

Tom Cade: Hello, this is Pod for the Course, and I am Tom Cade, the Senior Director of Communications for Washington Golf. And today we have with us Caroline Matelski, and Caroline won the 1994 Washington State Women's Amateur Championship. And that is significant because that was the very first Washington State Women's Amateur after 70 years or so of championships being held by the Washington State Golf Association, they finally held a Women's State Amateur Championship. And Caroline was the very first champion of that event. Caroline, thanks so much for being with us today.

Caroline Matelski: Well, thank you for having me, Tom.

Tom Cade: Yeah, you bet. So just to do some groundwork here. When you played in that 1994 event, you were playing collegiately, correct?

Caroline Matelski: Yes. I played for the University of Washington.

Tom Cade: And what year in school were you at the time, in 1994?

Caroline Matelski: I was a sophomore getting ready to be a junior.

Tom Cade: And where did you start in the game yourself? Are you from this area?

Caroline Matelski: Oh, yes. I grew up in Lakewood, Washington and I played out at Oakbrook Country Club. It was a country club then. I started at the age of 13. I did gymnastics before that and a lot of commitment required in that sport and it just got to be a little bit too much at 13. And then my dad said, "Hey, let's switch over to golf." And you know, that was the start of it.

Tom Cade: So your dad helped you get in the game?

Caroline Matelski: Most definitely. Both my parents played. My mom shot in the 90s most of the time and my dad was a scratch golfer and he got me started. We would do our weekend golf family outings together. And then as I got a little older, my mom's back started hurting and she didn't play with us. It was just my dad and I then.

Tom Cade: So did you play in junior tournaments when you were a teenager?

Caroline Matelski: Yeah, I started playing Washington Junior Golf. I believe I was 13 or 14 when I started that. District three. It's still the same district.

Tom Cade: In the Washington Junior Golf Association. Is that right?

Caroline Matelski: Yes.

Tom Cade: So, at what age, or what moment did you start thinking as a teenager: "Gee, I can really play this game. I know how to play this."

Caroline Matelski: Probably 15, when I started to seriously work on my game. Then 16, I was able to drive so I can remember going to school and then coming home, getting a snack and directly to the golf course every day and practicing.

Tom Cade: Were you recruited by the University of Washington?

Caroline Matelski: I was. I was recruited by 17 schools and I pretty much knew that I wanted to stay close to home. A good friend of mine Anne Huizinga already played for the University of Washington. She was two years ahead of me. And so she kind of arranged a trip with Mary Lou Mulflur, the coach, for me to go up there and visit. And I knew Anne and I was comfortable being around her. I liked the team on my visit and I just knew that's where I wanted to go and be a Husky.

Tom Cade: So with the 1994 Championship being the first one, how'd you find out about it, because it's not being held before. It was such an, obviously, a brand new thing. How, how did you personally find out about it?

Caroline Matelski: Well, during that time, I was looking for any tournament that I could play in. We had USGA tournaments and PPGA tournaments, the Junior World. And then we had, for state championships, we had the, I think it was Washington State WSWGGA, which is for private club members. And then there was the Washington State Women's for public links. And you had to choose either one of those to play in, but you couldn't do both, right?

So, there really wasn't a state champion. And then I can't remember how I heard that it came out, but I knew that it was going to be the first women's amateur champion. And I said, "Oh gosh." That was my goal. "I want to have my name on the trophy first." And I really set a whole program and a practice regimen around that goal.

Tom Cade: Yeah, until 1994, there was a women's championship for the Washington State Women's Golf Association, which was an association of private club members. And there was also a Washington State Public Links Association, which had a women's state champion. So, one for private clubs and one for public clubs. So this was the very first one where everyone could play and everyone could enter.

So, up until 1994, there were essentially two state champions, one private and one public. And now the purpose of this 1994 event was to start one that was open to everyone. And really would be considered to be the state champion because it was open to all.

Caroline Matelski: Absolutely.

Tom Cade: So for you, did you know, you must've known other players who were playing at that event? Do you remember that week at all, the other players?

Caroline Matelski: Oh gosh. All the regulars from this area were playing in that. Vicky Strada, Julie Bowen. I know Ann Swanson was older, but I believe she was there and she was a great role model for me at that time, Ann Swanson. Did I say Vicky Strada?

Tom Cade: Yes.

Caroline Matelski: She was also there. Amy Walker, also there.

Tom Cade: What else did you do during your playing career at the University of Washington? Did you travel much with the team or, how did it go for the rest of the time you were there?

Caroline Matelski: I traveled most times, most tournaments. I got mononucleosis once and I missed a tournament for that. And I believe I traveled to every other one, except in my senior year when I only played half of the year, my senior year. I dropped out the second half. I think the pressure that I put on myself from playing golf, where my self-worth was attached to my score, it just got to be a bit too much for me and my anger. The pressure I put on myself just got to be too much. And Coach gave me an option. She said, "Either go back to studying in my senior year, or go. You're off the team." And I said, "Well, okay, I'm off the team."

Tom Cade: Oh, okay.

Caroline Matelski: Unfortunately that's the way it ended for me.

Tom Cade: Did you play competitively after you left college or did you play just casually, or what happened after that?

Caroline Matelski: I turned pro for a short amount of time. In 1997, I lost in the playoff at the U.S. Women's Open Qualifier at Pumpkin Ridge. And then I can remember driving home from that tournament and telling my dad how that's it. I don't have anything left in me anymore. It's at this point it's just done. And I think shortly thereafter, maybe even the same year, I got my real estate license and started selling homes.

Tom Cade: Did you play at all or did you just put the clubs away for a while and said, "I'm done with that for now?"

Caroline Matelski: I put them away for a while. And then a few years later, I met my husband to be, and he enjoyed playing golf and I picked up the clubs again, and it had been three years. I got my amateur status back at that time. And then I played in the Washington State Amateur in 2003 at Longview.

Tom Cade: Yeah.

Caroline Matelski: So, had a good time playing there. I think I finished third or something like that. I didn't end up doing well, but I had a great time.

Tom Cade: Did you continue to play or did you just take time off for family or what?

Caroline Matelski: In 2005, I had my first child. In 2007, the second. And I did not play golf at all during that time. So, then I got divorced 2010. Maybe it was 2011, I got divorced. Anyway, I didn't touch a golf club really from 2004 until this February. February of 2021.

Tom Cade: And what prompted that? To pick it up again?

Caroline Matelski: My daughter wanted to do sports at school and I said "Well, I know how to play golf. I think that would be a good thing for you to learn." And so she went out and I started helping her with her swing, get started and it sparked my love of golf again.

Tom Cade: And suddenly you decided to sign up for the Washington State Mid-Amateur Championship, is that right?

Caroline Matelski: Yes. I was helping her trying to decide whether she wanted to play in tournaments and things. And then she decided she did want to. And I said, "Well, I might as well pursue my own dreams alongside of hers." I might as well pursue it, and we can play alongside each other rather than me being her coach. I don't want anything to come between our parent-daughter relationship. So it's just important that we each have our own, side-by-side.

Tom Cade: Where do you play your golf these days? What's your home course?

Caroline Matelski: We are lucky enough to live in DuPont, Washington. So our home course is The Home Course.

Tom Cade: The Home Course. That's perfect. They have a nice driving range there for practice, for kids and everyone.

Caroline Matelski: Yeah, they do.

Tom Cade: What are you doing to prepare yourself for next week's tournament? Again, talking with Caroline Matelski, the 1994 Washington State Women's Amateur Champion, who's now entered to play in the Washington State Women's Mid-Amateur Championship, which is going to be held next week, June 15th through the 17th at Fairwood Golf and Country Club in Renton, Washington. So, Caroline, what are you doing to prepare for that? Anything in particular or just going to enjoy yourself?

Caroline Matelski: Well, I've been playing a lot more than I used to play. I used to grind a lot on the driving range, working on my swing, trying to hit it further. And this time

around, I want to play with the swing that I have. I don't hit it far. It's straight though, most of the time, and I really want to focus on my mental game.

Tom Cade: Okay.

Caroline Matelski: I've been reading about ego-centered golf and the mastery side of golf. And I want to apply that in the tournament.

Tom Cade: Are you going to play in other events this summer or is this the only one?

Caroline Matelski: I am planning to be pretty busy this summer. I'm playing in, of course, the ladies club out at The Home Course, the Tacoma Women's Golf Association. I just played in my first event this past week. I'm playing in the Mid-Am as you know, and in the PPGA (Women's Amateur), which is going to be at my home course at The Home Course. I'm not doing the Public Links this year, but probably next year.

Tom Cade: It sounds like you're really kind of getting into it, which is great to hear. So my question is, early on after you stopped playing in your 20s, you said your attitude was tough and you were angry and demanding of yourself and everything. What's changed within you mentally to, at this point in your life, to get back into the game like this?

Caroline Matelski: Life lessons. Just a lot of experience and an attitude of gratitude. There were years where I couldn't afford to play. Even if I wanted to, I couldn't be out there doing it. And now it's solely my choice to be there. And I could be sitting at home doing nothing, but I'm lucky enough to be on the course. And for me, that changes everything.

Tom Cade: It sounds like a very different attitude and a very different approach that you've got now towards the game, which is great. I mean, it sounds like with a full list of events and tournaments, you're doing it for the enjoyment of it and it's nice to hear.

Caroline Matelski: I still want to play well, Tom, but I'm going to enjoy every bit of it while I'm there.

Tom Cade: There you go. Well, Caroline Matelski, again, thanks so much for being on with us today. And just to reiterate, Caroline was the very first champion of the Washington State Women's Amateur Championship, which was held in 1994. And we were very surprised and pleased to see her name on the list of players to play in the Washington State Women's Mid-Amateur Championship next week at the Fairwood Golf and Country Club. So Caroline, good luck with that and enjoy the round and enjoy the game again. It's nice to hear that you've picked it up again and thanks again for being on with us today.

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Caroline Matelski: Well, thank you for having me. I'm looking forward to seeing you all at the Amateur at Fairwood.

Tom Cade: We'll see you out there. Okay, Caroline. Thanks again.

Caroline Matelski: Thank you. Bye bye.