



Chautauqua Sports Hall of Fame

15 West Third Street - Jamestown, NY 14701

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EDITOR'S NOTE: The following article on Silver Creek resident Cindy Miller appeared on MiamiHurricanes.com. It is a compelling and inspiring read about the Chautauqua Sports Hall of Famer, written by Kevin Ivany, the University of Miami's assistant director of communications. This is the second of two parts. The first ran in CSHOF's October newsletter.

THE CINDY MILLER STORY (continued)

Unable to keep her family safe and unsure if she would even get to play, all she knew was that she had one year to prove herself or her father was going to force her to come back home, since her family could not afford it.

"I sat on the bed and the only thing I thought about was that I needed to pick up the phone and call Mary Lawrence," Miller said. "I played at the Women's New York State Amateur at Corning Country Club a month prior and I met Mary Lawrence, who was also from New York. We played a practice round and I was like, 'What are you doing? Where are you going to school?' She said, 'I'm going to Miami.' I was like, 'Oh my God, so am I.'

"So, I picked up the phone, I called Mary Lawrence and we went and hit some balls," Miller continued. "Then I went and hit more balls and then I hit some more balls."

Miller then walked into Parsons' office and demanded she receive an opportunity to prove her worth.

"I went to meet Norm, I sat down in his office and I said, 'I'm the one you said could try out.' And he told me, 'That's fine, here is when practice is and this is what you have got to shoot,'" Miller said. "So, if it wasn't for Norm Parsons, my life would have ended up completely different."

Miller went on to qualify for the season-opening tournament and broke 80 for the first time in her life. She then took lessons from teaching legend Bob Toski from Hidden Valley Country Club and continued to improve her game.

"I was like a pit bull. I was not going to leave (Miami)," Miller said. "I practiced more than anyone else. I would sit, watch and think, 'What do they do that I don't do? Why are they better than me?' I was willing to look in the mirror and Norm gave me that chance."

“And I told him in that initial meeting, ‘If I don’t get a scholarship, I am not going to be allowed to come back to Miami next year. But, I have to come back. I have to come back. I just have to,’” Miller continued. *“I drove the guy crazy because I burned the ships, I wasn’t going home. And I got a scholarship my second year and finished as the top-ranked player on the team, the team captain and an All-American. So many coaches nowadays don’t do that. They don’t see that there could be a diamond in the rough, but Norm did and he gave me a chance. So, he forever changed my life.”*

Captain of the 1977 and 1978 golf teams as a junior and a senior, Miller helped the Hurricanes to back-to-back Association for Intercollegiate Athletics for Women (AIAW) national championships.

Most memorable to her was the trip to O’ahu, Hawaii, where she fought to have a chance to compete at the 1977 title just days after her father passed away.

“My father always believed in me and would tell me I can do whatever I want to do. So, I was fighting to be the fifth person to be able to go to Hawaii,” Miller said. *“And I went over to Bob Toski and I told him, ‘I don’t have enough money to pay you, but I will do whatever I have to do at this driving range. I will pick up balls, sweep, whatever you want, but can you please help me?’ And he said, ‘Absolutely.’ So, I would just sit and watch him. All these rich people would fly down from New York City and take lessons from him and I would just sit, watch and listen. I ended up making that fifth spot and at the same time my father ended up going into a coma. I walked into the hospital the day I got home and I grabbed his hand and whispered in his ear, ‘I made the top-five.’ And I swear he squeezed my hand. He died later that night.”*

Competing for her father, Miller and her teammates went into the 1977 championship with chips on their shoulders and made T-shirts saying, ‘Miami Strokes It Better.’



Not backing down from a Tulsa squad featuring the defending national champion and future LPGA Hall of Famer, Nancy Lopez, as well as future Tour players Cathy Reynolds and Lauren Howe, the Hurricanes dominated the event, before repeating in 1978. With her senior year behind her, Miller was ready to pursue her dream of competing on the LPGA Tour. However, despite winning the New York State Amateur in the summer of 1978, that next February she did not make it through qualifying school. *“Again, you are not good enough,”* Miller said. *“I then got in my car and I drove to California by myself. I played on the mini-tour, I won a tournament and the next year I qualified for the Tour.”*

However, there was one problem. Working as a waitress and with her father recently passing, she did not have enough money to compete in the first LPGA Tournament she qualified for. But thanks to a friend from Buffalo, Chuck Hart, she was put in contact with the owner of New Era Cap Company, Dave Koch.

“(Chuck) helped throw a party at the local restaurant I was working at and we raised enough money for me to go play the last five or six tournaments of the season and Dave Koch helped sponsor me,” Miller said. “Again, thank you so much [to him]. I played for three seasons, but then I lost my card. So again, of the best players in the world, I was the worst and I was told, ‘You are not good enough.’”

At this time, she met her husband through a mutual friend at The Rathskeller at UM.

“There was this guy at the bar, his nickname was ‘Dirt Bag.’ He was a professional gambler and he told me he was Pat Bradley’s sponsor on the LPGA Tour,” Miller said. “And he goes, my buddy is coming down to play at the Doral Eastern Open and I am going to caddie for him, so I can get you a ticket. And I was like, ‘Oh my God, you are just dropping names left and right.’ Well, needless to say, his buddy was Allen Miller and I went to watch him play, he gave me a free lesson afterward on the driving range in Doral during the PGA event. We became golf buddies and now we have been married for 39 years.”



After raising her three children, Cindy Miller once again thought about returning to the golf course when she learned of the LPGA Legends Tour.

So, she picked up the phone and asked if she could compete. But she was hit with a familiar phrase, *“You are not good enough.”*

“I was 48 years old. How many times do I have to hear this?” Miller thought.

Finally, told she had to qualify, she picked up her golf clubs and began practicing. Miller not only qualified, but she also received an email from the Golf Channel asking if she wanted to be a part of a women’s reality television show called the Big Break.

“The little voice in my head said, ‘You don’t want an exemption, you are too old. What if you don’t hit it far enough?’ Miller recalled. “And then the other little voice said, ‘Excuse me, but you want to win a tournament on the Legends Tour and this will be a great opportunity to learn how to not choke your guts out. Oh, good point!’”

“So, I went on the show, I did really well and when I returned to the Legends Tour I got a sponsor exemption and I was now a television golf celebrity,” Miller continued. “I birdied the 17th hole of the final round, walked to the last tee tied for the lead and I needed to hit a shot over the water with thousands of people watching me and I knock it on the green. I two-putt for par and I was like, ‘Oh my God. Oh my God. They know who I am.’ But, then my friend birdied 17 and won by one stroke. So, I finished second, but I proved to myself that the dream that I had to be a star was not a nightmare. I was good enough.”

Currently a Certified Behavior, Motivation and Emotional Intelligence Professional, Miller is sought after as a speaker, coach and corporate trainer. Using decades of competitive golf experience and a lifelong pursuit of personal potential to educate participants, she inspires and challenges individuals, teams and corporations to unlock potential and improve performance.

Voted the 2010 National LPGA Teacher of the Year, she has also been named Player of the Year for the Northeastern United States. Miller is among The Top 50 Women Teachers in the United States ranked by Golf Digest and The Top 50 Women Teachers in the World by The Women's Golf Journal.

Miller and her husband form the only couple in the world that has combined to play on all four major tours; LPGA, PGA, LPGA Legends and PGA Championship Tours. They have been working with people of all ages and to help them develop their games.

"Allen is like a ball-striking wizard, so he has definitely helped me understand the golf swing," Miller said. *"Like I never understood all of this when I was little. So, it is my mission to share this with others because I was like, 'Holy cow, this makes so much sense.' So, when people come in, I look them in the eye and tell them that I can help them. And I love helping others. I have 85-year-old people who don't think they can hit the ball any better and I have three-year-olds who hit the ball in the air for the first time. And anything in between.*



"The only problem is that you have got to want to get better. If you want to whine about not getting better, go find somebody else," Miller continued. *"So, I absolutely love helping people get, do and be better. And now [Allen and I] are Certified Behavior, Motivation and Emotional Intelligence professionals because that stuff saved our marriage. And we do a lot of corporate training."*

Looking ahead, Miller has a few goals in mind focusing on her 'Own It' project. *"I have created this thing called the It Box and it is a non-profit for kids,"* Miller said. *"There are three things in the box; a nail, a mirror and a seed. And it represents your potential, your passion and your purpose in your life. And I teach people to 'Own It.' Your business. Your sport. Your life.*

"I am now creating coaching programs, retreats and corporate training programs to teach people to 'Own It.' I want to change the world. With my non-profit, we go into schools and I tell them my story. I then give them the opportunity to participate in the pursue your 'It' project and I teach kids how to do this. We help them to create a vision board for their futures. In fact, I want to partner with Pitbull, down in Miami, and go into those schools and teach those kids how to 'Own It.' That's my big vision."

When asked what she would say to Cindy Kessler if she could go back and speak to her 10-year-old self, a tear came to her eye.

"Good job, honey, you worked your butt off. You were put on this earth to go through these challenges, to prove to yourself that you can accomplish things beyond your wildest dreams," Miller said. *"And now your job is to help others do the same thing.*

<https://www.chautauquasportshalloffame.org/cindymiller.php>