

GOLF NOW! Chicago 2009 Interview With Eric Peschke, US Caddie on the Ladies European Tour

Chicago golf fans will have the same opportunity Louisville golf fans had in the 2008 Ryder Cup...to become the 13th man in support of a U.S. victory. But that may not be politically correct because this year it will be the U.S. women's team looking for your support as Aurora's Rich Harvest Farms plays host to the 2009 Solheim Cup from August 17-23.

Americans will most certainly recognize the Red, White, and Blue painted faces of Paula Creamer, Cristie Kerr, Morgan Pressel, Natalie Gulbis, and Stacy Prammanasudh, among others, but you may not be familiar with the Blue and Gold painted faces of the Europeans. Golf Now Chicago caught up with Crown Point, Indiana native Eric Peschke who spent the 2008 season as a professional caddie on the Ladies European Tour. GNC asked him about his experiences on tour and for some inside information about the European players he has walked the fairways with.

GNC: First of all, tell us a little bit about your golf career?

EP: I started getting into golf when I was around 10 years old. As a freshman, I made the Crown Point High School golf team and then my senior year I was lucky enough to get a golf scholarship and play 4 years at Saint Joseph's College in Rensselaer, Indiana.

GNC: What accomplishments in your amateur golf career are you most proud of?

EP: I had three wins in high school with one trip to the state finals and one win in college, but when it came down to it I just wasn't good enough to play professional golf. They play a different game, so I opted to be as close to the game as you can be without playing it...caddying.

GNC: How did you get this opportunity to go caddie in Europe?

EP: In 2007 I caddied on the Duramed Futures Tour and met another caddie who went over to Europe at the end of the season to work for an Austrian player. He met a South African player named Stacy Bregman who was interested in hiring a caddie for the 2008 season and he recommended me. I touched base with her via email and we decided to give it a try, so I flew over in April and started working for her in Spain.

GNC: What would you say is the average job description of a professional caddie?

EP: Haha, there isn't an average job description in this business. It can be as simple as making sure there is enough bananas and water in the bag to as detailed as helping your player pick clubs and read greens. My job was basically everything and anything she needed done to shoot a lower score and make more money. I wore a lot of hats this past season, but it was good experience for me because it made me a better caddie.

GNC: Describe a typical tournament week on the Ladies European Tour?

EP: We would usually fly to the next event on Sunday night or early Monday morning. I would get to the golf course on Monday afternoon, buy a yardage book, and start walking the course to double check the yardages. I would also roll balls on the greens and chart which way each putt breaks. I basically had a day to get to know the golf course we were playing like I knew my home course. On Tuesday we would play a practice round and talk about strategy, how we wanted to attack each hole, what to hit off the tee, where we wanted to be to set up angles to get at certain pins. Wednesday we would play a pro-am and hopefully have some fun with our playing partners. Thursday, Friday, Saturday and Sunday are tournament rounds and hopefully Sunday you're playing late and making some money. Then it's on to the next tournament.

GNC: How did Stacy do this season?

EP: We had a great year together. Last year Stacy finished 84th on the moneylist and had to go back to Q-school to get her full card. This year she accomplished a lot of her goals and automatically earned her full card for the 2009 season. She finished tied for 2nd in Turkey, tied for 6th in Scotland, qualified for the Ricoh Women's British Open, and finished in the top 35 on the moneylist with a little over 50,000 Euros to qualify for the Madrid Masters.

GNC: What was the most exciting thing you experienced this year caddying?

EP: Obviously, it would be easy to say finishing second in Turkey or getting to caddie in the Women's British Open, but if I had to go by my goosebump-o-meter it was what happened at the Irish Open. We were playing at Portmarnock Links just outside Dublin and in the first round Stacy and I were trying to figure out what club to hit for our second shot into the par 4 18th hole. We ended up taking half a club more and as soon as she hit her choke 5 iron I knew it was going to be good, so I yelled, "Oh be the right club"! Two bounces later it dinked the flagstick and went down for an eagle two. They had grandstands surrounding the entire green and everyone went nuts. It was a pretty cool feeling high-fiving her as we walked up the fairway to a nice applause. Two days later in the 3rd round she dunked a 7 iron on the par 4 15th hole for another eagle and the gallery went ballistic. I'm not sure what the odds are on holing out for two eagles in one tournament, but I'm 100% sure you'll get goosebumps every time.

GNC: I'm sure you were busy working all season, but when you weren't on the golf course did you get to do any sightseeing in Europe?

EP: This was my first trip to Europe and I was able to experience a little golf history, World War II history, and music history. The Sunday before the Scottish Open we drove to St. Andrews just expecting to get a picture by the 18th green. We were informed by the head pro that on Sunday the course is closed to golfers and open to anyone who wanted to walk it. We ended up walking the entire course and I got my picture taken standing on

the Swilcan Bridge. Standing on the same stones that the greats of golf walked over was awesome. I also visited Dachau concentration camp in Munich, Germany. It's one of those places where you can hear and read all about it, but you don't completely understand how horrible it was until you see it with your own eyes. When we were in London we took the tube (subway) up to Abbey Road and I got my picture taken walking across the crosswalk. The Beatles had it a little easier because the bobbies stopped traffic for them. My buddy snapped the picture and got me in full stride, but I almost became a hood ornament in the process.

GNC: Did you run into any problems traveling in Europe?

EP: My first week over there was in Barcelona and we had to rent a car to get down to the tour stop in Castellon. After the tournament was over we had to spend a night in Barcelona before we flew to London the next day. We parked our rent a car on the street and the next morning when we came out to load the luggage we were greeted by an empty parking space. The Polizia had towed our car and we spent the next two hours trying to figure out which lot they towed it to. We finally found the car, paid the tow charge, drove to the airport like we were trying out for a James Bond film, and made our plane just as they were closing the door.

GNC: What was your favorite tour stop?

EP: It might be surprising, but I would have to say the Turkish Ladies Open in Antalya, Turkey was the best. We stayed at the Calista Resort and Spa which is an all-inclusive resort on the Mediterranean Sea and the tour event was held at National Golf Club. The combination of a good golf course, all the food and drink you could stomach, beautiful scenery, and a 2nd place finish made it a very memorable week. The Canary Islands was a close second though.

GNC: What are your plans for next year?

EP: Right now I'm looking at going back to Europe again. I had so much fun and would like to get a win under my belt before I try to work on LPGA.

GNC: Could you see yourself working for a European player in the 2009 Solheim Cup?

EP: As much as I love being an American I would still have to say yes. It's a long shot that a European player would hire an American to work that specific event, but a lot of them do know that I'm from the Chicago area and that I have the ability to do some reconnaissance work easily at Rich Harvest Farms. I just couldn't pass up an opportunity to be inside the ropes in that atmosphere at an event where my family and friends could watch me work.

GNC: You've been around the European players who will come to Chicago to try and take back the Cup. Can you give us a little insight about each of them?

EP: Well obviously neither team has been finalized because they have all of this season to still qualify for the team, but I can break down some of the players who I think will make the team.

Gwladys Nocera (France): 5 wins this season (Scottish Open, ABN AMRO Ladies Open, SAS Ladies Masters, Goteborg Masters, and Madrid Ladies Masters)

Gwladys is the best ball striker and most consistent player in Europe today...period. We were never lucky enough to get paired with her, and I say lucky because getting paired with Gwladys meant your player was playing well (I call it the Tiger Woods affect). She will be one of the older players on the 2009 team and everyone will look to her for leadership on and off the course.

Martina Eberl (Germany): 2 wins (BMW Ladies Italian Open, Nykredit Masters) 9 top 5 finishes

Stacy and I were paired with Martina at the German Open, the BMW Ladies Italian Open, and at the LPGA Sectional Qualifier in Palm Springs, CA so I've seen Martina play a lot. She's a great driver of the golf ball and certainly makes her shares of putts. I think her best quality is that she doesn't ever make a mistake to beat herself. She won the Nykredit Masters coming from 6 shots behind in the final round so she knows how to claw back in a match play style event like the Solheim Cup.

Suzann Pettersen (Norway): 2 wins in 4 starts (Deutsche Bank Ladies Swiss Open, AIB Ladies Irish Open)

I only saw Suzann play in three LET events and she won two of them...enough said. She's one of the best players on the LPGA Tour today and she will bring her game. Suzann is one of the most focused players I've seen on the golf course and she will be looking at the Solheim Cup as an opportunity to take care of business.

Laura Davies (England): 1 win (UNIQA Ladies Golf Open) 6 top 10's

We were never paired with Laura, but the word on tour is that she is one of the nicest and most fun players to be paired with. Fun is what Laura would bring to the Solheim Cup team. The biggest laugh I got was watching her hit drivers off the top of a big red barn at the end of a 250 yard driving range in Denmark. She plays the game with no fear and has a way of getting out of trouble with ease. The closest European player I could compare her to is Seve Ballesteros because she can hit amazing recovery shots.

Annika Sorenstam (Sweden): Who knows if Annika will come out of retirement if she either qualifies or receives a Captain's pick to play in the Solheim Cup. I'm betting that she doesn't because she has made it clear that she wants to start a family. I saw Annika play in the British Open, at her own tournament in Sweden, and in Denmark and she is clearly still one of the best in the world. The Solheim Cup without her will be like the Ryder Cup without Tiger, but who knows, it seemed to work for the Americans.

GNC: Are there any players who are a dark horse to make the team that we may not know about?

EP: I would keep an eye out for Lotta Wahlin, Lisa Hall, and Melissa Reid. Lotta is from Sweden and won twice this year (Turkish Ladies Open and S4C Wales Ladies Championship). Lisa Hall (England) is a veteran who won the ANZ Ladies Masters in Australia at the beginning of the year and is one of the most consistent players. Melissa Reid (England) won Rookie of the Year and had 4 top 5 finishes this season and is definitely an up and coming star.

GNC: If you would like to read about the Ladies European Tour you can check out their website at www.ladieseuropeantour.com.