

## SPORTS / COLUMNISTS

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Jean Bartholomew stands at the fifth hole during the Met Women's Open championship held at Huntington Country Club. (August 25, 2009)  
Credit: Newsday/Karen Wiles Stabile

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June 5, 2013

Jean Bartholomew knows that her professional golf career would have been much different had she played the sport year-round and nationally during her youth in Garden City, the way teen golfers do now.

She probably would not have had a career.

"I would have burned out," said the 46-year-old teaching pro and former LPGA Tour player, who will tee off this morning in the second of women's golf's five majors, the Wegmans LPGA Championship. Her point is, she has absolutely zero misgivings about having played four sports instead of concentrating on one for 365 days a year, across various time zones.

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"My parents couldn't have done that," she said after hitting typically long, straight shots during a practice round yesterday at Locust Hill Country Club. "There weren't as many [junior] tour events. Now it's like a little professional tour these kids are on. It costs a lot of money to be a junior golfer now, if you want to get recruited by the top schools. Back then, you could play four sports and still compete.

"Being an athlete is an advantage and I think it helps you with your golf. Physically, I could do things that girls who never played other sports couldn't," she said.

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Bartholomew was a 1,000-point basketball scorer for Garden City High. She also was an All-Nassau field hockey player, a star for the county champion boys golf team and a softball player, too. When Newsday chose the greatest high school athletes in Long Island history, she made the list.

Later, she played for Duke, was runnerup in the 1988 NCAA women's championship, had 10 top 10 finishes on the LPGA Tour and had six seasons of six-figure earnings. She led the 1995 U.S. Women's Open through 36 holes. Had she been a golf-only athlete, might she have won a major or some other LPGA tournament? That is not a question that keeps her up nights.

She qualified for this major by having won the LPGA's teaching pros championship. "A win is a win," she said, having displayed a swing that still is solid. Her first teacher, Garden City Golf Club pro emeritus Gil McNally, still works with her because he has a winter home near her work place, PGA National in Palm Beach Gardens, Fla.

Of course, most of her time revolves around giving lessons, not taking them. For seven years, she taught on Long Island during the summer at The Creek. "But I decided I would play as much as I could in the summer, as long as I can keep up with these youngsters," she said.

As a Long Islander who still spends two months a year in Garden City, she would have loved to have been in the Island's first U.S. Women's Open at Sebonack in Southampton, later this month. She did try to qualify at the Atlanta sectional, but fell short. "That would have been nice," she said with a tone that indicated it was not the end of the world.

"You totally have a different perspective, stepping away from the game. You realize the stupid things that you did, like worrying about your swing and all that stuff," she said. "When you don't get to play much, you accept your bad shots a little more."

She might do some local TV commentary at Sebonack. "I've never been shy," said a golfer who has no regrets.

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