

ALLEN AND CINDY MILLER

CINDY MILLER GOLF, BUFFALO, NY

INTERVIEW BY PAUL RAMEE, JR

There is only one married couple in all of golf that, as a tandem, has played on all four major circuits—the PGA Tour, Champions Tour, LPGA Tour and Legends Tour. Proponent Group members Allen and Cindy Miller know it's not easy to play pro golf and they know it isn't easy to navigate the ups and downs of a long marriage, so they could well imagine their record won't ever be matched.

Born Cynthia Kessler in the Buffalo exurb of Dunkirk, N.Y., Cindy Miller was a walk-on Division I golfer at the University of Miami. She began there in 1974 and by the time she finished in '78 she had played on two national championship teams and made All-American.

Entrepreneurial by nature, she has followed up her three-year stint on the LPGA Tour with notable success as a golf professional, an author, a motivational speaker and operator of a specialty sports apparel company.

Cindy qualified for the LPGA Tour in August 1979 and played through the 1981 season. Her best finish was tie for 18th in the 1981 Bent Tree Ladies Classic in Sarasota, Florida. She was named LPGA Teacher of the Year in 2010 and has made the Golf Digest list of 50 Top Women Teachers in America.

She was a contestant on two series of the Golf Channel's reality show, "The Big Break III: Ladies Only" and "The Big Break VII: Reunion." She has competed in five U.S. Women's Opens and five LPGA Championships, and has played regularly on the Legends Tour.

Cindy and Allen Miller have developed a significant business teaching and coaching junior golfers in upstate New York.



As a guest speaker at corporate events and conferences, she shares stories "from inside the ropes" and reveals in detail how to "own your game,"

regardless of one's walk of life.

Allen Miller grew up a doctor's son in Pensacola, Fla., where he starred in junior golf and was Florida high school champion. After a strong career at the University of Georgia and a several prominent amateur titles, Allen earned a PGA Tour card with ease at the 1971 Q School (fall session) and set his sights on further tournament success. He reached his apex as a player in 1974 with a victory at the Tallahassee Open.

In general Allen's success at the game's highest level was frustratingly borderline—high enough on the money list every year to keep his card, but not high enough to bring sufficient financial or personal rewards. When the time came, he parlayed his keen interest in





Cindy began her career playing on the LPGA Tour and still loves to compete on the LPGA Legends Tour.

the mechanics and emotions of top-level golf performance into a stellar teaching career.

Paul Ramee, in this recent Q&A with the Millers, invited them to fulfill the “What I’ve Learned” mantra of this interview series, and they proved ready and willing to oblige.

I’m wondering how the two stories of your lives in golf began, and how they merged into one story—and Allen, let’s start with you.

Allen: I played the PGA Tour for 15 years, and along the way I would help other tour players with their swings, at times also working with non-tour players when I was home. I didn’t get paid for it, but I felt I had something to offer. When I retired from playing I had the idea to give lessons in my hometown in Florida, but I wasn’t able to find an adequate place to teach. In that era a typical tour pro who quit playing would not be financially set. Guys like me had to find work. I knew I could teach, and although Cindy had never really been an instructor, we did get an opportunity to come teach in Buffalo. Within a month we had moved everything to Buffalo and we’ve been here for 35 years.

Cindy: My parents played golf and they would drag me to the course with them. They were members of Tri-County Country Club, just south of Buffalo. I didn’t really like golf, but I ended up on the course. The pro there told my father he saw some potential in me. Shortly after that my mom took me to an LPGA Tour event and I got a closeup look at Laura Baugh. I remember looking at her nice clothes and her shiny golf bag and saying to myself: “I am going to do this.” The problem was, I wasn’t good enough. When I was 17, I wrote to the University of Miami and they told me I

wasn’t good enough. I wrote back and asked if I could come down and try. They said okay. My father told me I couldn’t go back if I didn’t get a scholarship after freshman year, so I practiced hard and earned a scholarship for those last three years. We won two NCAA Championships and I made All-American. I then went to play on the LPGA Tour. Out there among the best in the world, I was one of the worst. I managed to stay on tour three years and then lost my card.

Allen and I met while I was at the University of Miami while he was playing in the Doral Eastern Open. We were introduced by a mutual friend. I went from tour player to tour wife to tour mom. When we left the PGA Tour, Allen said he wanted to teach golf. At the time I asked him, “How can I fix anyone else if I can’t even fix myself?”

You both came from the playing side, how did that influence your teaching when you started?

Allen: I don’t think playing means you can teach. The tour professionals are trained athletes for the most part and don’t know a whole lot about what they are doing. Most of them these days just wait for you to tell them what to do. You have to take time to study the golf swing if you want to teach. I was always known as a technician, the golf swing has always been my love. The one thing about playing that makes a difference is we know how hard it is and most people don’t realize that. I didn’t realize how hard I had worked to get to the Tour until much later. I believe the most frustrating part of teaching is the lack of hard work people will put in.

Cindy: We try to impress upon our students how hard golf can be. One of my insights into that fact came from sitting on the driving range for hours listening to



Allen is a former PGA Tour winner who transitioned into a top-flight teacher after spending time around the legendary Bob Toski, who was his long-time swing coach.

Bob Toski. When Toski was teaching I would watch and listen like a sponge. My belief is that the “want” needs to be very high so the will to work matches it. I don’t know that I see that in too many players.

How have some of your mentors helped you?

Allen: Bob Toski is the one who changed my whole game, back in 1968. I was one of the top amateurs in the country and my dream was to be the No. 1 amateur in the world. I knew I had to change my swing and I wanted to find a great player who taught. I found Bob and in 16 hours over two days he changed my whole swing to eliminate my roundhouse hook. I had six months before I was to compete in the Masters, by virtue of my high finish in the U.S. Amateur. He took me under his wing and didn’t charge me a dime. He is like a second father to me. I have heard others teach and I know all the theories, but I knew what I wanted to look like and Toski is the one who took me there. I believed 100 percent in what he taught me and I never needed to change after that.

Cindy: My mentors, in no particular order, are Eddie Bush at Doral, Bob Toski, Allen Miller, Debbie Crews, Lynn Marriott and Pia Nilsson.

A lot of players go on to teach and look back and say, I wish I had known that when I played. Did that ever happen to you two?

Cindy: Yeah, all of it! I was such a sponge as a player. Now as an instructor I try and emphasize what the player is doing correctly. When I was growing up all I heard was what I was doing wrong. I kept thinking to

myself, “I am not trying to screw this up,” and also, “Why don’t you tell me how to fix it?” I understand how the student feels and I am sensitive to that so I make sure I give them solutions. I have never met anyone who tries to mess up on purpose.

Allen: In my belief, Toski took me to the highest level of golf and I had no reason to change anything. I had won a PGA Tour event. Like Nicklaus, I had one instructor my whole life and that is what I believed in.

When you’re working with a student how do you eliminate the “clutter” they see on YouTube, websites, etc. and get them refocused to what you are working on?

Cindy: I let the ball be the boss. I had a student come in and tell me he was trying to shorten his backswing. I asked him why and he said he wanted to be more consistent. My response was: “Why is the ball going dead right?” He had no idea. He thought he was trying the right thing. Some people will listen to anything. They never inspect the source. I tell them not to listen to the “committee of they.”

They tend to come to us when they are in pain. We have a lot of players that we work with all winter, then we never see them during the summer, until they start playing bad. We get them refocused on what the ball is doing and that gets their attention. Then improvement happens.

Allen: Most people want a quick fix or the secret move, you have to show them the disadvantage in that.

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Cindy: It is funny to see people who took a lesson from you two years ago taking a lesson from another teacher. I don't think I am God's gift, but I know I can help people. If the ball is not going where you want it to go, you need to know what you are doing with the club. The ball goes where the club points. Sometimes you need to really commit and give what we are working on a chance to develop.

Allen: We just did a tip on Golf Channel. We were discussing that if an instructor gives you a drill, you need to do it over and over to develop mastery. We see so many people hit three balls in a drill, then go back to the same old full swing. I use the example of Adam Scott. He said: "Sometimes a practice session is four hours and I do nothing but drills."

I wanted to ask you about the Buffalo market, having worked at a private club there myself. How have you managed to succeed in what some would call a challenging environment, in terms of economics?

Allen: The national economy doesn't affect the general public in Buffalo, in terms of their spending on the things they enjoy. The public here is going to spend their money to go to the Bills game, go to the Sabres game, or enjoy their golf. It has been that way ever since we have been here. It's different than every other place we've been.

Cindy: What I would say is we've built a track record. The seed of our business was planted 35 years ago and based on the work we have done, the economic cycles haven't affected our business. We have a list of 8,000 people and 50 percent of our work is with juniors.

Allen: At the private clubs it is hard to justify spending \$5,000 or \$10,000 to play golf 10 times a year, that may be why you saw a decline. But if they do leave the private club, they would then come to us.

You mention that 50 percent of your business is teaching juniors—what do you attribute that to?

Cindy: I think it is a matter of the parents looking for college scholarships. The investment works out great for the families. We have a student who is on scholarship and is saving \$180,000 over four years. They probably spent \$2,000 annually on her training, over five years. Who wouldn't spend \$10,000 to save \$180,000? But obviously we run the gamut on our students' ages. We start them somewhere around three years old and we've gone all the way up to age 89.

Allen: I believe it runs in cycles. My cycle was symbolized by Arnold Palmer and that inspired a lot of us kids, then Jack came along, then Watson, then Tiger, now Jordan Spieth. Every six or seven years a new cycle begins and the parents see the opportunity.

Cindy: There is so much exposure for kids now with all the competitive options. The kids get involved, then the parents get excited because of the medals and the opportunity. The PGA and LPGA had done so much to grow the game recently with all their initiatives. LPGA Girl's Golf and the PGA Junior League are wonderful programs. **PG**