

From The Desert Sun – February, 2008

Italy's Giulia Sergas moves to Coachella Valley to attain her LPGA goals

PALM DESERT - To take the giant leap of faith that Giulia Sergas has taken, you'd better expect giant results.

"I just left home and I came here with nothing, just with hope," said Sergas, an Italian golfer and LPGA member who has now made the Coachella Valley her home. "So you have to have a big goal. The big goal is to win the ranking one year, you know, having a chance to win all the majors. Otherwise, I would not be here."

A fully exempt LPGA player for the last five years but with just four career top-10 finishes, Sergas is hoping the work she's done in her new home will translate into greater success in 2008.

"The day I know where I want to be, I'll know it inside. And I think I'm getting there," said Sergas, who was 62nd on the tour's money list last year with \$184,050. "I will get there soon. But I don't start the year saying I'm going to win the first tournament. I'm going to start the year thinking I'm going to keep doing what I'm doing and let's learn and see where this thing is going to take me."

Sergas first came to the desert, armed with just a passport and her golf bag, about one year ago at the suggestion of part-time desert resident and LPGA star Sherri Steinhauer. What Sergas found was something far different than her home of Trieste in northeast Italy.

"You have no idea how many times I e-mail to my friends at home and say 'Today it is 22 degrees (Celsius or 72 degrees Fahrenheit), sunny, beautiful, snow on the mountains, everything is green.' Just gorgeous."

For Sergas, there are both positives and negatives to uprooting her life and moving across an ocean to pursue her golf dreams. The positives, she says, are the opportunities to grow as a golfer because she can immerse herself in the game in the desert.

That includes working with the Dave Pelz Golf short-game school at Cimarron Golf Resort in Cathedral City and working with Steve Jacobson of Tour Golf Fitness at Woodhaven Country Club in Palm Desert.

"She was on the driving range hitting balls with her coach (Peter Nervick) and obviously, nothing against Woodhaven, but you don't see many professionals on the driving range," said Jacobson, who is both fitness trainer and advisor to Sergas. "So I inquired through (a staff member) 'who's that?' and he said 'Giulia.' Basically I went up to her and started a conversation and told her I had the fitness deal and was she interested to take a look at it."

"Things like this don't help you in two weeks or a month. They help you because you see something coming up," Sergas said. "You can see yourself getting stronger. You see that in one or two years, you can actually believe in what you are doing."

The new dedication to a golf-specific fitness program is just part of what has Sergas thinking she is ready to make the next step in her career.

While the 28-year-old has yet to win a tour event, she has retained her playing privileges the last five years by finishing among the top 90 money winners on the tour. Her 62nd-place finish last year qualifies her for a second trip to the Kraft Nabisco Championship in Rancho Mirage in April.

But the advantage of living in the United States and playing on the American tour comes with some drawbacks for European players such as Sergas.

"To get the card and play on the LPGA and keep the card instead of just playing in Europe, you can definitely do it," said Sergas, an outgoing personality who designs her own line of golf clothing and has an interactive Web site, www.giuliasergas.com.

"But you leave home. You leave your parents, you leave your family, the language, the food, the culture. It's just very, very difficult."

Then there are the constant battles with confidence that Sergas shares with almost every other professional golfer in the world. For Sergas, that means trying to compare herself to players such as Lorena Ochoa and Annika Sorenstam without starting to feel bad that she hasn't reached those same levels.

"It's just trying to accept the fact that I can play really good," she said. "Sometimes it is hard for your head to realize that you are actually living what you always wished for, that it's not just a dream."

Adding a bit to Sergas' challenges was the loss of a small corporate sponsor in recent months. But with an American home now, Sergas hopes she can get some company, either regional or national, interested in a sponsorship deal. She even has a compelling argument why she might be a better sponsorship opportunity than the game's top players like Ochoa or Sorenstam.

"When you sponsor somebody, you get so much more than a hat or a golf bag or just something you can watch on TV. Because you aren't going to pay me millions of dollars, right?" Sergas said. "You are going to pay me a small amount of dollars. And for that amount of dollars, you are going to get so much more that I am able to give that the top player in the world won't have time to give you."

Whatever happens as Sergas begins her 2008 season, she knows she's already benefited from being in her new desert home.

"Whatever comes my way, it's already winning (for me), just being here and having all this experience for me," she said.