

# Sharon Stegmuller: *Chipping Away at Her Passion For Golf*

When my editor asked me to do an interview for national female golf something or other, I said, “me?” I know nothing about the sport. I don’t watch it and I stink at “putt putt” or as it is now called, “mini golf.” But I was up for the challenge. After all my dad had been an avid golfer. He had even gotten a hole in one after only playing for a few years, which is extremely rare. And as a black man, my dad, in the 80’s, playing a sport that was largely seen as a “white man’s” sport, I was looking forward to interviewing a female to get her perspective on the sport today. So, I put my feelers out and found Sharon Stegmuller, a local Ag business owner and Brawley resident. She is an avid golfer who grew up in Orange County but has been living in the valley for decades. She was out of town on vacation – playing golf of course- so we did our interview over the phone. I have to admit, after hearing about her love for the game. I am thinking about taking it up myself!

J: When did you first start playing golf? What made you take it up?

S: I started playing after college, during my second year working professionally for a large insurance company. I played in Orange County CA with some work colleagues near the UC Irvine campus. I took up the game because it was fun, the people playing were polite and mostly because there was a lot of opportunity to do insurance business on the golf course.

J: Was it an instant connection to the game or developed over time?

S: I loved it from the beginning and only wish that I had taken it up earlier. The better one plays, the more enjoyable, and the more invitations one will get to play on better courses and in bigger tournaments.

J: What was it that you loved from the beginning?

S: The comradery from other players, the respect for the integrity of the game, and of course, playing on beautiful properties.

J: Yes, even though I don’t play, I have seen dome spectacularly beautiful golf courses myself. Did you have any preconceived notions about the game?

S: I was intimidated at first because I’m competitive and wanted to be good right at the beginning. Wrong! It takes practice to become good.

J: Did you ever feel you had to act more masculine than feminine to fit in?

S: Not at all.

J: Have you faced any discrimination as a female player?

S: Not at all. In fact, many people are interested in seeing how well a female can play the game.

J: I am glad to hear that. Do you think you're treated differently *because* you were a female playing this game?

S: Not really. I've felt included in almost every situation, whether all female or co-ed foursomes. I'm sure men swear less when I'm in their foursome though.

J: As a black women, one of my fears of ever taking up golf is racism. I know certain golf course or tournaments would not even let black people play as late as 1990. Have you witnessed any racism while playing golf?

S: Not at all, in fact I've found people of all nationalities welcoming.

J: That's good. I do wonder if I would have the same experience. However, that would not stop me. I think I do want to try it someday. Where is the most beautiful place you have ever played?

S: I'm partial to Western courses. Sedona, Flagstaff and Sunriver OR would be at the top.

J: Do you attend major competitions -to view as a spectator?

S: Yes. I've attended the PGA Tour's local event in La Quinta, now known as the American Express Tournament (formerly the Bob Hope) and also the ANA Inspiration at Mission Hills in Rancho Mirage (formerly the Dinah Shore/Kraft Nabisco)

J: Have you ever competed?

Yes, I compete most Thursday mornings in a women's 9-hole league in La Quinta between November and early May. I also compete in co-ed tournaments, couples' tournaments and holiday tournaments.

J: Did you win when you competed?

S: Yes, I have won as a single player, part of a couple's team and also as a foursome. A great memory is winning the Fourth of July Firecracker Tournament at PGA WEST in La Quinta on 2009 and 2010. It was 110 and we kept our chill and beat out 25 other teams.

J: That's impressive. I had no idea you were this good! Where is your favorite place to play?

S: I love Spanish Bay in Carmel, Washington National in WA and The Canyon Course in Flagstaff. I played in Cabo San Lucas as well and that was gorgeous along the coast. I also played at Chamber's Bay, the site of a US Open...not my favorite—not one tree!

J: Who's your favorite female player?

S: Female: Lexi Thompson—although she came in 2<sup>nd</sup> at the last US Open at the historic Olympic Club in San Francisco, she is grit and determination and won the “local” Mission Hills Kraft Nabisco major tournament a few years back.

J: Do you think you will ever stop playing or think that you are too old to play?

S: No, it's one of the reasons I love the sport. You can play at almost any age. A great family sport and one that welcomes people.

J: Have you ever injured yourself?

S: No. But it helps to stretch and warm up.

J: What's the hardest part of the game for you?

S: Chipping from the rough just outside the green.

J: I had to Google what “Chipping” was. (Short shots played around the green)  
Well, this game is obviously something you love - so, what is the best part about this game for you? What are your strengths?

S: My drive is my best part. I'm 90% in the fairway and straight. I get all of my 5'3” frame into it.

J: I know you won a competition as a single player, but do you regularly play alone, if so, do you prefer that or playing in groups?

S: I do play alone, but current USGA rules do not allow one to post a score when playing alone. I like to post my scores to hopefully improve my handicap, which is 20.1. Generally, I play with others though.

J: Is there someplace you have always wanted to play but haven't yet? And will you?

S: I'd like to play at Whistling Straits and Torrey Pines in the next 3 years.

J: I know you said you are competitive so do you feel more relaxed as you play golf or is it more of a challenge and you feel amped up, or stressed?

S: (She laughs) Depends on the day. Hard to leave work at work sometimes. I'm competitive, so usually not 100% relaxed on the course.

J: Is there anything about golf that people who don't play would be surprised to learn?

S: Yes. Two items:

1) There are some senior housing communities that are developing 12 hole golf course for those who don't want to spend 4 ½ hours playing a round or who don't have the energy to do so. It's a nice evolution of the game to keep some in it longer. Hawk's Landing in Yucca Valley is one close by.

2) Female players are the fastest growing segment of the sport and equipment, and apparel companies are well aware of that.

J: I love hearing that. I hope women continue to take up this sport - that's exciting! What would you say to young women or any woman who is thinking about taking up the sport or never even considered it?

S: It's a sport that you can play for many, many years that has tremendous business and social opportunities. The earlier you start, the more you will enjoy it!