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Sports



After sinking putt for first title, Janet Coles shouts with glee and rushes into arms of caddy Bruce Landen Sunday

Aptos' Janet Coles Exults In First Win

By BOB PUTNEY
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"Yes, tears came to my eyes. I hugged my caddy. The joy was just so spectacular.... it's just the greatest feeling in the world!"

That was Janet Coles of Aptos talking on the phone Sunday after she had just won the first title in her two-year professional golf career — the Lady Tara Classic in Atlanta, Ga.

It didn't come easily as she had to wait until the third hole of a sudden-death playoff before winning the \$11,250 first prize.

And would you believe that this charming young lady was on crutches and in a cast for nine weeks and had moments when she wondered about her golfing future?

It's true. "I hurt my leg Jan. 10 playing basketball," said Coles, who played basketball and golf when a student at UCLA. This was only her third tournament

since returning to the tour. "I wanted to come out for three tournaments to give it a try and then I was coming back home," she said via telephone Sunday.

But physical therapy after she cast was removed helped, though Janet was limping when she went back out on the tour, her mother, Mrs. Henry Coles of Aptos, said Sunday. The parents' telephone hardly stopped ringing Sunday.

"I should have birdied 15, 16, 17 and 18 (where putts just wouldn't drop), but then I really didn't know I was in contention," Coles reminisced. "But I didn't know I was in contention. I didn't want to know. I asked my caddy not to tell me."

After signing her scorecard following a final round 0 of 70, she turned around and said, "Oh, my God, there might be a playoff." And when defending champ Hollis Stacey missed a putt on the 18th green, it forced the playoff between Coles, Stacey — with whom she had played many junior tour-

naments — and veteran Gloria Ehrst.

They started the playoff on the seventh hole, with Stacey missing the fairway to the left and Ehrst and Coles down the middle. "Hollis hit into a bunker and she was out of it, then Gloria and I flipped out putts," Coles recalled.

On the par three eighth hole, "Gloria hit a seven iron five feet from the hole and mine was 25 feet from the hole. Old 'whoops' here goes up to try to sink the putt and it stopped four feet away. Then Gloria just flipped her putt, I made mine and we went to the ninth hole. It's a dogleg left uphill."

Then, the 23-year-old Coles hit what she called "my best drive of the tournament. I really crunched it — 40 yards past hers. On that hole you can hit anything from a six-iron to a nine-iron into the green. She put her shot five feet from the pin and I hit a wedge three feet away. It was a blind shot to the green, too..."

Ehrst "flipped out her putt again and I made mine. That's when I hugged my caddy, Bruce Landen. He helped me a lot during the tournament."

Veteran pro Olin Dutra, who has worked with many of the sport's greats, received tremendous praise from Coles. "He mentally prepared me to win even when I was in a cast," she said of the highly-respected dean of pros at Fajaro Valley Golf Club. "He helped me with my swing. He helped me to trust my swing, trust myself and go after it (victory) and get it."

And that's just what she did Sunday.

And now, after changing her travel plans at the last minute Sunday night, she's headed to Hilton Head, S.C., and the Tournament of Champions.

Can victory be habit-forming?

"I hope so, I really hope so. That would be great," she concluded.

And with that trust instilled in her by Dutra, she will be among the Tournament of Champions favorites.