

Pressure? Not at this golf benefit

Coles, other LPGA players
turn out for a good cause

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WATSONVILLE — There is a softer, less serious side to professional golf; the side that shows up on Mondays. Away from the pressure of playing on the \$11 million LPGA Tour, players smile more easily, pull some pranks on each other, and do each other favors, too.

Just like sisters.

"That is our family out here," says Jane Geddes a five-time Tour winner this year, during Monday's pro-am benefit for the Watsonville High Foundation, hosted by pro Janet Coles at the Pajaro Valley Golf Club.

"We see each other all the time and we kind of have to be a family," Geddes said. "Of course, you have your close friends, just like anything else. Everybody kind of takes care of each other."

Coles, a 1972 Watsonville High grad, and a member of the school's Hall of Fame, put together a pro-am to raise money for girls' sports at her alma mater. Coles was able to get Geddes, one of the best players on the LPGA Tour, to come to the benefit for one simple reason: She needed a favor. And because Coles took care of Geddes, Geddes took care of Coles.

"Janet did a big favor for me," said Geddes, who has won \$386,000 this year, and is in contention for the LPGA Player of the Year award. "I had a commitment I couldn't do and she took care of it for me. So she came up to me earlier this year and said, 'Well, guess what — you are going to be there that Monday.'"

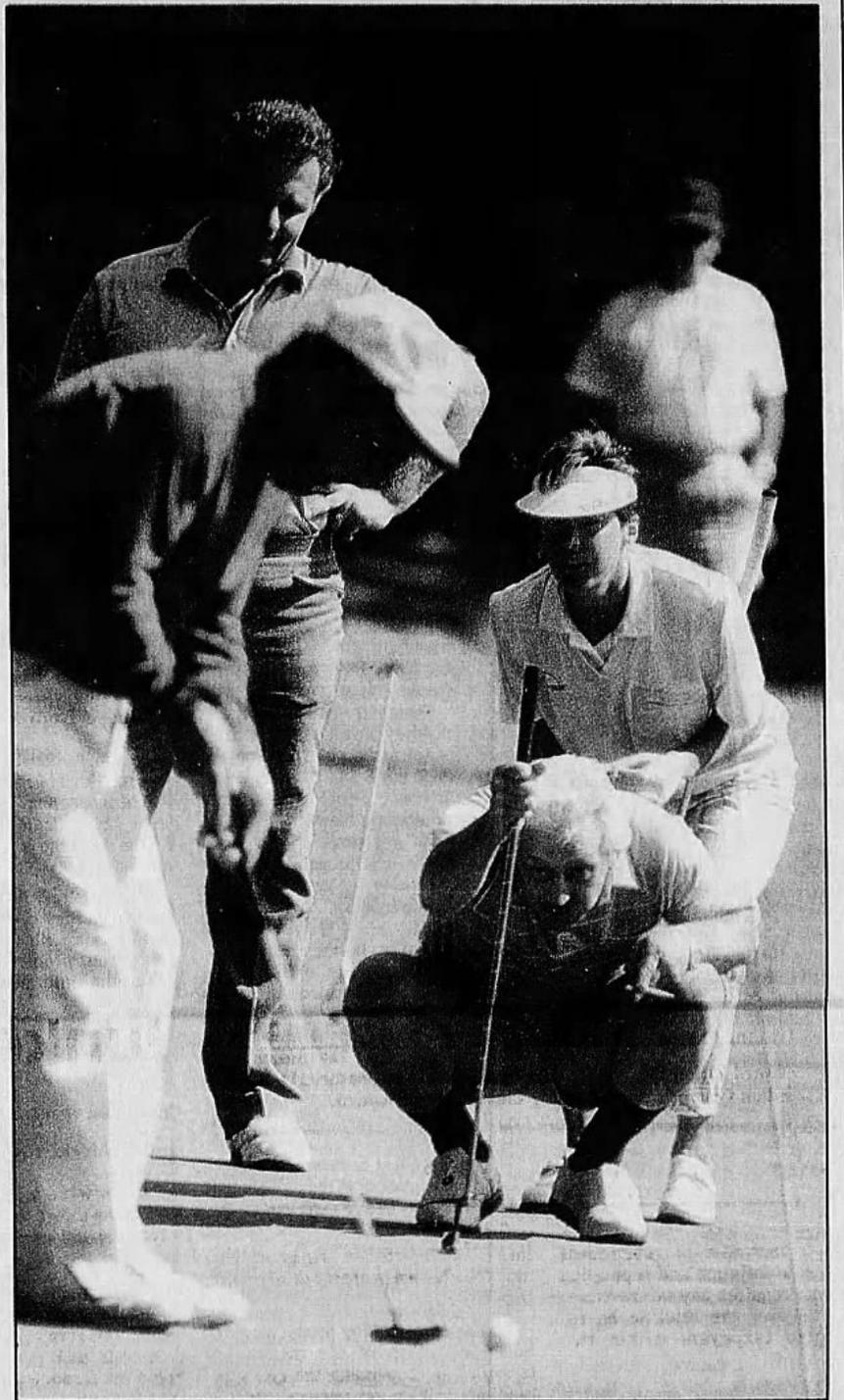
And there she was, having some fun with her amateur playing partners at Pajaro Valley, and helping herself to the barbecue. More than 70 amateurs participated the tournament, played in warm, sunny weather, with spectators scattered around the course.

That's usually the atmosphere for Mondays. It's a relaxed get-together — just like normal families have on Sundays.

"It's a chance for us to meet people and do things for a good cause, and that's always fun," Geddes said.

Coles, too, has a debt to repay.

"She'll scratch my back in a couple of weeks," said Chris Johnson, at 5-10½ one of the tallest players



Bill Lovejoy/Sentinel

Monday was a no-pressure day for Janet Coles and others.

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It's just fun and games at benefit golf tourney

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on the tour. Johnson is hosting an annual benefit in her hometown of Arcata, for the Humboldt County Junior Golf Association, where Coles will be Johnson's guest in a couple of weeks. "It's harder for me to get people up there on a Saturday, than for Janet to get players here," Johnson said between bites on her barbecued burger Monday. "So she's going to help me out up there."

"We do a lot of favors like this for each other," said 11-year Tour pro Vicki Fergon, who is enjoying herself more lately, since the changes she's made in her swing this year are finally salvaging an otherwise difficult year. "This is just a fun day for us," she said. "The paybacks are tough sometimes. But we all do them."

Johnson said the general attitude on the LPGA Tour is that the players are all in it together, even though they're battling for hundreds of thousands of dollars every Sunday.

"It's less cut-throat than a lot of other sports," Johnson said. "In tennis, you have to play against the other person and take advantage of them when they are tired, and see how they feel."

"But in golf," she said, "if I come to the 18th hole tied, I just try to play the hole as best I can, and not rub your nose in it."

Coles said players are all competitive people, "And that involves beating out a friend sometimes. It's on-the-course business. But pro-ams like this are off-the-course business. It's about having fun. There's no work in this."

"Inside the ropes, it's like any other job," Geddes said. "But outside the ropes, I wouldn't want to be doing anything else. It's nice to be getting paid for something everybody else does as a hobby. That's like stealing."

Monday, though, there were no ropes. No competition. It wasn't business. It was like family.