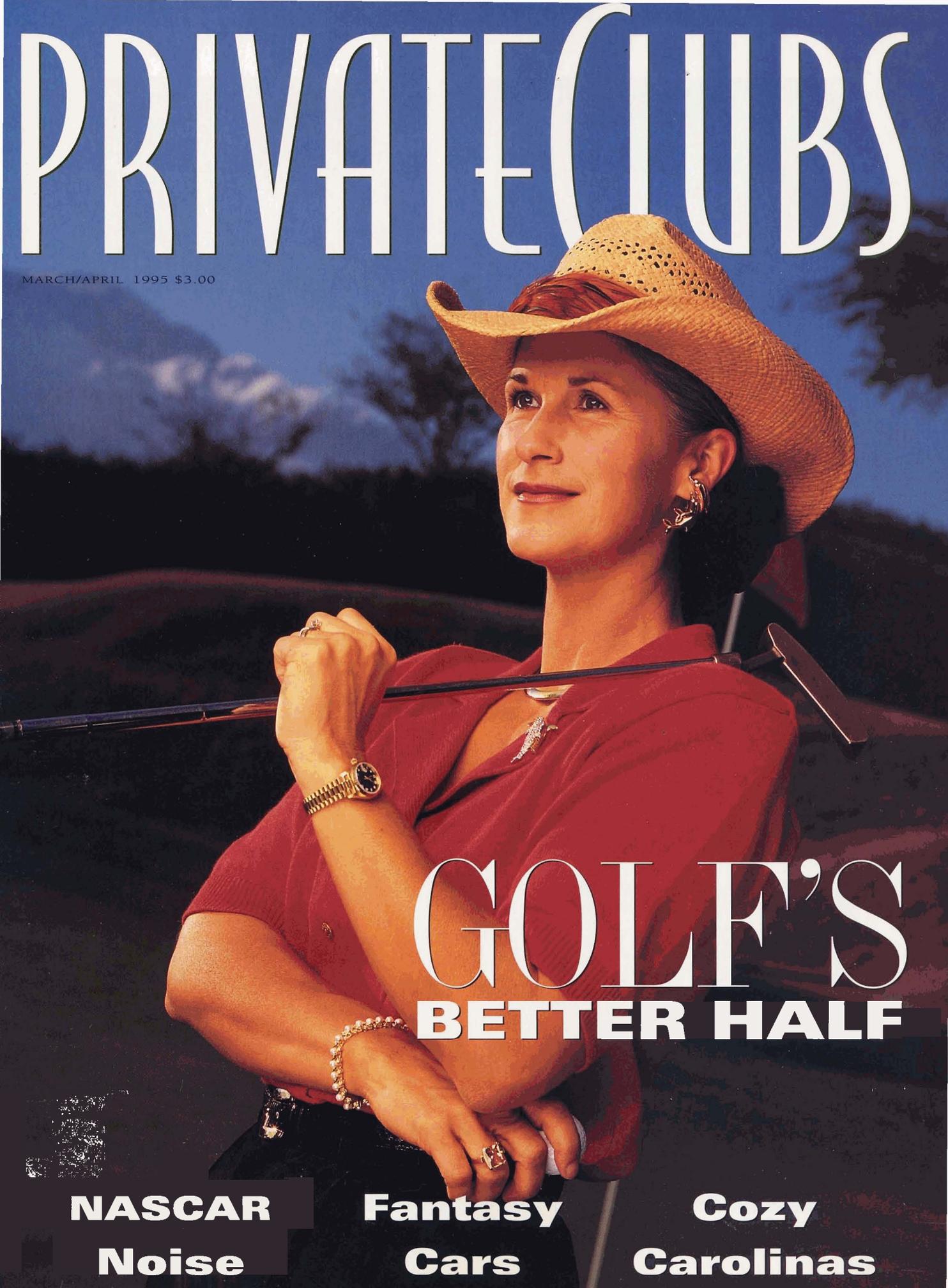


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## GOLF'S BETTER HALF

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# GOLF'S Better Half

Women are breaking through the "grass ceiling" and leveling the playing field in what has traditionally been a man's game.

BY MARK FUERST AND MARGIE PEERCE FUERST

**M**ore women than ever are whacking golf balls on the range or practicing on the putting green. New displays of women's golf equipment and apparel are appearing in club pro shops. And, while channel surfing these days, you might happen upon a televised Skins Game in which the players are from the Ladies Professional Golf Association (LPGA).

These are all signs of the continuing growth in women's golf. While only one in five of the 24.5 million golfers today are women, they make up nearly 40 percent of new golfers. Junior girls are the fastest-growing group of golfers. Close behind are female executives, who are using their well-honed organizational skills to found leagues of their own.

There may not be as many female golfers as male golfers, but what women lack in numbers, they make up in purchasing power. According to *Golf Shop Operations* magazine, infrequent female golfers spend four times as much as their male counterparts on lessons, videos, and magazines. Frequent female golfers also play more, travel more, and spend more than their male counterparts.

And the trend is continuing to the other side of the cash register: More and more pros are hiring women for their shops because, after all, a woman knows best what other women do

E. J. CAMP: LETTERING BY TOM NIXSEY



and don't like. "I treat my customers the way I want to be treated," says Dana Rader, director of instruction at **Raintree Country Club** in **Charlotte, North Carolina**. "A woman wants to be taken through a process so that she knows she is getting good value for her dollar." A recent customer came in for three fittings before buying new clubs. "I was in no hurry to take her money," says Rader, a former LPGA teacher of the year. "I'm more concerned that she is satisfied."

By the way, it's a myth that female golfers bog down play. The average female golfer takes four hours and 12 minutes to play 18 holes, while the average male golfer takes just under four hours, according to the National Golf Foundation (NGF). But frequent female golfers play in 10 fewer minutes than their male counterparts.

While most female players have taken lessons, those lessons often teach them only swing mechanics, not how to play the game. Getting comfortable with all the elements of the game on traditionally male-dominated courses is the hard part. "I don't expect new women golfers to know everything," says Rader. "I try to mentor them through the process of becoming a golfer."

Because nearly half of female golfers hold administrative, managerial, or professional positions, more and more women are learning to get comfortable conducting business on the course, too. "It's not about closing deals, but about building relationships," says Rader. You may not get to know someone well across a tennis net, but you can get a good feel for character on the golf course, she says.

Women can learn how to use golf as a business tool at Gillette LPGA Golf Clinics for Women across the country. From 150 to 180 business women participated in each of the

10 clinics in 1994, four of which were hosted at Associate Clubs. (Fourteen clinics are scheduled for this year.) Two LPGA Tour players, plus two dozen teaching pros, offer a full day of instruction on how to play, proper etiquette, rules, and dress codes, as well as the value of using golf in business. "It's a great way to direct women — from those who have never picked up a club to single-digit handicappers — to teaching pros and local golf leagues, in addition to promoting the LPGA Tour," says LPGA vice president Cindy Davis.

What's more, the third biannual Women in Golf Summit will take place November 13 through 15 at **Pinehurst** in **North Carolina**. The leaders in the field will gather to discuss pertinent issues concerning the status of women in golf and to plan for the future.

With a need for a sense of ownership and places to play, several major executive women's golf leagues have sprung up across the country. The number of executive women golfers is growing, armed with financial clout and a strong desire to learn and master the game quickly. In just three years, membership in the

Executive Women's Golf League, based in West Palm Beach, Florida, has increased from 28 members to more than 7,000 in 75 chapters nationwide. The average member today is 43 years old, earns a salary of \$62,700, and has a husband who earns at least as much, if not more.

"We are here to nurture businesswomen into the game of golf," says Nancy Oliver, a former golf marketing executive and founder of the league. "Our members know that golf works for businessmen, and they want to participate in the benefits, too. Our programs teach them to feel comfortable about playing golf and to build their skills and confidence to the point where they can accept an invitation to a corporate outing — or initiate one."

Janina Parrott Jacobs, founder of the league's Detroit chapter and a member of the **Skyline Club** in **Southfield, Michigan**, says she uses golf mostly to establish business relationships. Knowing that 75 percent of Fortune 500 chief executive officers play golf and use golf for business, she makes golf dates with decision makers. "Sometimes I accept dates to play without knowing exactly what the business connection might be," says Jacobs, a scratch golfer. "While we're playing, I engage my partners in conversation to get to know them and to find out what they do." That's how she landed a potential recurring feature spot about women's health and well-being on a local television morning show.

Being a good player also helps. "Anyone who is good at the game automatically earns respect," she says. "People believe if I'm good at golf, then I must be good at whatever I'm pitching them."

For novice players, the Executive Women's Golf League offers a six-week clinic for beginners. This includes on-course instruction as well as sessions on etiquette, tipping, clothing,



PAM FRANCIS (2)

and equipment over beverages at the 19th hole. "We create a social environment where women feel safe and welcome, which stimulates camaraderie," says Oliver.

This year the league will host chapter and regional play-offs leading to a national championship in October. Chances are the media will be there to cover the league championship, in addition to other developments in women's golf. *USA Today* now gives equal coverage to men's and women's golf. LPGA Tour events are shown on network television, although not as often as those of the men's Professional Golf Association (PGA). Two new sports cable television networks scheduled to appear this year, the Golf Channel and the Women's Sports Network, will no doubt cover the women's game.

And nearly a million women read *Golf for Women*, a seven-year-old magazine geared to high- and low-handicappers as

Caroline Basarah (above), assistant golf pro at Kingwood Country Club near Houston, has been playing golf since she was 13. At left, she hams it up in the locker room with some of her junior golfers: Courtney Coffman, Suzanne Roth, Jennifer Jones, Debbie Richter, Heather Alford, and Abby Vondra.

## DINAH SHORE'S LEGACY

One of the meccas of women's golf is Mission Hills Country Club in Rancho Mirage, California. The club has more than a 20-year history of involvement with women's golf as the site of the Nabisco Dinah Shore (the former Colgate Winners Circle) event, which in the late 1980s evolved into one of the four major LPGA championships.

This woman-friendly club has more than 400 active women's auxiliary members, dozens of them low handicappers. The Mission Hills Desert Team, made up of single-digit handicappers, has won a series of match-play tournaments against seven other desert clubs for 14 of the past 15 years. So many other good golfers wanted to play team matches that they organized a Spring Team for women with handicaps of 10 to 26.

Mission Hills has an advantage over most other facilities because of its 54 holes. "We have a Ladies' Day and a Men's Day each week and simply rotate courses," says general manager Nancy Aaronson. "We have yet to face a tee-time issue." The courses are set up from a woman's as well as a man's point of view. "We are just as concerned about the playability of the courses from the ladies' as well as the men's tees," she says.

Women are accepted as equal members with men, and single women are also welcome to join. With more younger women getting into the game, "we are seeing more 30-year-olds join, which was unheard of in the past," says Jane Comelli, co-chair of the membership committee and a member of the board of governors and the executive committee at the club.

Besides weekly women's group and club play, Mission Hills recently sponsored a unique international match. Last May, Comelli and member Sada Fukuda set up a match between 14 Japanese and 14 American women at the five most prestigious desert courses in the area. "We showed them our desert clubs, made new friends, and enjoyed competitive golf," Comelli says. At a barbecue awards dinner, the golfers exchanged gifts and "found out what life was like in Japan, how these women felt about their lives, and where they were going," she says.

The match was so successful that Comelli is working on getting English women golfers to come try their hand at desert golf this year. She has her sights set on Scotland (where she's played golf on vacation eight times), Ireland, and Australia in hopes of sending a team of American women overseas for future matches.

Comelli and her husband, Tom, play golf together five times a week during the summer. In the winter they play together Saturday mornings, and she plays with friends four or five times during the week. "If I'm not playing, I'm practicing," Comelli says. "Tom tried to get me to play golf years ago," she says. "I was an inveterate skier for 20 years. I thought golf was something you did when you couldn't do anything else. I admit I was wrong. I love this game."

well as seniors. "Our main mission is instruction, which means not only swing mechanics but etiquette and the rules of golf," says Patricia Baldwin, editor in chief. "The woman golfer today is multifaceted. She likes travel and fashion in addition to instruction. Our readers are sophisticated, and we have to match their expectations."

Family golf also receives a good share of editorial space. "I have yet to meet a male golfer who wouldn't want his wife to play with him, at least some of the time," Baldwin says. She believes the industry needs to market golf more as a family sport, akin to skiing. "People say they don't play because golf takes too much time away from their family," she says. "But if the whole family plays together, even if it's a four-hole, par-3 course, that's no longer an issue."

An important aspect of family golf is teaching young girls the game. To help girls learn that golf can be fun and become a lifetime sport, the LPGA founded a Junior Girls Golf League. What began with a few dozen girls in Phoenix in 1989 has expanded to include 6,000 girls age 6 to 18 in 47 areas nationwide.

The program is designed for girls with different interests, says Sandy LaBauve, founder of the league. "Some girls are happy just to hit the ball. Others want to improve their game, or even earn a college scholarship," she says, noting that more than 100 girls who play in the league have scholarship potential.

Some of those girls play at more than a dozen Associate Club courses in Houston and Dallas that have signed on with the league. "In Houston we have many competitive junior golf programs," says Caroline Basarab, assistant golf pro at **Kingwood Country Club in Kingwood, Texas**. "We're also competing against tennis, volleyball, and basketball camps."

The girls are divided by ability, not age groups, and they are not thrown into competition until they learn the proper skills in clinics. The beginners play putting, chipping, pitching, and driving games as they learn the swing basics. The more advanced players practice the course in a fun, competitive tournament. Everyone wins something, from ribbons to golf pins to candy. They begin actual play at 125 yards from the green and, as they improve, move back gradually to the women's tees.

When they begin to play nine- or 18-hole rounds, the emphasis is not on head-to-head competition. "Our tournaments are meant to be fun," says LaBauve. "On one hole we will have the girls play with their feet together; the next, they have to exchange putters on the green." Most tournaments are blind draws so that no one knows her partner until the end of the round. And again, everyone wins something. "The kids think it's awesome, and their parents love it," says Basarab. "All the girls have fun, they get to meet kids from around the area, and they feel good about themselves."

As a teaching pro, Basarab sees herself as a role model. She started playing golf at age 13 and won a golf scholarship to Texas A&M, where she was named most valuable player her junior and senior years. "I always thought I would play golf professionally," she says, "but I'm content about what I'm doing for these young girls. A lot of them remind me of myself when I was younger. It's rewarding to see their improvement and to give something back to the game."

While only a handful of the girls in the league will go on to become pros, "more than anything else they will be introduced to golf, understand the value of the sport, and this will

"Golf has great value to women," says Nancy Aaronson,

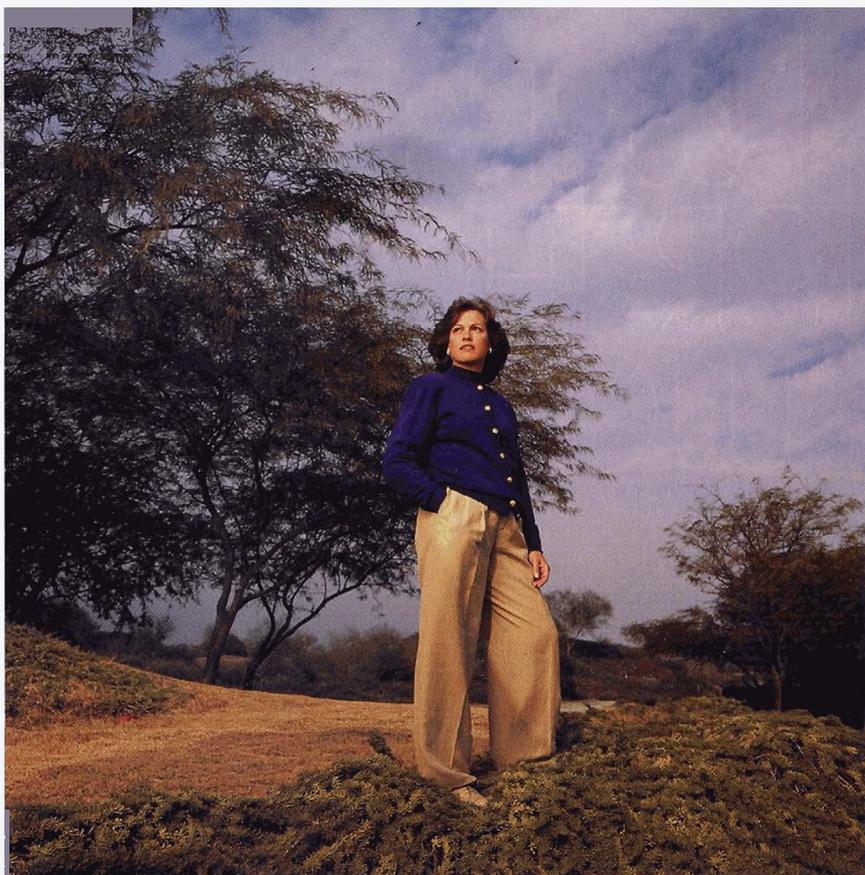
general manager at Mission Hills Country Club.

empower them in whatever they do," says Davis of the LPGA.

Many of the same ideas devised for teaching girls are being incorporated into women's golf programs. The old half-hour lesson with a male pro barking pointers doesn't fit most women's idea of a good time. The concept at many Associate Club courses is to provide a friendly group atmosphere and a customized teaching program, says Jerry Gelinis, senior vice president of marketing for the Associate Clubs. Beginners progress together from the putting green to the range to the course. They learn the game in a relaxed setting: out on the course at the 150-yard markers at the end of the day without any pressure from other golfers.

Maybe even more importantly, women at the Associate Clubs have a built-in support network and a group of similarly skilled players to compete against. This offers them the opportunity to experience golf in an atmosphere "that encourages reasonable goal-setting within the context of a social setting," says Nancy Aaronson, general manager at **Mission Hills Country Club in Rancho Mirage, California.**

She began playing at age 13. "Above all the other sports I played in school, I saw golf as a sport that I could play for a lifetime and retain my femininity," she says. However, at that time she did not anticipate what an advantage golf would be in business. In fact, in every business position that Aaronson has ever had, from the male-dominated construction industry



to architecture to real estate, she has made her most important contacts on the golf course.

"From my own experience, I know the game has great value to women," Aaronson says. "As more women in positions of responsibility play, clubs will encourage their participation. Some men may not be as receptive as we'd like, but women make up a significant part of the golf market today and are extremely important to the growth of the game."

Mark Fuerst, coauthor of the *Sports Injury Handbook*, and his wife, Margie Pearce Fuerst, a New York criminal defense attorney, play golf together as often as they can.

## Play Together, Stay Together

One of the biggest problems with women golfers is their husbands. It pains me to hear the terrible advice husbands constantly give to their wives regarding golf." So says Harvey Penick in his second best-selling book of golf wit and wisdom, *And If You Play Golf, You're My Friend*.

With more women playing golf, more couples are putting their relationships to the test on the golf course. But couples who play together regularly need not sign up for immediate family therapy. Instead, they should consider going to golf school together. "If I had my preference, I would teach all couples," says Dana Rader, director of instruction at Raintree Country Club in Charlotte, North Carolina. "That way I can educate the husband to what his wife is going

through and teach him to be more patient."

Husbands can learn what to say to their wives on the course to preserve harmony. They can help each other with on-course reminders and corrections, first taught by an instructor during lessons. Each of the 15 or more golf schools Rader runs each year has at least two or three couples, she says, who go away not only better golfers but better communicators.

Jan and Dennis Ellmer from Fairfax, Virginia, attended the Golf Advantage School at Pinehurst together last May and last September, and they plan on going again this spring. "When you go to golf school as a couple, you get to work on your own individual games and also learn how to support each other," says Jan, a 41-year-old fitness instructor and mother of three.

"I was having a bad time one day, and Dennis helped to motivate me and get me through my disappointment."

The best part of golf school is "talking with your husband over dinner about what you learned that day and how you think you can improve," Jan says.

The Ellmers still have trouble with what Dennis perceives to be Jan's lack of etiquette. "I think the hardest part for beginning golfers to learn is when to move along," Jan says. "I think I'm doing fine, and he says, 'Move it; people are not going to wait for you.' That's the only thing we argue about."

The Ellmers play together when they can. "I love it," says Jan, "because I can be with my husband for four solid hours with no interruptions."