

THE NEXT LEVEL: GOLF

BY JULIE SAMPSON

LEEANN Vogel's love/hate relationship with golf started as a teenage romance when her father said she must learn the game because it's something she could do throughout life and good for business.

"I got halfway through that first summer before I finally hit a good shot. Once I hit that shot, I knew I always wanted to play. It took me 20 years to learn that not every shot can be a good one," she said.

Learning that lesson, and competing in 22 women's amateurs, has taken Vogel around the world. Vogel, a member of Southward Ho Country Club in Bay Shore, was the Long Island Match Play champion twice and was the Women's Metropolitan Golf Association Match Play champion in 1993. Vogel partners with Rev. Diarmuid McGann. They won the Long Island Mixed Pinehurst Champion in 1993 and placed second in that tournament three times.

"Golf helps me to keep a good attitude," she said. "Even if I have to say, 'Oh, here, I actually found the ball,' that's the good news in this shot."

Vogel is known for a graceful swing, which she attributes to her 5-foot-11 physique. "It's my powder-puff swing because it's fluid. I can hit it competitively with my leverage," she said.

ADVICE: Vogel stresses the fundamentals.

"The theory is that if you set up correctly and start your swing correctly, then you'll hit the ball in the right direction. Three fundamentals a golfer should focus on are grip, stance and alignment. I have an overlapping grip where the pinkie on my right hand gently overlaps the left hand. I find it's a happy medium between the ten-finger grip and the interlocking grip.

"Usually with your stance, you have to be aware that you're parallel to the target line. To check your alignment, make sure your feet, hips and shoulders are lined up properly to where you want the ball to go.

"A rule of thumb is that as the club gets shorter, the ball gets closer to the center of your stance. That's a rough guideline. With the driver, the ball should be roughly off the left heel. If you use a pitching wedge, the ball should be close to the center of your stance.

"To have fun, you have to be creative. You have to try different things. It's great fun when you find what works for you. I take this game very seriously, but I manage to keep it fun."

FAVORITE COURSE: "Meadowbrook Country Club because of its variety. It has short holes, long holes, easy holes and tough holes. Meadowbrook is challenging, but it's fun because it lets you breath." ■



Golfer:
LeeAnn Vogel, 33
Hometown:
West Gilgo Beach
Focus:
Grip, Stance, Alignment