

Meg Mallon: Hometown kid's now a star

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STAFF WRITER

Meg Mallon was a mere pup on the Ladies Professional Golf Association circuit on her last visit to Indianwood Golf & Country Club five years ago.

Her main goal back in those early years simply was to play well enough to make a living in professional golf. And things did not go well in the beginning.

The 1989 U.S. Women's Open hosted by Indianwood was typical of her early career struggles. Mallon, the hometown kid, did not make the cut. It was the second time in three "Open" tournaments she failed to play past the first two rounds.

But my, how times have changed. Since that last U.S. Women's Open appearance at Indianwood, Mallon's career has risen steadily than one of her accurate fairway drives.

Mallon, the former Birmingham resident who graduated from Mercy High School in Farmington Hills, is one of the LPGA's household names. She has earned star status on the tour, not only for her stellar play but also for her friendly personality that makes her one of the most popular players among her peers.

"She absolutely is considered a star player on the tour," said Rhonda Glenn, an ABC-TV commentator for LPGA events and one of the most knowledgeable followers of the women's golf tour.

"I don't know if we'll ever have another Nancy Lopez. She (Lopez) came out when the tour really needed her. She won nine tournaments her rookie year. I don't know if Meg will ever reach that kind of stature as far as her playing ability, but, I'll tell you, she comes pretty close to being as popular."

"When people think of the LPGA, and think of it in a favorable light, Meg Mallon is one of the names that comes to the fore," Glenn added. "Nancy is still the name that everyone knows, but Meg Mallon is certainly right up there in that category."

CAREER PROFILE

MEG MALLON

Born:	4-14-63, Natch, Mo.
Residence:	Ramona, Calif.
Started:	Exempt
Career victories (best):	6 (1993)
Joined LPGA:	October 1980
Career best finish:	6 wins
Low career round:	65
Career earnings (rank):	\$1.65 million (18th)
LPGA career holes-in-one:	0
Playoff record:	1-1

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*Rhonda Glenn
ABC-TV commentator*

Mallon, 31, owns six career victories, all since her turnaround year of 1991.

In 1991, she won her first professional tournament victory at the Oldmobile LPGA Classic. Later that year, she charmed the golf world by winning her first two major tournaments, the U.S. Women's Open and the Mazda LPGA Championship, within a three-week stretch.

She finished with a dozen top-10 finishes that year and pocketed a career-best \$633,802. Mallon also registered a career-best score of 65 during the second round of the 1991 Mazda Japan Classic.

Mallon was winner of Golf Digest's Most Improved Player award in 1991.

She went on to win more than \$400,000 in 1992 and followed that up with two wins in 1993 (the Ping/Welch's Championship and the Sara Lee Classic title) en route to earning another \$276,291.

The likeable linkster, who graduated from Ohio State University and turned professional in 1986, has \$1.65 million



DIAN DEAN/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

in career earnings and ranks 18th on the tour.

Indeed, she has come a long way since the disappointment in front of her hometown fans at the 1989 U.S. Women's Open at Indianwood. And her personality has not changed even though her status has.

"Obviously, you look down on paper and you can see what the changes are (since her last appearance at Indianwood)," said Mallon after a fine round of golf at the 1994 Oldmobile Classic held at Walnut Hills Country Club in East Lansing.

"Hopefully, I haven't changed too much as a person. Just my life has

changed a little bit. I still think it will be difficult (at this year's U.S. Women's Open) being at home and having my whole family there. Hopefully, I'll be able to handle it a little bit better than I did last time."

"My goal last time (at Indianwood) was just to make the cut," she said. "Now, I have set my goals a little higher. You have to set goals for yourself and keep yourself in check because nobody else does. It is such an individual sport."

And Mallon is one individual who, after paying her early-career dues, has found success while growing into a key-stone player on the LPGA tour.

Ties to Michigan link field of contestants

Meg Mallon, a former Birmingham resident and graduate of Mercy High School in Farmington Hills, is the most visible member of the Ladies Professional Golf Association with Michigan connections.

However, there are a number of other LPGA players with Michigan ties. Following is a list of those players with brief career summaries:

■ **Elaine Crosby:** Crosby was born in Birmingham and grew up in Jackson. She graduated from the University of Michigan with a bachelor of arts degree in business administration. She started golfing at age 20; two years later, she won the Bowling Green Invitational. In 1981, Crosby won the Michigan Women's Amateur Championship. Crosby,

36, is an exempt tour player who lives in Ft. Myers, Fla. An exempt player doesn't have to qualify to play in the open. Her lone career victory since joining the tour in 1984 came in 1989 when she won the Mazda Japan Classic. She has two career holes-in-one. Crosby has won \$1.01 million and ranks 44th on the LPGA career earnings list. She became a member of the LPGA Executive Committee in 1992 and was named president of the LPGA in 1994.

■ **Mary Murphy:** Murphy, 34, was born in Birmingham. She is an exempt player who lives in Naples, Fla. Murphy joined the tour in 1985. In her rookie season, she finished sixth in the 1986 Cellular One-Ping Golf Championship. She posted her career-best finish —

fifth — at the 1990 U.S. Women's Open at the Atlanta Athletic Club in Duluth, Ga. Murphy graduated from Southern Methodist University in 1981. She lists being a co-medalist at the 1985 LPGA Qualifying Tournament as her greatest thrill in golf. Murphy has \$124,832 in career earnings.

■ **Amy Read:** Read was born in Birmingham and is a non-exempt tour player. She joined the LPGA in 1986 and fired a career-low score of 67 during the second round of the 1988 Greater Washington Open. Read has suffered a number of restrictive injuries over the years, including reconstructive ankle surgery that caused her to miss the entire 1989 season and recurring shoulder and ankle injuries that limited her to a schedule of 13 events in

1990. Read graduated from the University of Kentucky in 1986 with a degree in recreation. Read has \$120,217 in career earnings.

■ **Kelly Robbins:** Robbins, 24, was born in Mt. Pleasant. She joined the tour in 1991, winning her first and only tournament last year when she captured the LPGA Corning Classic. In 1993, Robbins totaled seven top-20 finishes and earned \$200,744. Robbins played golf at the University of Tulsa, where she was a member of the NCAA Championship team in 1988. Throughout her college career, she won seven individual titles and twice was named a first-team All-American. In 1991, she was