

# Why Women Golf

*A Sport for Life* by Staci Martin



Meredith Badali, ODU senior, works on her stroke.

(Photo by Marshall Hoyle)

Whenever I drive down suburban streets in early spring, I'm amazed at the numbers of golfers willing to brave unpredictable cold fronts and blustery wind to get their first crack at the green after a winter indoors. Their colorful windbreakers and gleaming white carts peek through the trees. It always make me wonder at the wide appeal of the game of golf.

To the layperson golf is a game with the ultimate goal of hitting, as few times as possible, a small white dimpled ball. You must hit this small white ball across a rather long and narrow lawn, swinging a funny-shaped steel stick, into a hole—a hole not much bigger than a teacup—all the while avoiding tricks and traps like rough grass, trees, and sand. Never mind the spiked shoes, silly knickers, and patterned socks—golf is intriguing, if anything.

Golf lost its appeal for me when I came in last place of all high school players in the entire state of Wisconsin. Joining the golf team was meant to placate my parents; not wanting to play well was some kind of teenage rebellion—a rebellious act I somewhat regret. Of course, the golf season in Wisconsin is significantly shorter than here in Virginia, but lack of practice time aside, I simply wasn't into the game.

Recently I decided to revisit golf and talk with a few golfers to see if I might be able to rekindle my interest in the game.

## RELATIONSHIP BUILDING

Golf is a game of skill, passion, intellect, and relationships. It allows the player to focus on her own game and that of her fellow players. It is an intrinsic game that combines physical work with mental stimulation. According to the members of the Old Dominion University Women's Golf team, it is a game that builds inner-strength, confidence, and character—no matter what the player's level of expertise. Whether you are a beginner or seasoned pro, a youngster or retiree, golf in Hampton Roads offers something for everyone.

Meredith Badali, an ODU senior who plays for the university's golf team embodies the spirit of women's golf. She is a confident, spunky young woman out to make a difference in the world. Meredith started playing for the ODU Women's Golf team due to a chance meeting in the dorm elevator with fellow player Ashley Davis. "Ashley mentioned there was an opening on the team," she said, "and being impulsive, I decided to give it a try." After a session out at the driving range

with Coach Pat Kotten, she realized she had a lot of work to do.

Although Meredith hadn't played much golf before, she committed to lessons and training and found herself enjoying the game. "Golf built my confidence and helped me make new friendships," she said. Meredith put in hours and hours of hard work and found herself, with the support of newfound friends, on the team and competing in Division 1-A golf as a new player. Building new relationships and strengthening old ones seems to be a common theme among women golfers in the area.

Recently hired by Kay and John-Garret Kemper for a governmental relations position at Kemper Consulting in Norfolk, Meredith attributes the success of her interview to her interest in golf. She considers her fellow teammates lifelong friends and hopes to play golf with them throughout her new career. "Golf is a game of camaraderie," Meredith explained. "You can make new friends or plan golf trips with old friends. It

## Why Women Golf: A Sport for Life (cont.)

is great for relationship building in social circles and in business.”

Fellow golf team players echoed Meredith's sentiments on the impact the game of golf has and will continue to have on their lives. Laura Holmes, another ODU golf team member and dual major in sports management and marketing, came from Ireland to play college golf. “I love being out on the course,” she said. “To me, golf is relaxing. It is everything, every day. I've made friends from different universities and got to travel around. I mean you can play golf anywhere in the world.” She plans to try her hand at professional golf in the coming years.

### A SPORT FOR LIFE

For most players, the social aspects of golf are a big draw. The opportunity to socialize with bosses, play with old friends, or meet new people in the positive, competitive environment of a golf course is certainly better than the same in the neighborhood bar. However, for professionals in the sport, the game is so much more

Michelle Holmes, the women's golf pro at Lambert's Point golf course in Norfolk, began playing golf in Ireland at the age of ten. Soon she joined the juniors' team and then started playing golf for Ireland.

“I come from a golfing family,” Michelle said, “and it is great to get out with friends and family on the course.” She



Deztany Jackson, an ODU engineering major, likes to analyze her swing. (Photos by Staci Martin)

spends a lot of time on the green with her husband, who's the golf pro at Lake Wright. She encourages women to get involved in golf because, “golf is a sport for life.” Holmes offers lesson and clinics and has clubs and starter sets for beginners. She spent three years getting certified through the PGA program in Florida.

The Ladies Professional Golf Association (LPGA) has grown exponentially over the last few decades. More and more women are trying their hand at making a living off the game. Apparel and equipment endorsements for women players are becoming the norm and playing professionally can open doors into book writing, commentating, and instructing.

Susan Vreeland, the women's golf pro at Owl's Creek in Virginia Beach considers herself lucky to have a career in golf and believes it's a great way to get the family outdoors, enjoy the fresh air, and get some exercise. “Golf lets me get in tune with nature,” she said. “There are osprey flying overhead, trees in bloom—it is just a wonderful environment.”

Sue offers lessons, clinics, and outings for new golfers including couples lessons, family lessons, or group lessons. She says it is important that beginning golfers use the right equipment and learn the fundamentals of posture, stance, and grip. It is okay for beginners to rent or borrow clubs, but you need to make sure that the equipment fits right. There is nothing more frustrating than being too tall and using short clubs or vice versa.

### WELCOMING ENVIRONMENT

In the early 1950s when women were first beginning to enjoy the game of golf, men would joke that GOLF meant “Gentlemen Only; Ladies Forbidden.” However, in the past few decades with rising interest in the LPGA and in local groups like the Executive Women's Golf Association; women are having a greater impact on the green and golf is having a greater impact on women's lives. In many ways, the golf course has replaced the garden club as the place for women to get together.

The Executive Women's Golf Association, founded in 2001, is a volunteer organization that exists to provide a welcoming environment for women to enjoy the game of golf for business and for life. Maggie Lowery, sponsorship chair for Hampton Roads, said, “The Hampton Roads chapter is all about encouraging women to get out and learn the game of golf.” EWGA



Laura Holmes, also on the ODU Women's Golf team, finds the game relaxing. (Photo by Staci Martin)

meetings and outings provide members with an opportunity to network and make social contacts with women golfers of every level.

“We have clinics for people who have never played golf and golf outings for people who want to improve their game,” Maggie explained. It makes sense to pair beginners with each other so that they can explore the game together and build a shared experience. Sue Vreeland, who is also a member of the EWGA, said, “EWGA is a great way to make friends and network with people.”

Maggie's mother was an LPGA player back when women were only allowed on the course after 2 p.m. Maggie started playing golf as an adult, not because she had an interest in the sport, but because she knew it would be a valuable tool for business networking. Now she enjoys getting involved in charity tournaments, couples' golf outings with her husband, and welcoming other women to the game of golf. For Maggie, golf added a new fulfilling dimension to her life.

EWGA often holds tournaments at local golf courses, special outings to sporting goods stores like Golf Galaxy and Chico's, and coordinates special events like the 2007 Women's

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# Why Women Golf: A Sport for Life (cont.)

Golf Week in June and the 2007 Take Your Daughter to the Course Week in July. From May 9-13, the EWGA will have an information booth set up at the Kingsmill LPGA event. Women can stop by and get more information about getting involved with the group.

**INTELLECTUAL SATISFACTION**  
For women like me, who have an interest in golf, but perhaps not the skills to start playing right away, the EGWA has a program called SWING, which stands for "Skillful Women Inspiring New Golfers." It is a mentor program available to EGWA members that partners them with an experienced golfer.

"Mentors help new players get comfortable with the game," said Maggie Lowery. "Golf appears to be intimidating, but it is really not." The goal of the program is to acquaint new golfers with the game—like etiquette, pace of play, and rules of the game. Additional benefits to the mentor program include equipment and clothing discounts. Pairing up with an experienced golfer is a recommendation I heard from many women golfers.

Business and social networking aside, golf provides an element of intellectual satisfaction for some players. Deztany Jackson, a sophomore with ODU's women's golf team, is an engineering major who started playing golf at the age of nine. "There used to be an ice cream parlor at the driving range so I would just go along with my dad for the ice cream," she recalled, "but then I got bored and started hitting golf balls."

Deztany satisfies her intellectual curiosity by applying her physics and

engineering courses to the green. "I love to analyze my swing and how the course is laid out," she said. Since her father's an architect, Deztany hopes they can work together one day to design courses or manufacture sports equipment.

Pat Kotten, coach of the ODU Women's Golf Team, believes it's important for women to get involved in all aspects of the game, including course design. Many older courses were not designed for competitive play among women and are not as challenging as they could be for very experienced players. However, for beginners like me, the few extra yards from the Ladies' Tee make all the difference in the world.

Coach Kotten has encouraged the members of the ODU women's golf team to give back to the community through the First Tee program. First Tee is part of the YMCA of South Hampton Roads' mission to provide low- or no-cost learning facilities and educational programs to youth interested in golf. Local golfers offer their time and expertise to teach young people the game along with life skills and leadership skills. It is similar to the EWGA mentor program, but for young people. Members of the ODU Women's Golf Team and EWGA members are involved the First Tee program.

After exploring golf in Tidewater, I found that there is, indeed, hope for me and my daughter. We are looking into the First Tee program and I hope to have an EWGA mentor lined up by the end of May. I think a few lessons will definitely be in order. I'm looking forward to wearing a trendy windbreaker, spiky shoes, renting some clubs, and finding my way around

the course. As a beachcomber, I'm used to sand and water! ■

For more information:

- EGWA Hampton Roads chapter - Call 757-430-3812 or visit [www.orgsites.com/va/ewga-hamptonroads](http://www.orgsites.com/va/ewga-hamptonroads).
- The First Tee program - Visit [www.thefirstteehr.org](http://www.thefirstteehr.org).

Watch the pros at the Michelob Ultra Open at Kingsmill in Williamsburg from May 7-13. For information on the event or to buy tickets, visit [www.michelobultraopen.com](http://www.michelobultraopen.com).

Staci Martin is a freelance writer, and ODU graduate. She lives in Virginia Beach.

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