

Women's Varsity Golf – A 10-year Perspective

by Erika R. DeSanty, Head Coach – September 2020

In 2014, I had the honor of being named the head women's golf coach here at Princeton University, becoming the 5th head coach and 3rd female coach to lead the program. My path to coaching our Tigers was quite different than our previous female coaches, Amy Bond and Nicki Cutler. Both were decorated division I golfers, while I played division III basketball. Their coaching careers began at the division I level, while mine began at Williams College. Princeton was my dream job, so when the position opened, I jumped at the opportunity to interview. It was during that process that I first met Will Green, our men's golf coach, and Kelly Shon '14, one of the best golfers to ever tee up for Princeton. Their love for Princeton and the golf program was clear from the moment we met, solidifying my desire to take on this role – I have never looked back.

The last decade has been transformational not only for me, but also for our program. We had the chance to watch Kelly as she brought her talents from Princeton to the LPGA Tour; we ended a twelve-year drought in Ivy Championship victories; we traveled internationally twice; and we developed a practice facility allowing year-round training. These are just a few of the tremendous milestones that have come to define the Princeton Women's Golf experience.

Kelly's stardom highlighted the 2011-2014 seasons for our Tigers. In her first year wearing Orange and Black, it became clear she would have an extraordinary career at Princeton and beyond. Kelly is one of only four golfers to earn All-Ivy honors in each of her four seasons, one of only five golfers to qualify individually for the NCAA Regionals (she did this three straight seasons), one of only three golfers to make it to the NCAA Championship, and the only golfer to earn Ivy League Player of the Year honors twice. Fortunately, for Princeton fans, the excitement of her playing career left us cheering years later as she entered the professional competition world. In 2015, Kelly returned to Jersey turf to compete in the ShopRite Classic in Galloway, NJ. In an unforgettable fashion, Kelly carded a season-best performance and finished tied for 3rd. As Coach Green and I followed along from outside the ropes, we were overcome by the powerful experience of watching a former Tiger represent herself and our program in such an extraordinary way. She attacked the Bay Course at Seaview Country Club calmly and confidently, highlighting her rookie season with this performance. Kelly retired from her playing career in 2018, but the pride she brings to our program endures.

While Kelly competed on Tour, our program experienced a necessary and an exciting shift culturally and competitively. Change takes vision, but more importantly, it takes the right people. My goal from the moment I arrived on campus was simple - bring in the best possible golfers whose goals for our team would align with my own. At Princeton, I have the privilege of

recruiting some of nation's finest junior players because, along with selling the best education our world has to offer, we can showcase a beautiful home course on campus. Additionally, with consistent advancements to our practice facilities and the opportunity to travel internationally, we are able to draw the top talent year after year. I can still remember the thrill of winning an early recruiting battle with Duke University for Maya Walton '20. This recruiting win, and others that followed, positioned our Tigers to build on our individual successes in order to achieve our team goals – we came together to win consecutive Ivy Championships in 2017 and 2018. In two record-setting performances, our Tigers proved the depth of our talent and the quality of our competitive mindset. In 2017, this was on display with a 31-stroke victory over second place Harvard, and in 2018 with an exhilarating one-hole playoff win to top the Crimson again.

Both Championships had their share of excitement, but the playoff win in 2018 was undoubtedly the best athletic experience of my life. As Alison Chang '20 eloquently wrote in her 'Dear Princeton' letter, "Standing among crowds of Princeton supporters by the 9th green, I will never forget the palpable, electrifying, and quiet confidence that coursed through our team, energized by our momentum from the 18th. In my eyes, this will remain as one of Princeton's greatest sports moments ever." It is this focus on team over individual that sets us apart from other programs. We strive to stay connected on the course, stressing the philosophy that though we may play as five individuals, to win we must always compete as one. As Maya reflected on our culture and her experience in a recent article featured in Town Topics, "Working on leadership skills, confidence skills, learning to be team oriented and putting other people first has really helped develop me into the person that I am today, both on and off the course [...]. Princeton Women's Golf has been the best experience of my life."

In those two defining seasons, our Tigers had an Ivy League Championship Medalist, two runner-up finishes, an Ivy League Player of the Year, and an Ivy League Coach of the Year honor. Those successes, among many others, will undoubtedly serve as springboards for years of winning to come. In just a decade, Princeton Women's Golf has seen a cultural shift that has propelled our program to new heights. Indeed, the future of the program looks brighter than ever.

Links for further reading:

- Women's Golf Team Wins 2017 Ivy League Title:
<https://goprincetontigers.com/news/2017/4/23/womens-golf-team-nears-ivy-record-in-winning-ivy-league-title-by-31-strokes.aspx>
- Princeton Captures 2018 Ivy League Women's Golf Championship in Playoff:
<https://ivyleague.com/news/2018/4/22/princeton-captures-second-straight-ivy-league-womens-golf-championship-crown.aspx>

- Alison Chang’s April 2020 “Dear Princeton…” letter:
<https://go Princetontigers.com/news/2020/4/9/general-dear-princeton-alison-chang.aspx>
- Town Topics July 2020 article featuring Maya Walton:
<http://www.towntopics.com/wordpress/2020/07/22/while-disappointed-by-abbreviated-senior-season-pu-womens-golfer-walton-made-great-memories/>
- Princeton University Women's Golf Record Book:
<https://go Princetontigers.com/news/2020/8/31/womens-golf-record-book>
- More about the author, Coach Erika DeSanty:
<https://go Princetontigers.com/sports/womens-golf/roster/coaches/erika-desanty/7170>