



Feeling at home while on the road

Friday, May 09, 2008 - 12:07 AM

By PAUL WOODY
TIMES-DISPATCH COLUMNIST

WILLIAMSBURG -- Several hours after she had finished her first round in the Michelob Ultra Open, and who knows how many hours before her next big adventure, Jill McGill was patiently working on her game on the practice range.

Nothing unusual about that, except this -- McGill worked on her woods and irons for a good hour in a steady rain.

"This sort of rain is not too terrible," she said. "This is more of a nuisance."

McGill finished 2 under par yesterday, which put her back in the pack, but within striking distance of first-round leader Mhairi McKay, who finished 8 under par. And if her work on the practice range -- the woods were long and straight, the irons precise -- is any indication, McGill will spend the weekend within striking distance of the leaders.

She is a classic example of what it takes to succeed on the LPGA Tour; steady, with an elegant, polished game. Her swing is smooth, and the club wraps around her 6-foot frame on every drive.

She has been on the tour since 1996 and has yet to win. Her best finish was second place here in 2005, yet she has earned almost \$2 million.

She does not shirk from getting in her practice time, but when she leaves the course, she leaves the golf behind.

"You try to create as normal a life as possible," said Patrick Byerly, McGill's regular caddy and husband.

"You try to make the place you're in for the tournament your home for the week," Byerly said. "Whatever you would do at home, you do on the road. We go to the grocery store. We get the lay of the land. We do the laundry."

"It's very glamorous," McGill said, laughing.

Glamorous it might not always be, but with McGill and Byerly, about 6-2, solidly built with short, dark hair to his wife's long blonde hair, it always seems to be interesting.

At some point this weekend, they plan to be at Busch Gardens on the Big Bad Wolf, the roller coaster that moves along at nearly 50 mph before dropping a sheer, stomach-churning 99 feet.

"I think it's awesome," McGill said.

"We rode it three times without getting off," Byerly said of their experience last year. "That kind of put us over the edge."

"Then we wobbled around for about a half-hour," McGill said.

Spending every moment of the day together is not the easiest thing for any couple to do, especially when the day includes competing in high pressure professional golf, where one shot can be worth tens of thousands of dollars.

But McGill and Byerly have an obvious affection for each other. They share a similar sense of humor and a similar sense of adventure. Sort of.

"I want to enter a hot dog eating contest," McGill said.

Byerly shook his head.

"I don't want you to do that," he said.

McGill and Byerly are completely at ease with each other, whether on the course or just off the practice range, standing under an umbrella chatting about their lives together.

Byerly is no stranger to high-level athletics. He played wide receiver at the University of Oklahoma for four seasons, then found a way to occupy his time in his fifth year at OU.

"You were busy doing something else, weren't you?" McGill said with a bit of mischief in her voice and a smile creasing her face. "He was the basketball mascot, Top Dog."

"I'm a man of many traits," Byerly said.

"I never thought I would marry a sports mascot," McGill said.

"A lot of guys out here call me 'Top Dog,'" Byerly said. "Somehow, it leaked out," -- and he paused to look at his wife. "I haven't been able to live it down yet."

"Hey, it's a lot better than some of the nicknames around here," McGill said.

Byerly now focuses his athletic pursuits on running. He's finished six marathons, with a best time of 2:57, and a most recent time of 3:04 in Boston.

He left the tour the week before the Boston race, forcing his wife to work with another caddy. She missed her regular caddy.

"I don't know what I'd do without you," she said, briefly considering life on the tour without her husband at her side.

Byerly laughed, something he and his wife probably would do a lot less if they weren't spending their lives together on the LPGA Tour and, occasionally, on a nearby roller coaster.

Contact Paul Woody at pwoody@timesdispatch.com or (804) 649-6444.

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