

OLSON

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Erik Williams / USA TODAY Sports

Amy Olson takes a tee shot off the 3rd tee box during the final round of the U.S. Women's Open golf tournament at Champions Golf Club on Monday, Dec. 14, 2020. Olson finished in a tie for second place.

The emotions, and the day, were not done. With Sandiford by her side, Amy agreed to a couple of post-round interviews. She broke down on national TV in one of them talking about Lee.

Taneka, just out of camera view but right in front of Amy, was there helping her through it.

"She just ran interference, kind of limited who could talk to me," Amy said. "She made sure I had the time and space that I needed. She was the one monitoring where I was at, what frame of mind I was in and what was going to be the most beneficial for me."

The job of caddie after 18 holes was never more important. Sandiford, worried about Amy being alone, offered to fly back to Minneapolis with her. But Amy insisted some alone time was what she needed.

This week, Olson begins her eighth year on the LPGA Tour at the Gainbridge LPGA in Orlando, Fla. Like she has for the last five years, Sandiford will be there to do more than carry a bag, read a green, judge the wind and give advice on yardage.

"A lot of people have the hard skills to be a caddie," Amy said. "What a lot of people don't have is that emotional intelligence of when do you say something and probably more important when do you not say something. She just knows. She knows if I need to blow off some steam or if I need a word of encouragement and she needs to speak up. She just knows that."

Taneka Sandiford: My dream job

The two met in 2016 at the Pure Silk-Bahamas LPGA Classic. Olson was going with local caddies at the time, meaning it was up to the tournament to find somebody to carry her bag. Sandiford, a native of the Bahamas, was back in town and received a call to be paired with Olson.

"I had struggles finding a good tour caddie that I connected with," Olson said, "so I decided to do locals to take that stress off myself."

Sandiford met Olson on the driving range on Monday before the tournament started. They connected from the get-go.

"I loved how she went about her business," Olson said. "I loved her big smile, her positivity and she did whatever I asked of her."

Olson played the next six tournaments with other local caddies. It didn't go near as well as the week with Sandiford. Later that year, in May, Olson was playing in the Volunteers of America Texas Shootout in Dallas.

One state away, Sandiford was coaching golf at Redlands Community College in El Reno, Okla.

So Olson texted her to see if she would be interested in driving to Dallas and caddying for her. It wasn't long before that local caddie from the Bahamas became a permanent LPGA Tour caddie.

"The job is amazing," she said. "I love traveling and what kept me in golf was to be able to travel. Now I'm getting paid to travel around the world, you can't beat it. This is a dream job that I never dreamed about, but for sure the coolest one."

"It's completely a team thing. I can't be there without her and she can't be there without me. When she plays well, I play well. When she wins a tournament, she'll go home with the trophy but mentally I'll be like that's our trophy. We both did that."

Sandiford doesn't mess with Amy's swing on the course unless she asks her to look at something. That usually only happens on the driving range.

"She has a great swing coach and she has to mentally understand it, she has to feel it so she knows exactly what she's doing right or what she's doing wrong," Sandiford said. "Ron is great. If she needs Ron, she'll do a video and he's always there."

The Sandiford-Olson team plans on remaining a pair for the foreseeable future. They both say they're on about the same career path and at some point, both will move on from the LPGA.

The plan for Sandiford, 26 years old, is to return to the Bahamas some day and run a preschool.

"I wouldn't be surprised when I retire, she retires," Amy said. "I have a feeling our professional careers will track each other."

Sandiford is going about traveling the world and doing her dream job while dealing with multiple sclerosis. She was diagnosed in 2018 after suffering a

seizure while out for a jog in Nassau, Bahamas.

It's rare for a Black woman who grew up in a warm-weather climate like the Bahamas to get MS.

"That's unheard of," Amy said. "It was extremely shocking in many regards and she's so healthy that's the last thing on your mind."

When the diagnosis hit, the Amy Olson support system was 180 degrees from the U.S. Women's Open. It was Amy who was there for her friend and caddie.

"She's been rock solid from the day she got her diagnosis to today," Amy said. "She will not live in fear. Her trust is 100 percent in God knowing he has a plan. She's so confident in that and that's inspiring to see. It's easy to talk about when things are good but to talk about that when truly your future is unknown — it's genuine."

Ron Stockton: Swing change is hard

Around the same time of Sandiford coming aboard, Amy was in the midst of a major swing change. She missed 11 cuts in her rookie season of 2014 and seven cuts in 2015. There were a couple of high finishes but generally she ended 72 holes from 40th to 80th place.

It was enough to remain in the top 100 of the money list to retain her tour card. But her game was not in a place to consistently finish high. The problem: her ball flight was too low, which made it tough to hold approach shots on the faster, harder LPGA Tour greens.

She got away with it in college at North Dakota State, where she won an NCAA-record 20 tournaments, because the courses were shorter. On the LPGA Tour, those wedge shots were suddenly 5 and 6 irons.

Olson connected with Stockton through LPGA player Morgan Pressel.

Looking to improve her short game, and noticing that Pressel's short game was one of the best on tour, Olson asked Pressel who she worked with. It was Stockton, the son of former PGA player Dave Stockton.

Stockton overhauled Pressel's swing beginning in 2009, a process according to the Golf Channel that took several years.

"I really loved the simplicity with which he taught," Amy said. "It's not super complex and I've always gravitated toward complex because it seems smarter. The best players and the best teachers make things really simple so I found that refreshing."

Success certainly didn't come overnight.

The low point was at the LOTTE Championship in Hawaii. Olson shot 79-71 and missed the cut for the fifth straight tournament. Moreover, that stretch included an 80, a 77 and a 76.

"I was hitting it all over the place," Olson said.

So she called Stockton and asked if she could meet her at Stockton's home course in Palm Springs for a two-day "boot camp" to overhaul her swing.

"He cleared his calendar, we got up there and we worked morning until evening," Amy said. "You know if something is going to work or not in a couple of days and I knew we were on the right track but I didn't know how long it would take. Literally, I'm ready to rebuild my swing. This is not a minor tweak, I'm ready to do the work."

Stockton said he's not a huge fan of making major changes to a tour player, but made an exception with Amy. Mainly, he changed the plane of her backswing, which in turn changed the way her body maneuvered through the swing.

"She worked so hard," Stockton said. "Honestly,

with all the different players I've worked with, I have rarely seen the amount of effort Amy put into making real change. It's her swing now. I'm not sure she could even do what she used to do."

Grant, in his second season as the Bison linebackers coach, can appreciate good teaching. It's his job.

"(Stockton's) got a personality to coach anybody in the world," Grant said. "He'll give you one thing to work on and maybe that one thing will fix five or six problems you have in your swing. He's a fun guy to be around. He's laid back but competitive, tough and handles everything with a lot of grace and poise, which fits in perfect with Amy because that's her to a 'T.'"

It wasn't until 2018 before the swing change started to resonate in results. She finished 2016 missing seven of the last 10 cuts.

The criticisms, for the first time in her golfing life, came her way.

"So that gave me a bit of a hardened exterior and even interior that you have to have to be successful," she said. "I had no doubt I was on the right track but people see you struggle and wonder what's going on. I didn't care what people thought anymore. I did when I was in college, I did when everybody was singing my praises. After you get some criticism and you know you're doing the right thing, you stop caring what people think."

She missed five cuts in her first 10 tournaments in 2017 and finished in a tie for 55nd or higher in eight other tournaments.

A tie for ninth in the LPGA major ANA Inspiration in March of 2018 may have started the road to consistency, at least on the statistical sheet. It came one tournament after an 11th place finish in the Bank of Hope Founders Cup. Later that year, she finished in a tie for second in the Evian Championship.

She had five top-20 finishes in 2019. That consistency that she was "craving" finally was coming to fruition.

The star witnesses were Sandiford, Stockton and Grant.

"The LPGA is unique compared to the PGA," Grant said. "In the PGA, a lot of these guys are flying private jets with their wives or girlfriends on tour. The LPGA is not that way. Myself and maybe a few boyfriends or husbands fly in to visit. Taneka is her entourage. Taneka is an incredible rock. She's very mentally tough and, good or bad, she stays in the moment. Amy has the same skill set as well and they play off each other extremely well."

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REGION 1

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The Jaguars defense was stout early, allowing only seven points in the first quarter and eight in the second. Northern Cass created turnovers, out-rebounded the Colts, and turned the turnovers into fast break points.

"Defense is all about communicating and helping each other out, just talking," Halle Crockett said. "We're a good defensive team. That's how we get going. That's how we get our energy is on defense."

Richland star guard Megan Roob led the Colts with 18 points. The Jaguars doubled her for much of the game and she had a hard time finding an open shot. Early on, she took advantage of the extra defensive pressure on her by passing to open teammates, but the shots just weren't falling for the Colts early. As the game wore on, a Roob tried to take over,

forcing shots in traffic, but Haidyn Crockett did a good job of containing her.

"Our No. 2, my sister Haidyn did a really good job on her, she shut her down," Halle Crockett said. "She played great defense getting up in her face and getting her rattled. It was important to slow her down. That was our goal."

Wyndmere-Lidgerwood 50, Lisbon 39

Wyndmere-Lidgerwood pulled away in the second half as it defeated Lisbon 50-39 in the region quarterfinals. After entering halftime tied at 21, the Warbirds outscored the Broncos 29-18 in the second half.

W-L separated itself with an 8-0 run to close the third quarter. Drew Frolek and Kendra Kaczynski each scored four points in the run.

The Broncos pulled within four points at 42-38 as they opened the fourth quarter on a Roob tried to take over,



David Samson / The Forum

Wyndmere-Lidgerwood's Ashlie Mauch and Kendra Kaczynski fight for a rebound with Lisbon's and Sheyenne Waletzko and Elizabeth Rieger during opening round play of the North Dakota Class B Region 1 tournament in Wahpeton on Monday, Feb. 22.

er scored four of the five points in the run. The Warbirds responded, closing the game on an 8-1 run.

Four Warbirds finished in double-figures for scoring. Drew Frolek led the way with

a game-high 15, while Kendra Kaczynski scored 12. Gracie Kaczynski added 11, ahead of Zoey Bohnenstingl's 10.

Kendra Odegard led the Broncos with 12 points and Sheyenne Waletzko scored eight.

The Broncos led by as many as 6 points midway through the second quarter, but the Warbirds charged late in the half. W-L closed the frame with an 8-2 run to send it into halftime tied.

The Warbirds will face Central Cass in the semifinals at 6 p.m. on Tuesday. The Squirrels defeated Wyndmere-Lidgerwood 65-28 in an early-season meeting back on Dec. 22.

Kindred 76, Sargent County 42

Kacie Burner scorched Sargent County with 27 points and led the Vikings to a region quarterfinal victory.

Burner opened the second half with four-straight 3-pointers as she pushed her team's lead to 52-23. She added a fifth 3 down the stretch and scored 19 points after the break.

As a team, the Vikings made nine 3s. Charli McQuillan made two, and Abby Duchscherer and Kaydence Streyle made one each.

Kindred dominated every facet of the game. They owned the boards, forced turnovers on defense and shot the lights out.

The Bulldogs had nobody to match up with the Vikings' tandem of athletic 6-foot-1 forwards Duchscherer and Terryn Johnson. Duchscherer scored 18 points with 14 coming in the first half and Johnson scored 17.

The Vikings jumped on Sargent County right away, running out to a 22-7 lead by the end of the first quarter.

Duchscherer closed out the first half with a half-court buzzer beater to send the Vikings into the break with a 40-20 lead. Johnson intercepted a pass near the 3-point line with about 3 seconds to go. She struggled to gain control of the ball, but finally got it and sent a short pass ahead to Duchscherer who threw up a heave and drained it.

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