

DRIVEN TO BE

THE Best



Beth Daniel and Betsy King will always be linked by their remarkably similar, Hall of Fame careers. And it all started at Furman.

BY VINCE MOORE

BETSY KING AND BETH DANIEL.

The names, spoken in tandem, have been uttered so many times at Furman over the past 30 years they could almost serve as a university mantra.

They are very different people with different lives, but their careers tend to be woven into a single thread at Furman — and for very good reason. When it comes to alumnae making good and raising the profile of their alma mater, they may well represent the greatest package deal of all time.

King and Daniel graduated a year apart in the late 1970s, after leading Furman to a national championship in women's golf. They went on to become two of the finest players the women's game has ever seen.

They won 67 tournaments between them, waltzed into the Ladies Professional Golf Association Hall of Fame within a few years of each other, and earned every honor there was to win. For a period covering more than 20 years, one or the other was a favorite to win anytime she showed up at a golf tournament.

Furthermore, they didn't achieve fame and fortune and then ride off into the sunset. They remembered Furman, which was a kind thing to do. Because while they may have helped Furman win its first national

championship in 1976, they did it without a great deal of support from the university.

It was a time before women's athletics had a prominent role on college campuses, and it seemed they spent as much time asking the school for monetary support as they did on the golf course. Daniel, in fact, became so upset with the direction of the women's program her senior year that she didn't even play on the team. Her final season of college as the reigning U.S. Amateur champion was limited to a few appearances with the men's team.

They could have decided to leave Furman behind and concentrate solely on their own careers and interests. But they went in the opposite direction, contacting the university and offering to put together a pro-am tournament to raise money for the women's golf program. They wanted to be sure that the golfers who followed them would have everything they didn't.

The Furman LPGA Pro-Am went on to become one of the most successful fund-raising stories in school history, raising more than \$1.7 million

dollars over its 23-year existence. You just have to look at the number of full scholarships the team now enjoys, the REK Center for Intercollegiate Golf, the gleaming practice facilities, and the airplane trips to tournaments to see the Pro-Am's handiwork.

Daniel and King. Betsy and Beth.

The names haven't surfaced as often in the past few years. King has stopped playing tournaments altogether, and Daniel is down to a precious few.

But two such outstanding careers shouldn't just fade into the twilight. So it was entirely fitting when, last September, they came together on center stage in women's golf once again.

At the Solheim Cup, a biennial competition pitting the best U.S. women golfers against their counterparts from Europe, King captained the American squad to victory in Halmstad, Sweden — with Daniel as her assistant captain. If you've been following the Betsy King/Beth Daniel story for a while, it was certainly no surprise to hear those names spoken together one more time.

KING ARRIVED at Furman first, in the fall of 1973, making her way South from Reading, Pa., where her father was a doctor and her mother stayed at home to tend to her and her older brother. Coming from a family of golfers, she started playing at age 8. But she was interested in more than golf, playing field hockey, basketball and softball and achieving all-star status in all three.

"My poor brother," King recalls. "He had to take me everywhere, and I played every sport I could. I would even play tackle football with the boys and tag along with him to baseball practice."

She did play golf, taking lessons at the Reading Country Club and

entering a handful of junior tournaments, but the Pennsylvania climate made for a short season — and golf took a back seat to basketball, anyway.

“I was playing too many other sports to devote all my time to golf,” she says. “I played golf mostly in the summer, and it was more about recreation and just having fun.”

It speaks to King’s athletic ability that despite being a part-time golfer while growing up, she was still a strong player. She was a semifinalist at the 1972 U.S. Girls Junior Championship and was close to being a scratch player when she enrolled at Furman.

King also played field hockey for two years at Furman and three seasons of basketball before injuries to her right knee forced her to give up the other sports and concentrate on golf her senior year. She would be on tour for a couple of years before she learned she had a torn anterior cruciate ligament that required surgery.

Daniel came to Furman a year later, in 1974. She grew up in Charleston, S.C., where she began playing golf at age 6 with her parents and older brother and sister. She played other sports as well — basketball, tennis, softball, track and field — but golf was a priority, and the Lowcountry weather made it possible for her to play all year long.

“I didn’t get serious about golf until I was 15 and I realized I might have a chance to go to the next level,” Daniel says.

She honed her game in junior tournaments during high school, and by the time she came to Furman, there might not have been a better female amateur in the country.

There was a great deal of chance involved in King and Daniel choosing to attend Furman. King discovered the university when her parents returned from a trip to Hilton Head Island and told her about a pretty liberal arts college they had seen in South Carolina. She applied and was accepted to Furman before she even saw it, and then she had anything but a standard campus visit a few months later with her parents.

“We just rode around campus and looked around, and that was it,” King says, sounding amazed that one could choose a college in such an uncomplicated fashion. “I didn’t talk to the Admissions office or any of the coaches or anyone else.”

Daniel, meanwhile, had scholarship offers from two colleges in Florida, but chose Furman despite not receiving a penny in scholarship aid. Her decision was influenced largely by having family members who lived in the Greenville area.

“I often think that my parents must have loved that I picked the one college where they would have to pay the full tuition,” Daniel says. “I obviously had no concept of finances at that time.”



WHILE IT WAS certainly Furman’s great fortune that King and Daniel would decide to enroll, it might have been just as fortuitous for the two future Hall of Famers to spend three years playing golf together. The spark of greatness no doubt existed in both of them, but who’s to say that anything less than what the other provided in terms of competition would have ignited the competitive fires they took to the tour?

“When people ask me why Beth and Betsy became such great players on tour, I have an answer,” says Cindy Ferro, a 1976 Furman graduate and a key member of that year’s championship team. “They are, without question, two of the most competitive people I have ever met in my life.”

And they were indeed competitive at Furman. Gary “Doc” Meredith, the coach who led the team to the national championship, knew he had two extraordinary talents and went out of his way to put Daniel and King in situations where they had to compete against one another.

They were, as King acknowledges, widely considered to be the best one-two punch in women’s college golf. But who was number one and who was two in the equation? It surely fanned the competitive flames when Daniel won the U.S. Amateur title in 1975 — she would win again in 1977 — and had the hardware to prove she was the best female amateur in the country.

“We were competitive,” King says, laughing. “But Cindy was able to keep the peace most of the time.”

Ferro remembers serving as a referee on occasion, but says things weren’t all that bad. “It wasn’t like they were having arguments,” she says, “but they were such competitive people that I would have to step in every now and then and remind them about what we were trying to do, which was be a great golf team.”

The 2007 U.S. Solheim Cup squad, clockwise from top left: assistant captain Beth Daniel, Sherri Steinhauer, Pat Hurst, captain Betsy King, Laura Diaz, Nicole Castrale, Natalie Gulbis, Juli Inkster, Morgan Pressel, Cristie Kerr, Paula Creamer, Stacy Prammanasudh, Brittany Lincicome, Angela Stanford. Thirty-one years earlier, the women’s collegiate champions included, from left, Cindy Ferro ’76, Leigh Coulter ’79, King, Coach Gary “Doc” Meredith, Daniel, Holly Hunt ’79, Sherri Turner ’79.



According to Ferro, the competitiveness wasn’t confined to the golf course. She remembers taking a bowling class at Furman with King, who treated it as anything but a relaxing form of recreation.

“We were divided into teams for some reason and Betsy kept saying, ‘Come on guys, we’ve got to win,’” Ferro says. “I said, ‘Betsy, give us a break. It’s only a gym class.’ But no matter what it was, she had to win.”

Daniel says that neither she nor King cared for those competitive situations that Meredith put them in, but she can see the wisdom of it 30 years later. “We pushed each other, and it certainly made us better,” she says. “There is no question that being on that team made me a better player and helped prepare me for professional golf.”

The two may have been much alike in their competitive natures, but they were different people with distinct personalities. King was a self-described “straight arrow” in college, while Daniel, by all historical campus accounts, was not. They had different interests away from the golf course and different friends, and they would continue to travel their individual paths after they moved on to the LPGA Tour. But the golf always held them together.

It wasn’t all competitive madness, though. It was fun playing on the best college team in the country, and they traveled to tournaments in an old Winnebago that they now recall fondly, although they complained fiercely at the time about not being able to fly like some of their competitors. Daniel said all the girls drove the Winnebago at some point, even though doing so surely violated every university policy that existed.

“I can remember coming back from tournaments and driving at three in the morning,” Daniel says. “We didn’t have any accidents and I can’t remember running anybody off the road. Looking back on it, that was probably more fun than flying anyway.”

KING BEGAN playing on the LPGA Tour in the fall of 1977, but if you weren’t paying attention you wouldn’t have known she was out there. She played in 181 tournaments over six full seasons without winning once. She made enough money to keep her card and make expenses, but she appeared to be anything but a future Hall of Famer.

She won an unsanctioned tournament in Japan in late 1981 but didn’t earn her first LPGA title until 1984. After that, though, there was no stopping her. She won 30 tournaments in the next 10 years and became the most dominant player in women’s golf.

Her best season came in 1989 when she won six times, including her first of two consecutive U.S. Women’s Open championships. King, who



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qualified for the Hall of Fame in 1995, finished her career with 34 tournament titles (including six majors), three Rolex Player of the Year awards and two Vare trophies, given to the player with the lowest stroke average on tour over the course of a year. She played on five Solheim Cup teams.

“I finally learned how to win, and there is a mental side to winning,” King says. “It gets easier to win that second, third or fourth time.”

Daniel, meanwhile, landed on tour with a flourish in the fall of 1978. She won her first tournament in 1979 and was named LPGA Rookie of the Year. She won four more times the following season and was named Player of the Year, becoming the only player besides Nancy Lopez and Annika Sorenstam to follow a Rookie of the Year season with a Player of the Year award.

Daniel would keep on winning over the next 25 years, even though injuries to her back and shoulder slowed her considerably. When she captured the 2003 Canadian Women’s Open at age 46, she became the oldest winner in LPGA history, an accomplishment of which she is particularly proud. In all she has won 33 tournaments and one major, three Rolex Player of the Year awards and three Vare trophies. She played on eight Solheim Cup teams and qualified for the Hall of Fame in 1999.

“My early success didn’t surprise me,” Daniel says. “After winning two U.S. Amateur titles and a national championship in college, I was pretty cocky. In fact, I was more cocky coming out of college than any other time in my career. If you play golf long enough, it will definitely humble you.”

King, who has lived in Scottsdale, Ariz., for the past 27 years, played her last LPGA tournament in August of 2005 and doesn’t plan to tee it up again on tour. Her final victory came in 2001, and the slow but steady erosion of her game over the next few years led her to finally call it quits.

“I miss playing [on tour], but I just don’t play well enough anymore

to be out there,” King says. “It’s hard having been one of the best and then not being able to play to that standard anymore. If I don’t have a chance to win, why would I play?”

If there is anything that clings to King as closely as her Hall of Fame credentials, it is her Christian faith. It has been the central focus of her life since she attended a 1980 conference sponsored by the Fellowship of Christian Athletes, and she has known for some time that her life after the tour would involve some sort of ministry.

During the past three years King has made annual trips to Africa to raise funds for people affected by AIDS. In partnership with World Vision, she is currently leading an LPGA member initiative, Golf Fore Africa, that will assist the people of Mudasmwa, Rwanda in dealing with the AIDS epidemic and the root causes of poverty in the community.

“It was a life-changing experience visiting Africa,” says King. “It’s a situation of extreme poverty, and AIDS is a disease of poverty. I came back and said I have to do something.”

Daniel has not given up totally on playing professional golf. She played in 15 tournaments in 2006, finishing in a tie for sixth at the Weetabix Women’s British Open, and another five in 2007. But while she has cut back her schedule and is no longer a full-time player, she won’t rule out playing a few select LPGA tournaments in the future.

“I lost that fire you need to compete at this level, which is why I cut back my time on tour,” Daniel says. “And if I don’t have that fire, I had to ask myself why am I out here trying to compete?”

Daniel, who lives in Delray Beach, Fla., has also been working as a golf analyst on a few LPGA events for the Golf Channel and CBS Sports. She has already been named Solheim Cup captain for 2009, which will keep her busy over the next two years, and there will no doubt be the odd LPGA tournament in which to play.

“I enjoy commentating, and I felt like I got better with each telecast,” Daniel says. “So I would enjoy doing more of that. And it is the ultimate honor to be named Solheim Cup captain after having been part of so many competitions.”

WHEN CAPTAIN King and assistant captain Daniel led the United States to a 16-12 victory over Europe in the 2007 Solheim Cup, it marked just the second time the Americans had won on European soil. The other “road” victory came 11 years earlier, in Wales, when the U.S. team posted a 17-11 win. If you’re looking for the lone connection between the two victories, look no further than King and Daniel, both of whom played for the 1996 squad.

“I felt like Beth and I made a good team [in 2007],” says King, who added to the competition’s Furman flavor by inviting Ferro to come to Sweden and assist with the U.S. squad. “I hadn’t been playing for two years, and Beth had a lot more knowledge about the younger players.”

Daniel and King. Look at the LPGA record books. From the time they joined the tour in the late 1970s through the results of the 2007 Solheim Cup, their names appear an inordinate number of times. The odds seem minute that a single era could produce two such great players with nearly identical records, and it is downright inconceivable that they should have come of age together at a small, liberal arts college in the South.

King tells the story of a good friend and golfer named Donna Noonan, who played at the University of Georgia when King and Daniel were at Furman. “She told us later that she used to say, ‘If I can’t beat those girls in college, then how can I expect to compete on tour?’”

If Noonan had only known what was in store for those Furman girls, she might not have been so hard on herself.

“Betsy and Beth would never give up on anything,” Ferro says. “They would fight to the end, and they both learned how to deal with the stress of playing at the top level. It’s been fun to watch them play and rack up their victories and march together into the Hall of Fame. They were the best of their era. Furman should be proud.” **|F|**

THE BREAKDOWN

BETSY KING

- > Member, LPGA Hall of Fame
- > Member, U.S. Solheim Cup team, 1990, 1992, 1994, 1996, 1998
- > Captain, U.S. Solheim Cup team, 2007
- > LPGA Player of the Year, 1984, 1989, 1993
- > Vare Trophy winner (lowest scoring average), 1987, 1993
- > Victories: 34 (six major titles)
- > Co-founder, Furman-LPGA Pro-Am

BETH DANIEL

- > Member, LPGA Hall of Fame
- > Member, U.S. Solheim Cup team, 1990, 1992, 1994, 1996, 2000, 2002, 2003, 2005
- > Assistant captain, U.S. Solheim Cup team, 2007; captain, 2009
- > LPGA Player of the Year, 1980, 1990, 1994
- > Vare Trophy winner (lowest scoring average), 1989, 1990, 1994
- > Victories: 33 (one major title)
- > Co-founder, Furman-LPGA Pro-Am