

You Are What You Golf

Amy Sikora · West Coast Golfer Magazine

I glanced at the snow on the ground and saw that the forecast high for the day was 24 degrees. I shivered and reluctantly admitted to myself that sometimes it really can be too cold for golf in northern Nevada.

Luckily, there are other things a golfer can do during the winter months in the Reno and Lake Tahoe area when the scenery has turned a radiant golf-ball white.

The powder-covered Sierra Nevadas are home to world-famous skiing and snowboarding. Divine ski fun can be found at Heavenly on the south shore of Lake Tahoe or at Squaw Valley, where you can ski like an Olympian at the site of the 1960 Winter Olympics. There is also a favorite of the locals, Sugar Bowl.

The snow and freezing temperatures that hamper golf also create rinks for ice skating, hills ideal for sledding, and snow play areas perfect for family fun and snowball fights. Trailheads appear that are ideal for snowshoeing and snowmobiling, and cross-country skiers can find a niche at the six Nordic centers located throughout the snowy Sierra.

While the snow offers alternate activities suitable for momentary distraction, I was still bummed that it had become the adversary of my golf game. I decided instead that if I could not play golf, I could at least talk about it.

I warmed myself with coffee and a great conversation with Deborah Jones, a certified Master PGA Professional and PGA Teaching Specialist. She provided a wealth of information about golf and those who play it.

Deborah holds the honor of being one of only about 80 PGA Golf Professionals in the country, and she is the only woman to hold the title on the West Coast. "I have actually been a golf professional for about 20 years, and I am a Master Teaching Professional," she explained.

To earn the title of PGA Golf Professional, an apprentice must complete about four years of intensive golf curriculum and training. "You have to take a player's ability test, and you have to take classes that cover all aspects of golf. They teach you about merchandising, golf carts, teaching, and even food and beverage."

I could not imagine anyone more dedicated to or informed about the game of golf than Deborah. She was not born holding a club and admitted that she did not discover her passion for the game until later in life. "I went my first year in law school and I had already earned two master's degrees, so there was a little confusion," she said.

While in law school, Deborah borrowed some golf clubs and gave the game a try. "I went to the driving range and I absolutely fell in love. I decided I did not want to become an attorney. I just wanted to be a golf professional."

I had always thought of golf as a fun sport and a good way to pass the time, but according to Deborah, I should consider golf crucial to my professional survival.

"It gets you into doors that normally you would never be able to get into," she said. "And as a woman, if you cannot be 25, have the legs of Julia Roberts, and wear five-inch heels, then you need to learn how to play golf." She laughed and added, "No woman should be without golf clubs in the back of her trunk."

Deborah believes that people can not only advance their careers through golf, but also discover themselves. "It will really test you individually to see what you are made of. Plus, when you are playing with other people, you can see what they are made of too."

"It is really an unusual thing to be able to spend four hours with somebody and have them pegged by the way they behave," she said.

That rang true for me. I thought back on the different golfers I had played with and realized how much their personalities came through on the course.

There is the Glitzy Golfer, who has all the expensive gear and loves to show it off. The Gizmo Golfer, obsessed with finding the perfect club or gadget. The Angry Golfer, who wraps clubs around trees. The Cheat Golfer, who looks for an eraser on the golf pencil. The Constant Mulligan Taker, because that one did not count. The Drunk Golfer, who is always waiting for the beer cart. The list could go on.

For the rest of the winter, I suppose I fall into the category of Want-to-Be Golfer.

I shared my golf-induced winter blues with Deborah, and she reassured me. "The weather gives you a little break, and it is always good to have a little break from golf."

There may be truth in that. Sometimes stepping away from what you love can renew your passion for it.

Deborah went on to explain that there is nothing that beats golfing in northern Nevada. "I love the high desert, and the ball flies farther, which is always a positive," she laughed. "With Lake Tahoe and the mountains around, you can play a course surrounded by pine trees in a mountain environment, then head down to the valley and experience the high desert."

Deborah's 20 years of golf experience in the Reno area and her professional perspective left me with a renewed outlook on taking a winter hiatus from golf. As we wrapped up our conversation, she mentioned that she gives golf lessons at ArrowCreek Country Club in Reno.

After that short meeting, my inspiration and passion for the game were reignited. Sign me up.