



Pro-golfing, Swiss-style

Twenty-six year old Nora Angehrn is Switzerland's number one professional female golfer, and a promising young talent in Europe. *Swiss News* caught up with Nora in St. Moritz to find out what it's like to be a touring pro-golfer.



Nora has been playing sports since she could walk and golfing since the age of ten. “When I was young, I played ice hockey, basketball, floor hockey, basically anything with a ball. You name it and I played it.”

When her parents started going to the golf course on Sundays, “they said I could come with them or stay home by myself. So I decided to go with them. I caddied for my dad and started playing too. It was cool, but not ‘oh wow, I love it’.” Well, not at first, that is.

Nora displayed natural talent for golf, and her annual improvement meant that at the age of 14 she was selected for the Swiss National Team. As an amateur, she went on to compete in

seven European Amateur Team Championships, three World Amateur Championships, and was the Swiss Amateur Champion in 2000, 2001 and 2004.

Going pro

For European women to become pro-golfers, they must attend and finish in the top 30 positions at Qualifying School – Q-school – to gain their playing card for the Ladies European Tour (LET). Finishing in the top 30 allows competitors to play in almost every professional European tournament during the following year.

Nora competed at Q-school for the first time in November 2004, almost on a whim, she says, to try her hand at the competition and see how she would do. She ended up shooting the lowest round of the week with a final round five-under-par 67, which catapulted her from 20th position to 3rd and ensured her a full playing card for the LET in the 2005 season.

Counting that day as one of her greatest golf successes to date, she says: “My adrenaline was racing during that round. It was a great way to turn pro.”

Between the ears

However, turning pro meant that Nora’s hobby had become her profession. “Because golf is my job, there is more pressure than when I was an amateur.”

She now has sponsorship, which she calls one of the most important factors in pro-golf. But with sponsors, comes the added responsibility of representing them well, while continually improving the standard of her golf.

After a tough year in 2005 that saw her return to Q-school to regain her card, Nora’s attitude is positive. “For me, fun is the most important part of whatever I do.

“Currently, I am working on the mental side. Many people say that at a certain level, golf is all between your ears. I am just trying to get better each year.

“As long as I have fun, keep my card, keep the sponsors happy and make a living, then I’ll do it.”

On the ball: golfing here and abroad

The difference between the US and Switzerland, says Nora, is that everyone can play golf in the States.

“And that is awesome. But of course, the disadvantage of going to a public course in the US is that it may take six hours to play 18 holes because the people in front of you can’t play,” she says with a laugh.

Nora usually spends 1-2 months during the winter in Florida, practising with her Canadian coach, Denise Lavigne. This year, she trained in the West Palm Beach golf area.

Contrary to popular belief, training for the pros doesn’t mean playing a round of golf every other day. “That would be great though,” she says. “I go to the driving range and hit balls for two hours. It’s not really fun, because the shots I am hitting are bad, but it is a little part of the swing that I’m actually working on. Or I putt for two hours to work on one minor part of my game.”

When she wasn’t training in Florida, Nora did manage to get in a few rounds. “Playing in the States is definitely more easy-going than here. And it can be more fun. On the course, the cart girl comes by with beer, everyone’s laughing, and I get the chance to meet and talk with many different people.”

Nora says there is still a bit of an elitest attitude in Switzerland surrounding golf. “People think playing golf is snobby. I



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“At a certain level, golf is all between your ears.”

remember when I was young, I was almost embarrassed to tell my friends that I was going to Zumikon [golf course].”

And of course, there’s the matter of space. “We don’t have enough space. Everything is tight. It’s supply and demand and we can’t keep up.”

Playing with the best

Once she has established herself on the LET, Nora has set herself some ambitious goals. The biggest is to represent Europe in the Solheim Cup, though she also aspires to play on the LPGA tour; a tour she believes holds the highest standard of female golf in the world.

“The talent is amazing,” she says, “the prize money is triple at least, and the marketing is way ahead of Europe. I would say that the LET today is like the LPGA was seven years ago.”

There is a new trend for women golfers, especially in the US, to compete in men’s tournaments, for example Annika Sörenstam at the Colonial in 2003. And even though she didn’t make the cut, Nora believes “the thing Annika did was very cool.”

“She is the number one female golfer in the world, so she entered the men’s tournament as a one-time thing – to see if she was good enough, if she could compete on that level.” And her actions certainly were good for the visibility of women’s golf.

While Nora respects Sörenstam, she doesn’t seek to replicate the career of one specific golfer. “I don’t really admire just one golfer. I admire different aspects. I admire Tiger for his mental toughness, and Adam Scott for his swing.”

Promising start

Nora began the 2006 season by becoming the first Swiss to win the Pam Goldings Ladies International held at the end of Feb-

ruary in Johannesburg, South Africa. “We all want to play,” she says. “Most European players head to South Africa because we don’t have a [European] tour until the end of April.”

The tournament marks her second professional win, and is certainly the way she hoped to start her season, taking home SFr 9,000 in prize money. “My sponsors pay the expense of going, but any money I win, I pocket,” she says.

Nora’s next competition at home will be an important one as the LET comes to Switzerland this May for the first time since 1997. The Golf Gerre Losone course, located between Locarno and Ascona, will host the Duetsche Bank Ladies’ Swiss Open from May 18-21.

Playing alongside Nora will be Switzerland’s two other professional women golfers – Florence Lüscher and Frédérique Seeholzer – together with at least four of the top amateur players, who will be nominated by the Association Suisse de Golf (ASG) to represent the Swiss nation.

This contest will mark Nora’s first professional LET event in her home country – a competition that she is hoping to shine in. “The pressure’s going to be on, of course, but I won the pro-am (Losone International) on that course, so I like it.”

With over 500,000 in prize money, 75,000 alone going to the first place winner, Nora has many reasons to play her best. And, as an added bonus, the winner earns a spot in the LET for the remainder of 2006 and the following three seasons.

To cheer Nora on at Golf Gerre Losone, take the train to Locarno, and then hop on bus 36 to Losone. Take the bus to the end of the line, and then follow the signs to the course, which is about a 15-minute walk away.

By Kati Clinton

Wanna go pro in Switzerland?

For European women to become pro-golfers, they must attend and finish in the top 30 positions at Qualifying School to gain their playing card for the Ladies European Tour (LET). Finishing in the top 30 allows competitors to play in almost every professional European tournament during the following year. However, if a competitor’s ranking at the end of the following year falls too low, she will have to compete in Q-school again to re-win her card.

Women ranked in the top 90 in Europe are automatically exempt from Q-school and retain their cards for the next year. Women ranked in the next 45 or so places in Europe return to Q-school, but are exempt from the pre-qualifying round, and begin play at the final stage.

Around 150 women compete in the LET Q-school each year. First time competitors, as well as women who have lost their cards from previous seasons, have to play in a 36-hole competition to advance to the qualifying round.

Successful competitors then join the 45 or so players who were already exempt, to make a field of 90 – plus ties – for the final qualifying stage. The final stage consists of a 54-hole competition, with the top 30 competitors winning full playing cards.