

Breaking away

Back on the team

A 'money player' for her alma mater

By ED VYEDA
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DESPITE BEING banned from playing on the Watsonville High golf team — because she was a *girl* — Janet Coles holds no grudges. She bears no contempt for the school, her old coaches or anyone else involved in what was a blatant case of sex discrimination.

"I don't look back at it like that," says Coles, now in her 12th year on the LPGA Tour. "I think it hurt my parents more than me."

Instead of turning her back on the school, which would have been understandable, Coles has become a champion for the cause of supporting girls' athletics at her alma mater. Sept. 26, she is to host 17 other Tour pros for the Reebok/Janet Coles Pro-Am, with proceeds to go to the Watsonville High Foundation. It was a tournament that raised \$6,200 its first time out in 1987 — which is highly successful for a one-day fund-raiser — and this year should do even better.

"That's nice of her," says Bud Rowland, the 80-year-old retired Watsonville teacher who was the Wildcat golf coach when Coles came along in 1969. "She's been a gracious person right along."

Coles was in school before the implementation of Title IX, the equal rights regulation that now governs school sports. "In those days, the gals just didn't participate with the fellows," Rowland recalled. "But, Janet took things in stride. She realized the situation was a rare one. She handled herself and the conditions very nicely."

Coles played as a freshman and sophomore for the Wildcats, in 1969 and 1970, and went unbeaten — in the process becoming the first girl in the school's history to earn a block W.

"It was not like the ones handed out now for girls and boys," Rowland said. "Those (blocks) were just for boys — up until she broke the custom."

"Then," Coles, now says with a grin, "I got kicked off the team when I was a junior. I still got to practice. I just didn't get to play."

It was almost a case of Coles, who graduated from Watsonville High in 1972, being too good for her own good, Rowland says. He needed permission from all the school principals to allow Coles to play against their teams. Things went fine for a while, then the climate changed and it wasn't OK anymore for Coles to play.

"Janet was real good. She could take care of herself," Rowland said. "The (other school) principals weren't that happy to have her play. The fellows didn't like to take a beating from a gal, but they weren't going to admit it."

At the same time, Rowland made sure that if Coles was going to play, she'd have to be good enough. At the time, the Cats had a solid team, including top player Matt Bloom, who went on to UC-Riverside and won the NCAA Division II individual championship.

"We didn't make any special exceptions for her," Rowland said. "She got on (the team) because she was better than those guys who wanted to play. The fellows didn't resent it."

"The funny part of it," Rowland said, "was I remember her dad, Hank, aying at the time, 'I could sue those people. They are apt to prevent Janet from making a livelihood.' Of course, at that time, we didn't know she was going to be a pro."

Coles did.

"I was a young kid, and I just said I was going to play golf no matter what they did," says Coles, who still lives in Carmel. "But, it was a non-contact sport, so I couldn't understand the problem."

Coles, who turns 34 in August, is now making sure girls at Watsonville High don't get passed by, insisting that 50 percent of the money raised from her pro-am goes directly to girls' sports. "I wanted to make sure there was a commitment to that," she said.

Coles, who last year was named to the WHS Hall of



Bill Lovejoy/Sentinel file

Janet Coles has followed through on her plans to improve her pro-am benefit.

Fame, is also pleased to know that there is another girl playing golf these days at Watsonville High — Michelle Mio, who came close to qualifying for the Central Coast Section tournament this year. "I think that's really great," Coles says.

As for the pro-am, "I'm excited Reebok is in-

volved," Coles said of the company contributing \$17,000 to cover the appearance fees for the Tour pros who will join Coles for the tournament. Coles has been not only put her name on the tournament, but has put in her own time, too.

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Golf/ Coles playing for Watsonville, again

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"The reason the tournament has grown so fast is because Janet is out on the Tour every day putting things together," says Gary Cursio, general manager of Pajaro Valley Golf Course, which again will host the pro-am. "He job is to play golf, not run a tournament. But she is doing it, and doing it totally gratis."

"Janet Coles doesn't need to come back here and do this," says Larry Hebert, the Reebok International regional representative, who helped coordinate sponsorship of the tournament. "There are other things she could be doing. But I've known Janet and Gary for 12 or 13 years and it's nice to work with friends, because they are working from the heart."

The amateur field is limited this

year to 66 players, at \$250 a player, for the fivesome scrambles. Gallery tickets are \$20, and included in both is the all-day barbecue on the course. For pro-am information, call 722-0670, or 724-3851.

"The winner of this whole thing is the foundation, and women's athletics," said Coles. "I'm just thrilled to be involved."

Not bitter. Just thrilled.

After seeing a foursome play 150 holes in one day last year, radio DJ Vic Johnson of Santa Cruz figured he could put together a group that would be up to the challenge of beating that mark. And he did, as Johnson and partners Neal Pearlberg and Steve Christansen played 153 holes at Pajaro Valley Golf Course, in The Longest Day In

Golf benefit for the American Cancer Society.

But, Johnson's group still didn't do well enough to beat the foursome at Aptos Seascape — where Randy Brooks, Fred Vierra, John Hill and O.J. McCulley played 171 holes, from 5:40 a.m. to 7:30 p.m. And they would have kept going for their goal of 190 holes, except that Seascape had to close the course for the night.

Together, the teams raised close to \$13,000 in pledges during the benefit. Last year, Brooks, Vierra, Hill and Matt Murray played 150 holes at Seascape and raised \$10,000. Murray couldn't play Monday because of an injury, but McCulley, the Aptos High star this year, filled in and more than met the challenge.

LPGA star Patty Sheehan, one of Santa Cruz's adopted daughters for her involvement with a locally based charity organization, recently received the prestigious Charlie Bartlett Award, given by the Golf Writers' Association of America to a playing professional for unselfish contributions to betterment of society.

Sheehan, who has helped establish Tigh Sheehan, a home in Soquel for young girls, was honored during the Dinah Shore Invitational, in Rancho Mirage. The last recipient of the award was Gene Sarazen, in 1984.

Besides the award, Sheehan also picked up a \$1,000 check from Dinah Shore, to go to Tigh Sheehan.



Janet Coles

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