

CAROLINE MASSON

An Early Bloomer

Asking Caroline Masson about her role models reveals a great deal about her strategy. The young professional golfer does not aim to emulate a single icon. Instead, she combines a variety of skills into a style all her own. Not a bad concept, as the 24-year-old's meteoric rise demonstrates.



Caroline M.

A sports family

Caroline Masson's father directed her into tennis early on, and she took up the sport with enthusiasm and diligence. Her ambition and hot temper claimed a few victories at the cost of more than a few broken racquets. At the age of six, Caroline stepped on a golf course for the first time and has never looked back since. She played her first tournament when she was ten and made the junior national team five years later.



Baby steps and big leaps

At the Hubbelrath Golf Club in Dusseldorf, Caroline Masson showed potential at an early age. Her talent and ambition brought her numerous national and international victories. As an amateur golfer, she reached the top in the German championships and scored wins in the Spanish Ladies Open and the European Team Championship seven times. In the years 2005 and 2007, the Gladbecker native played in a team for the Ping Junior Solheim Cup and took the trophy home both times. Still playing as an amateur, in 2009 Caroline reached ten under-par, the best result ever by a German golfer. Moving into professional territory was only a matter of time.

A stellar professional career begins

The constant travel and training regimen did not prevent Caroline from finishing high school in 2008 and subsequently going to Oklahoma State University on a scholarship. A year later, she finished the Qualifying School at La Manga Club in southern Spain and was eligible to play in the 2010 Ladies European Tournament (LET). There she pulled a surprise victory with a sensational final round of 66. Already in her first pro season, Caroline Masson made the final round in 14 out of 16 tournaments. She secured four top-ten rankings, and the first victory came in 2012's South African Women's Open with one shot lead. With this win and her biggest success to date, Caroline Masson already secured a place among the international golfing elite. Other successes followed soon: 2011 saw her at number seven in the LET ranking; she was already second in 2012. In that year she also joined the LPGA Tournament, the top contest in professional American women's golf.

Caroline Masson was the fourth German female golfer to play on a European Solheim Cup team in the competition's history. On 18th August 2013, the European team made history at the Colorado Golf Club with an 18:10 win against the American hosts. It was the first European victory on American soil. "After this team victory, I want to be there again in two years and defend the Cup at home," asserts the visibly proud German pro.

Strong nerves and good support

In addition to talent and drive, Masson has one particular strength as a player: performance under pressure. At times when her opponents are visibly nervous, Caroline keeps her focus and owns the game.

A closely knit family and a stable circle of friends as well as her coach, Günter Kessler, support her unconditionally. Although she spends a lot of time in the States, Caroline Masson knows the best place to recharge her batteries is at home. Here is a peek into what she has in store for the friends of women's professional golf.



After the opening round of the LPGA Tournament in the Bahamas, you posted that your game felt a little rusty. How was that?

The first competition of the year is always special. You do not know exactly where you stand and how the tournament pressure will affect what you learned during practice. On top of that, I only had one week's time to prepare. The thumb fracture which I got in Japan last November took longer to heal, and I got the okay to get back to training only a few days before my departure.

Do you see the first tournament of 2014 as symptomatic for the whole year?

Not really. As I said, I was injured for a while. My thumb was in a brace for four weeks. As a result, the expectations were not very high. Still, I performed well, which tells me the injury is not likely to have long-term effects.

What goals have you set for this year?

To make the top 30 in the LPGA money list and to create as many opportunities for a win as possible.

Until recently you played with a splint. Is the injury gone?

The fracture has not healed fully yet, but it is stable enough to allow me to play golf painlessly.

How do you assess the Novelty Race to CME Globe?

This is a good innovation for the LPGA. For us players, the opportunity to win such a big prize at the end of the year is great, of course. Also, the importance and power of the CME Titleholders, our last tournament of the year, and the media attention both increase. I hope that this development goes a little further so at the end of the year we have a competition similar to the FedEx Cup.

The Solheim Cup 2015 takes place in Germany. What does this mean to you personally?

The Solheim Cup 2015 taking place in St. Leon-Rot is a huge thing for me! After playing on the Solheim Cup team last year and having one of the best golf weeks ever, the Solheim Cup is my biggest goal for 2015. It is a unique opportunity to have this event in Germany and I'll try anything to make it onto the team again!

Does the date fit into your tournament schedule?

In the coming two years, it will be hard to connect the Solheim Cup with LPGA and LET. With the exception of the majors, only the LET gives Solheim Cup ranking points. The other way to qualify is via the world rankings. I will finalise my 2015 tournament schedule depending on how things go in the next few months.

What's special for you about playing in a team?

We play about 30 single tournaments a year. It is a really nice change to play a long week on a continental team and to support each other. The spirit in the European team is just fantastic, and it makes winning together a little bit better than winning alone.

In 2016 golf is back in the Olympics. Is this a challenge for you?

Sure, the opportunity to play in the Olympics as a golfer is incredible in itself. The biggest challenge for us golfers will be to play our best at the Olympics. Compared to other sports, we have so many events each year (majors, WGCs, Ryder Cup)... It will be interesting to see if we can keep up the pace at the Games, too.





You clearly deliver great performance under pressure. How does this work in a team context?

You say that you do not handle loss well. What does it really mean to lose in golf? Good question! Somehow, golf usually leaves you feeling like you've lost. Tournament victories are rare. This makes the sport difficult. But I do not think that just because you have not won a tournament, you have lost it. It is more about getting the most out of your play on the course at any given day. Sometimes this means playing a very good round, or it can mean a mediocre round in which you kept your score together. In my opinion, one can only lose if preventable problems like bad attitude and silly mistakes lead to a bad score.

Your coach Günter Kessler is a German coaching legend. What is it like working with him?

Because I spend a lot of time in the States these days, our cooperation is less intense than a few years ago. But I see him each time I am back in Germany and whenever he makes it to some of the tournaments throughout the year. Otherwise, I can call him any time when a problem arises and we take care of it quickly.

Your career started with tennis. Do you keep it up or does it interfere with golf?

Tennis is a great sport, and I am still a big fan. If I can, sometimes I like to play for an hour. I see it as a good workout.

Sandra Gal also plays on the LPGA Tournament. Do you train together occasionally?

So far we have not trained together, but my move to Orlando will certainly grant us a few good opportunities to practice and play a few rounds together.

Do you see many of your colleagues outside your tournament schedule?

Not really. We see each other daily for 30 weeks a year. It is good to get a little break from the tournament circus every once in a while ;)