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DORFMAN**

GOLF

The choices of her life

Karen Noble is a pretty little thing who lives in Morris County, plays golf right out of the Harry Vardon One and Only Original Primer and says she has narrowed her life down to two electives. She will either go out on the pro tour or into politics.

Given the relative image of each discipline, it would be a crying shame if she didn't pick golf.

But make no mistake. Political ambitions are no flashing moment of idealism acquired by this 5-4, 125-pound sprite during her recently-completed student years at Wake Forest, even if it could seem to an onlooker that sports were her only preoccupation.

She was a two-time captain of the golf team, a talented field hockey player, the school's "athlete of the year" in her senior term, and a campus heroine admired primarily for these physical gifts.

But having wandered, for no particular reasons, into such courses as "Introduction to American Politics," "American Constitutional Law" and "Women in Politics," she emerged with high grades and a resolute inspiration to help reverse all the inequities visited upon women since Plato and his band of Greek philosophers first enunciated the utter worthlessness of the female species.

The philosophers, she should know, also barred women from the early Olympics, although this was more a concession to propriety. They were contested in the nude, and very popular, a sort of buff-o boxoffice.

Obviously, Karen Noble is not yet prepared to stand for election to anything. What she is contemplating is resuming an academic life in law school, and then, from an earned position of political power, a frontal assault on the remaining barriers of women's rights. A sister, Anne, 23, works for a Washington, D.C., firm and could precede her into the democratic process.

In college, Karen says with acute insight, she learned the theory of government, but not the practice. She has been told to expect a difference.

But golf will come first. Actually, she has the personality — and quite likely the tools — for both. At 21, with honey blond hair, an appealing face and an assertive but pleasant style, she has both a marvelous golf swing and the education in political science, each from the same school which gave us Arnold Palmer and which has populated more than a few of the nation's golf courses with its athletic talent.

The dilemma, Karen poses without conviction, is what to do first.

“There are some people who say to me, ‘Why in the world would you want to go out on the tour...It’s a hard way to make a buck...You have to do all that traveling...in and out of motels...living out of a suitcase.’ And there are people who say to me, ‘How could you NOT go out on tour...travel to all those nice places...stay in those nice hotels...and actually be paid to

play golf.”

Such indecision was immortalized by the late, great Jimmy Durante, who wondered in song, “Did you ever have the feeling you wanted to go, and then have the feeling you wanted to stay?”

At any rate, Karen Noble is one of the best amateur golfers in the country today — she was runner-up in the U.S. Amateur last year — and beneath all that equivocation is a decision hardened in cement. No matter how she hedges, you can bet your last certificate of deposit she will elect to turn pro and hit the trail some time next summer.

If there is a delay in this plan, it will be only if Karen is chosen to play for the U.S. Curtis Cup team against the British amateurs, who have been sticking it to us lately with a flourish. It will be played next year at nearby Somerset Hills.

Women’s rights then would just have to wait. Even her game plan for the near future is no less than a road map to her first LPGA tournament.

She is headed for the Lost Tree Country Club in Jupiter, Fla., this winter to work in the golf shop and to play in at least four important tournaments, which would continue the process of honing her game into professional quality.

Karen Noble is right now at that intriguing point where everyone around her is certain she can’t miss in pro golf, and where nobody could possibly guarantee it. You just don’t compete with the likes of Nancy Lopez until every last function of the game is committed to muscle memory.

Meanwhile, she sits on top of women's golf in New Jersey and the met area, although strong recognition in this respect must be made of another youngster, Laura D'Alessandro of Toms River, who also has pro prospect sketched visibly into her golf swing even as she continues to matriculate — predictably — at Wake Forest.

Karen's victory the other day in the Women's Trans National championship continues to reflect her progress into world class ability, as did her U.S. Amateur performance last year. Locally, she is a two-time former state amateur queen, two-time Metropolitan match-play champion and this year's Met stroke-play winner.

She won the Met mother-daughter title in 1987 with her mom, Rie Noble, and this year's Met father-daughter title with her father, James. So the genetic resources are visible, mostly on her mother's side, although James Noble, who owns a medical supply company in Bernardsville, was once a scratch player and the captain of the Harvard golf team. No chopped liver here.

Rie Noble, a lady of Scottish-German descent — (Rie is affectionately short for Marie and the opposite of Mare, the contraction preferred by Italians) — grew up in a Pennsylvania family devoted to the game, including four brothers who could really strike the ball. After she married James in 1963, they came to New Jersey and joined the Morris County Golf Club.



Karen Noble

... she doesn't fear future

Then Rie set out to stock a trophy room, as with the WNJGA 1971 match-play and 1972 stroke-play titles, the Garden State 1970 and 1972 stroke-play titles and the Garden State's better-ball crown no fewer than seven times with partner Joan Ruvane.

The official parental position in the Noble household is that Karen can make up her own mind about her future. The emotional position is that there is a family and a brass marching band waiting in the wings to cheer her on as she leaves for her first LPGA tournament.

Karen was 10 when her parents put a golf club in her hands and described a fairway, and she has profited from skillful tutelage ever since. From her parents she went on to Diane Daley, respected Wake Forest coach, and without interruption to David Glenz, the Morris County pro, who has been easily the dominant player in the metropolitan area for some years now as well as New Jersey's PGA teacher of the year.

She also found time to become a basketball player and an All-State field hockey player at Mendham High School.

She insists she does not fear the future.

"I think I can hit it as far as anyone," she claims, alluding to the distance the lady mercenaries have cultivated.

The swing is there, onlookers admit, and she agrees.

"I don't have to think of the swing when I make the shot. I just react. This game is 80 per cent mental," she claims, thereby joining a consensus.

As she piles victory upon victory, the club has been highly supportive and excited, including Mike Yannotta, a 25-year-old assistant pro there with PGA Tour hopes of his own. They have been dating for two years.

Each may be out there soon enough, criss-crossing this country in happy competition, maybe meeting occasionally at an airport. They'll just have to work it out.