

# . . .win in golf when your clubs are lost

By Patty Sheehan

*When soon-to-be Ladies Professional Golf Association Hall of Famer Patty Sheehan arrived in England for the 1992 Women's British Open, she didn't have quite what she expected waiting for her at the airport. A movie about women's baseball helped the former Nevada collegiate medalist and University Hall of Famer overcome the unexpected turn of events and garner a first in women's golf.*

It was my first time playing in the Weetabix Women's British Open in Woburn. I had applied to get into the tournament after winning the U.S. Women's Open in July. When I applied, I was the fifth or sixth alternate, so I wasn't expecting to go. They called me a week before play started, when I was in Seattle, and I had my manager pack for me.

I was flying over there thinking, I'm going to play a *links* course [the layout common to Scotland, Ireland and England, characterized by open layouts and heavy rough, favoring finesse and accuracy over power]. I'll put my driver away.

It was a tough week. The airline had lost my golf clubs and I had to play the practice rounds without them. I was traumatized. It's always nice to have the clubs you're going to play with. The problem was I had no idea when they were going to arrive.

I practiced with gentlemen's clubs four swing weights too heavy for me. My swing weight [a standard for measuring the balance point of the club head as it swings, with D-4 being heaviest] is D-0. The lie angle for my club wasn't right. I had to buy new shoes, raingear, tees and balls. Everything that had to do with golf.

After a two-day delay, I got my clubs back and that was a relief. But it was all a little unsettling.

The weather was difficult through the early rounds. The week after the British, we had the Solheim Cup matches coming up. I would be a player and the expectations were pretty high for me, but Nancy Lopez, Beth Daniel and Betsy King were there in Woburn and the media thought they'd be the ones to watch.

I watched the movie *A League of Their Own*

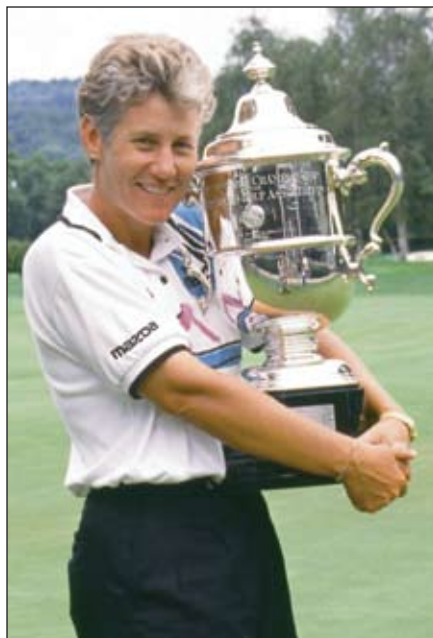


Photo Courtesy of LPGA

*Patty Sheehan holds the U.S. Women's Open championship trophy in 1992, just before winning the British Open. She's also received a President's Medal from the University in 1998.*

the night before the final round. I think that movie is what got me through that week. Those girls in women's professional baseball had to deal with a lot of adversity. If they could get through it, so could I. And if I did, I'd be the first to win the Women's British Open and the U.S. Women's Open in the same year.

I can't remember if I was leading entering that last day, but I was in the final group [Sheehan shot a closing 67 to break the course record at Woburn and finished 12 under par.] I remember the 16th hole, I made a 30- to 40-foot putt that put me ahead by three shots. Two holes to play. I don't think I had a good lie on 17 and I hit it from the trees. But I recovered.

On 18, the hole had a road on the left side and out of bounds on the right. It was a tight-

driving hole. I had about a three-shot lead and I said to my caddy [former Nevada women's golf coach Carl Laib], "I'm going to hit a 2-iron on this par-5." I barely got to the fairway. As long as I hit it down the middle, that's where I wanted it. The crowd was probably thinking I was playing it safe. I had blown so many tournaments by hitting my driver off line.

As I walked down that fairway, I was crying and the emotion I felt was a lot different than any other tournament I'd ever played. I had a lot of pride that I was carrying the U.S. Open trophy with me. It was a wonderful experience. The wonderful things people said to me. You could really feel the energy. The way they speak over there. It was, "Well done, Patty." I've got an Irish name, so I think they liked that and they're really appreciative of good golf.

I tried to stay pretty close to Carl. He had never been in that situation either. We've shared a lot together. He was starting to tear up and we were so choked up that we couldn't talk.

For me, it was then a 7-iron and a 9-iron shot to the par-5. I was so emotional and trying to get a grip. I didn't want to three-putt and look silly. I was about 20 feet away from the hole.

I got within a foot and a half. The second putt went in and I was so happy to be finished. The other competitors were all very gracious and complimentary. They love competition in Britain. At that time the Women's British Open wasn't an LPGA-sanctioned event [it became a major championship in 2001].

It had been really wet and rainy. We had a few delays. I guess I played steady and I was right there at the end. There were times when I didn't have my clubs that I was wishing I were at home with a fire in the fireplace. But you have to keep plugging along.

I'm extremely proud to be the first female to win those tournaments in the same year. I think it's the only thing that I can say belongs to me. That's one that no one else will have.

*Sheehan, 50, was named by Sports Illustrated in 1987 as one of eight Sportsmen and Sportswomen of the Year for founding a Soquel, Calif. group home for abused and neglected girls. She attended Nevada for three years as a physical education major, competing in golf from 1976 to 1978. Sheehan won 35 LPGA tournaments, including six majors, qualifying for the Hall of Fame in 1993. She was interim head coach for the Nevada women's golf team for one season and occasionally competes on the Legends Tour.*