

AMY ALCOTT: THE KEY IS THAT YOU LOVE IT

With her 30-plus worldwide victories and five major titles—and her wit, wisdom and walk-the-line style—West L.A.'s Amy Alcott has brought dimension and character to golf. On the eve of Alcott's transition from full-time LPGA regular to player emeritus, the World Golf Hall of Famer talks with **Anne Wallace McAndrews** about the state of women's golf, the secret to success, designing her first course, and her biggest peeve about the game today.

Anne Wallace McAndrews: *What's different about the women's golf Tour, as you leave it, from when you arrived?*

Amy Alcott: Players today are in the best shape ever and view themselves as athletes. There's no question they have to be fit because of the rigorous week-to-week tournaments and competition. To say the players are better or better shot-makers? I wouldn't say so. They are stronger, the equipment is better, and sports psychology has taken the also-ran kind of players and made them better. Ultimately, it takes something special to be in the top one percent, a whole mind-body connection. Anyone who is looking for an easy way out isn't going to make it. I am talking from the Annika Sorenstam *crème de la crème* point of view. When I arrived on the Tour in 1975 at 18, it took dedication to be at the top, and it still does.



Is there a secret to your success?

You can't hit enough golf balls. There's no way to practice enough. Maybe you think you've hit a lot of balls; however, there's always someone out there who has practiced more than you. Also, golf should be something you want to do, not something that a parent or some other person aspires for you. Otherwise you'll lose interest.

Who has the purest swing?

One of the most visibly powerful swings is Tiger's. Ernie Els has one of the most fluid swings. Of the modern era in women's golf, there's only one swing I like and that's Karrie Webb's. She has an equality to her swing that I like. When I see a swing I like, I'll notice it—and there aren't a lot of swings I like.

Your advice for young Tiger wannabes?

I encourage people to play with those they find intimidating, and that will make them better players. I played with the boys a lot when I was 15. They outdrove me 20 to 30 yards, and I played with old men who challenged me to work on my short game. You're going to have ups and downs. I've learned more from tournaments that I didn't win. Sometimes it is like a survival test, and you learn more from falling on your face and picking yourself up—although being in the winner's circle is a hell of a lot more fun!



You tell a story about your father in Al Roker's book Big Shoes: In Celebration of Dads and Fatherhood. Was your father a big influence in your decision to turn pro at 18?

Growing up, I didn't give a whole lot of thought to turning pro. My parents were both good athletes, but neither played golf, which is why I pursued it. I wasn't pushed. In high school, I received a scholarship to go to Dartmouth to play on the men's team. My teacher, Walter Keller, said, "You're a little racehorse. You need to go out and challenge yourself." He wanted me to play different courses in different parts of the country, with golfers of different levels. The whole world was my oyster at 18, but I was a scared little kid.

What's one of your most memorable moments in the game?

The day I played Augusta National in 1999, I had a hole in one on the 16th. I was one of two women playing that day. I felt a bit like an outlaw. Clint Eastwood happened to be there and from the back of the room after the round, he raised a toast and sang "Once in Love with Amy."

What possessed you to jump in the lake at your first Nabisco victory (1983) at Mission Hills?

I looked at my caddie and said, "We're jumping in the water." You can't be afraid to be who you are. I felt it was me. Golf is a very conservative sport. It almost exudes that we never do anything wrong. It's important for players to do and say things they really feel, and not just perform as robots. Kind of like what Mae West once said: "I don't care what they say about me as long as they talk about me." Little did I know it would start a trend.

What's it like to go from full time on the Tour to player emeritus?

It's an adjustment. I'm home now more, and it has been a transition, but golf has given me great structure. It's everything I've known since I was a little girl practicing on the front lawn of our home. Now I play selected Tour events. I'm excited about the new radio show I co-host called GolfChix. You can hear it Saturday mornings in Los Angeles (570AM), in Palm Springs (920AM), and all the way to Rochester,

New York. Together with my longtime business agent Linda Giaciolli and television host and producer Susan Hunt, we talk business, lifestyle, and the world of golf. We dish, from equipment to golf politics, from Tiger to Annika to the Topless Golf Team in Arizona.

What led you to want to design golf courses?

I've always kept a book of 40 or 50 of my favorite golf holes, from Ohio to the Philippines. If being a golfer is being an artist, then I've always viewed myself as an artist. I'm very visual. It's a natural progression for me to consult on course design. I got a lot of enjoyment designing the new Indian Canyons Golf Resort in Palm Springs where I'd won three Nabisco championships. I'm grateful to have worked with Casey O'Callaghan, a talented architect from Newport Beach. And to the Agua Caliente Indian band who said, Okay, let's go ahead and do this on their land.

In this day of "survival" and "extreme" golf played on ball-eating, monster layouts, how does Indian Canyons compare?

The course is designed not to confound or send you on a Mr. Toad's Wild Ride around every corner. There's something to be said for planning a course that challenges, but doesn't exhaust; energizes, but doesn't deplete; unleashes the warrior within, but at the end of the day, you still have energy to go out to dinner. I like to think that if you let it, a course will speak to you. It will show you the way around.

You're at the top of the world in women's golf and a member of the World Golf Hall of Fame. Does the word "retire" exist in your vocabulary?

I don't think anyone should retire. I've played as a pro for 30 years and I love it still. What's driven me the most is that golf is a game. When I lose sight of that fact and start playing with expectations, then it becomes work. The key is that you love it. Mark Twain said that when you find something you love, you never work a day in your life.

What would you change if you could change one thing about golf?

I think we're too quick to call young players superstars before they've proven themselves. We're so crazed for idols and superstars we've forgotten who they really are. It's all about hype. Excellence is longevity over a long period of time. Nowadays my pet peeve is that athletes who are called superstars are here today, gone tomorrow. Annika Sorenstam, Kathy Whitworth, JoAnne Carner, Lee Trevino, Jack Nicklaus, Tom Watson are the real thing. Amy Alcott is the real thing. ■