Hello,

Please enjoy my columns. I am interesting in keeping track of which communities they go to. I would appreciate it if you could take a moment and send me a quick email at rejeangiguere@rejeangiguere.com when you publish the first one.

Thanks, Rejean.

Suzann Pettersen: Unsportsmanship at it’s Worst.

The 2015 Solheim Cup is where the best of Europe’s women golfers play against the best women’s team from the United States. The format is similar to the Rider Cup in men’s golf.

This year we got to witness the sight of Norway’s Suzann Pettersen put winning at all cost ahead of integrity and sportsmanship. It sure looked ugly.

In a four ball match that was tied on the seventeenth hole, Alison Lee of the U.S. putted and missed her chance to win the hole, leaving her putt eighteen inches past the cup. Everyone on the green started to walk towards the next hole, and a conceded putt was assumed. Even the tour official started to announce a tie on the hole. Alison bent down to pick up the ball, only to be challenged by Pettersen who happened to glance back as she walked away.

A number of things come to mind. You don’t usually see people walking off the green when someone still has to putt. Second, there are lots of conceded putts in this golf format. Unlike a normal golf game where scores are added together from each hole to create a final score, this form of golf is played hole-by-hole and there is no accumulation of overall strokes. The game is solely about who wins the most holes.

The history of the conceded putt, the gimme, is well entrenched in this type of golf. Jack Nicolas is well known for one gimme, and it’s another example of his amazing level of golf etiquette.

The 1969 Rider Cup was held in Scotland. On the last hole, with the Cup on the line, Brit Tony Jacklin was facing a missable putt. If he missed this one the U.S. would win. Jack Nicklaus stepped forward, picking the ball up and offering a gimme, thereby ensuring a tie between the teams.

It’s almost like a tie was okay with Jack. Maybe he could see the possible consequences of Jacklin missing the shot. Tony Jacklin, would have had all the pressure, and the entire the loss of the contest on his shoulders if he missed. Either way, Nicklaus’ gesture was still an act of sportsmanship on a highest level.

Fast forward to this past weekend. A young Alison Lee had been warned earlier for picking up the ball before it was conceded, even though it obviously would be. It would be easy to chalk it up to crowd noise or youth, definitely a lesson for Alison to learn.

In the video you can see Pettersen is frustrated with how long Alison is taking to putt, she looks away, tilts her head, crosses her arms. Her body language is there. She moves her feet around and changes position, which she shouldn’t be doing if she wants to be standing on the edge of the green while someone else is putting.

 Hopefully Pettersen didn’t look back on purpose hoping to catch Alison picking up the ball before the words were spoken.

Either way, she could of let it go. She could have said she meant to concede the hole, and kept the spirit of competition alive while looking like a professional who understood the game. Instead, she won the hole with the referee and brought a young golfer near to tears. The fact that Suzann’s playing partner was also shaken with the situation makes it clear she would have liked a different outcome.

Unlike with Jack Nicklaus, this was not the final hole of the Solheim Cup. An angered U.S. team stormed back in later matches in the biggest comeback in Solheim Cup history.

Suzann defended her position for a day before backing down and apologizing. She will not only have to nurse a loss for Europe that she had something to do with, but she will also have to nurse a figurative black eye until it heals.

Rejean Giguere is a Northern Ontario author of six novels whose passion spills over into the sports world. Check out his website at www.rejeangiguere.com.

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