

Local pro comes home

After years on the road as a touring professional, Bend's Taya Battistella returns to Central Oregon to start a new life

By Zack Hall / *The Bulletin*

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Taya Battistella looks as if a giant weight has been lifted from her, even if this is just a meeting over coffee.

The 31-year-old golf pro from Bend has always been friendly, funny and warm.

She still is, but now she seems at peace, too.

No wonder. For the first time since she finished her college golf career at Portland State University in 2003, Battistella has a place to call home.

She has dedicated her adult life to golf as a touring professional, traveling from town to town, and occasionally from country to country. But now she has returned to Bend to settle down.

"It's the first time in my life where I can say, 'OK, I can be here and I am not moving anywhere,'" says Battistella. "I can get a job without thinking, 'How am I going to quit the job in like five months?'"

"It's kind of nice, and kind of refreshing."

Battistella — who won or shared three Class 4A state girls individual golf titles at Bend High School from 1996 to 1998 — had stayed from any long-term housing commitments as she took up residence at places that best served her golf game at the moment.

Battistella has lived in so many places since college that she really has lived nowhere. She has taken up residence in Beverly, Mass.; Coral Springs, Fla.; Bellingham, Wash.; and Palm Springs, Calif. — not to mention Portland and Bend.



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Bend golfer Taya Battistella, left, gives a lesson to Adam Cox of Bend, at River's Edge Golf Course in Bend Wednesday afternoon.



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"I think I lived in like 11 different houses in Portland, in a grand total of maybe four years (there)," Battistella says. "I didn't live really anywhere. It was more like I had a different home every week for about seven years."

More than those cities, though, her home was on the road. She played for three seasons (2007-09) on the Duramed Futures Tour, the LPGA's main development tour that takes golfers throughout the eastern half of the United States and beyond. And when not on that tour, Battistella darted around the globe to play in professional tournaments as far away as China since she turned pro in 2004.

Need a lesson?

Who: Taya Battistella

What: LPGA-certified golf professional

For lessons: taya.riversedge@gmail.com, or call River's Edge at 541-389-2828

She even played twice on the LPGA Tour, qualifying for the Canadian Women's Open Championship in both 2006 and 2009 after winning Canadian Women's Tour events in those seasons.

Battistella's entire adult life has been traveling from tournament to tournament on a relatively modest budget.

"It's not really a sustainable lifestyle," Battistella says. "I appreciate every day that I am not on tour. It's been a really easy transition."

With her suitcases stowed away, Battistella can now look forward to her new life.

She spent much of the last year at Portland State taking prerequisite classes for physical therapy school, which she hopes to attend in fall 2012.

Her plan is to help golfers with golf injuries by becoming a physical therapist, with the added benefit of being able to share insights from her background as a golf pro.

Battistella has plenty experience with both golf and injury, having fought a nagging back since college, she says.

"I have a pretty unique perspective," says Battistella, adding that issues with swing mechanics early in her career caused her back troubles. "I'm pretty excited about physical therapy AND golf. I think that has a lot of potential."

Currently, Battistella has a job as an assistant at Rebound Physical Therapy in Bend, and she is taking more physical therapy-related classes at Central Oregon Community College.

And she is starting to give lessons at River's Edge Golf Course in Bend. (Battistella earned her LPGA teaching credential in 2009.)

"I was thinking I would teach, like all washed-up golfers do," Battistella jokes.

Her first effort to combine golf and physical therapy begins on June 13 with an eight-week "boot camp" for women aimed at helping them break 100.

The program, she explains, will integrate golf-specific exercises with more traditional golf instructions by combining Rebound sessions with on-course work with Battistella and River's Edge head pro Troy Eckberg.

The cost to attend the class is \$175.

Putting Battistella's golf expertise together with physical therapy training makes sense to Marcus Ainsworth, a physical therapist at Rebound who will be helping with the boot camp program.

"She understands the golf swing, obviously, because she is a pretty good golfer," Ainsworth says. "She can take that understanding of golf-swing mechanics related to performance on the course, and apply physical therapy knowledge for rehabbing back pain and reducing the likelihood of back pain, that sort of thing. I think it could be very valuable."

And playing competitive golf in the future? That is less certain for Battistella.

"With school and everything else, I'm not really tournament-ready like I would like to be," Battistella says. "If I did it, I would do it more for fun."

The prospect of not being prepared to play well "would be hard for me," she says.

"I have time to figure that out," she adds, "but right now I'm focusing on trying to get through my school stuff."

Professional golf is a life Battistella has, for the most part, left behind. Sure, she misses the competition, she says.

But the lifestyle?

"Not really," says Battistella, who's parents still live in Central Oregon. "I'm pretty excited to be where I'm at in my life right now."

"Moving to Bend, I'm starting to feel grounded for the first time ... EVER."

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