements and tee positions for the week of the tournament. Mr. O. gave me some good tips on setting up a golf course for a tournament which I am sure I will use a lot as a golf course superintendent someday. Shelley and I drove down to Portland, Oregon for the next tournament. We took the back way so we could see Mount Rainier and Mount St. Helens. The three-hour trip from Seattle to Portland took us nine hours, but the scenery made the extra time worth it.

Portland was a great week but not without reserve. I had the opportunity to play Pumpkin Ridge, drive a 1997 Hummer, and stay with the owners of Columbia Sportswear. Shelley shot 70 at the tournament on Friday of the tournament and was in tenth place after the first day. She was playing very well on the second day until the seventh hole where she hit a tree root. Already nursing a bad elbow, the sudden jolt caused her to lose all feeling in her right hand and arm. She was forced to with-

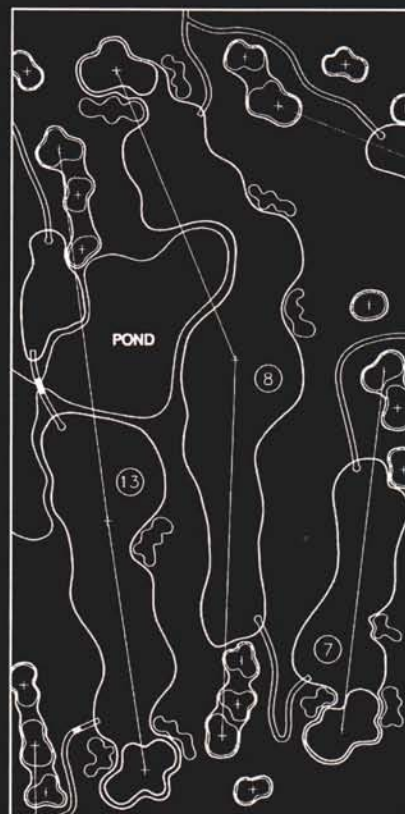
draw on the ninth hole when the pain got so bad she couldn't hold on to the club anymore. We went to the doctor and found out that there is severe tendinitis in her right elbow. Shelley had to withdraw from this week's tournament and next the week's also, in hopes that her elbow would be healed up for LPGA qualifying school October 19<sup>th</sup>-22<sup>nd</sup>.

My stint as an LPGA tour caddy will end at qualifying school in Daytona Beach, Florida on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of October. As an LPGA tour caddy my job description was quite diversified. Not only did I have to carry Shelley's bag but also at times I was expected to read greens, be a comedian, a psychologist, swing analyst, taxi driver, bell hop, a yardage detector, navigator and a scapegoat when things went wrong.

These past few months, Shelley and I have gotten to know each other better. We shared a lot of great times and some that we'd like to forget. The good ones outweigh the bad ones by far. I had the opportunity to go to work every day and love the job I was doing. I made many great friends, and learned first hand about life on the golf tour. I also learned that the tour life is a hard one. You are your own travel agent, only get paid when you play well, live out of a suitcase, and need to adjust to a strange city each week. I saw first hand that playing golf everyday, as your job, could be very fun and rewarding, but also very frustrating and trying.

Caddying this summer gave me a lot of chances to see different golf courses, different maintenance practices, talk to many superintendents, and see a lot of neat and interesting places. I had the opportunity to walk inside the ropes with the best women golfers in the world. This summer will be one I will never forget and, yes, my sister and I are still friends. ♣

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