

Change for the better

Inkster putting like a champ

LOYALTY GOES only so far. Although Juli Inkster had used her old Arnold Palmer blade putter to win three U.S. Women's Amateur Championships, plus two major championships as a professional, a couple of weeks ago it seemed like there just weren't any more championship putts left in it.

Unlike a lot of players, who change putters more often than they change socks, Inkster hadn't tinkered too much with different putters during her career, which began innocently enough around her family's home along the 14th fairway at Pasatiempo Golf Club. It was that same Arnold Palmer putter that took her to her first of three straight Women's Amateur titles in 1980, to All-American honors at San Jose State, and to her place now as one of the best players in women's golf.

Throughout a career that now totals 12 LPGA Tour victories, the old Arnold Palmer putter seemed to be a comfortable fixture in Inkster's hands. She'd even joke about how she wouldn't know what to do if she ever got a new putter.

Maybe the greatest putt in Inkster's career came in the first round of the 1982 Women's Amateur, where the two-time defending champ was 1-down on the 18th hole, facing a 12-foot downhill slider for par, while her opponent was in easy two-putt par range.

She turned to her husband, Brian, who was caddying for her, and asked how the putt was going to break. "He couldn't say anything," Inkster once recalled. "I mean, he couldn't talk. I know he thought I was going to miss it." Instead, she made it, then went on to win the match on the first hole of sudden death and made history that week in becoming the first player since 1934 to win the tournament three years in a row.

But, this year, Inkster's often-magic touch with the putter was missing. In five tournaments she'd made a modest \$11,000 and some change. Finally, a couple weeks ago in Tucson, she hit 15 greens and shot 82. So, the putter that had been her trusted ally since she first started playing was heading for re-

Golf



Ed Vyeda

irement. And although Inkster had shelved the old putter in the past, if only briefly, this time it might be for good — since her new Ping putter was good enough to help her win another major, Sunday at the Dinah Shore.

But the old putter really doesn't belong in a closet, really, or in the trunk of a car. It deserves a place above the mantle. After all, if that putter could talk, it would have some great stories to tell.

□ Although Inkster's victory was the major news at the Dinah Shore, local golf fans probably noticed, too, how well Janet Coles played in finishing tied for sixth.

Coles, the 1972 Watsonville High grad who is in her 13th season on the LPGA Tour, had herself in contention with some of her best play this year. It was her highest finish of 1989, and biggest paycheck, \$12,511.

Coles is currently trying to iron out some problems with her annual pro-am fundraiser for the Watsonville High Foundation. The Reebok company has stepped out as corporate sponsor, which leaves the tournament a bit stranded. But, if the event doesn't follow last year's format — featuring 18 Tour pros — Coles still plans to coordinate a benefit tournament.

"We've looked at alternatives," said Gary Cursio, general manager at Pajaro Valley Golf Course, which is to host the Coles tournament. "We'll still have a tournament. It may be on a different date, and we may not have the pros playing. But there will be a Janet



The Associated Press/Sentinel file

A switch in putters helped Juli Inkster win the Nabisco Dinah Shore LPGA tournament Sunday

Coles tournament."

□ There *definitely* will be a 23rd Little Helpers Golf Tournament. Already, 84 players have registered for the April 28-29 event, the longest-running benefit tournament in the area. The tournament features a flight for best-ball twosomes and a flight for scrambles foursomes, for 36 holes at the Pajaro Valley Golf Course. Entries close April 21, with entry fee \$150. For more information about the tournament, call 724-3851.

□ Kenny Woods of Aptos helped

Stanislaus State win the 16th annual George Buzzini Sr. Stanislaus Invitational college tournament last week, placing tied for fourth individually. Woods, a sophomore, shot even-par 72 the final round of the 54-hole event at Turlock Country Club — which is somewhat familiar ground, since Woods is a third-generation golfer from his family to play the course. Both his father and grandfather have been Turlock members.

Woods' performance was a solid, 7-over-par for the tournament, and three shots behind winner Dave Bolton of Portland State, at 220, 4-

over-par. Teams in the field included San Diego State, Long Beach State and UOP.

□ Former Pajaro Valley GC assistant Dian Murphy has been named head pro at Laguna Seca Golf Club, becoming only the second woman head pro in Northern California.

Murphy, 41, has worked seven years for Nick Lombardo, who owns Laguna Seca, Pajaro Valley plus the Rancho Cañada golf complex. Murphy said she plans on doing a lot of teaching.

Ed Vyeda is the Sentinel's sports editor.