

Shepley dealing with golf's ups and downs

Making it as a professional golfer is not easy at the best of times.

You need to play consistent golf while living out of a suitcase. You need to deal with the highs and lows in a sport that provides plenty of both. You need to be among the top performers in your field. And even with all of that, you need a little good fortune.

Jessica Shepley has had helpings of all of those this season. The Iroquois Ridge grad won the season opener on the CN Canadian Women's Tour at the beginning of May. On the Duramed Futures Tour, Shepley has posted her best stroke average since turning pro in 2005. Her mark of 71.68 is a full stroke below her breakthrough year in 2008, when she finished seventh on the tour in winnings to earn conditional status on the LPGA Tour for the first time. She's made all nine cuts this season (and 23 of 24 over the last two years). The only thing missing this season, as far as the Futures Tour is concerned, is a top finish that would vault her up the money list from her current standing of 31st.

And this is where the life of the professional golfer gets tough. You still have to deal with what life throws at you away from the golf course. For Shepley, it came in the form of an accident on an Illinois highway.

"The first big hiccup in the year," she said.

Driving to a tournament, her car hydroplaned on the wet highway.

Fortunately, the 28-year-old fared much better than her car, which is off the tour permanently. She emerged from the accident with tightness in her back.

"This is the stuff you have to deal with," said a frustrated Shepley, who withdrew from this week's CN Canadian Women's Tour event at Blue Springs Golf Club in Acton after shooting an opening round of 80 on Monday. "I kept playing but I should have taken care of it."

It's easy to understand why Shepley chose to continue playing. The injury wasn't bad enough to prevent her from golfing and, when your livelihood and future in your chosen career are directly linked to earning paycheques, it's tough to sit on the sidelines mid-season.

"I don't want to take time off but there's no consistency," she said. "It's not helping to play through it."

Shepley's opening round put an end to her winning streak on Canadian soil — she also won the Canadian Professional Golfers Association Women's title at the end of the 2009 season. But taking some time should give her a better chance of defending her title when the event will be held in Burlington Aug. 16-18. The following week she'll compete at the CN Canadian Women's Open, her fifth career LPGA event.

For now, competing just 20 minutes from her parents' home, the break at least comes at a good time.

"I'll stay here and get some work done on it," she said. "I'll take the next couple of weeks off and regroup."

If Shepley can come back and repeat her recent success in Canada on the Futures Tour, she may be able to avoid having to go to the LPGA qualifying school. She already has earned an exemption to the final stage but would prefer if she didn't even need to use it.

"Definitely, not going to Q School would be a nice thing. That's always the first goal," she said. "It's just that one week and you either do it or you don't. Everything is riding on that one week."

For now, Shepley is banking on a couple of weeks of rest to get her game back to where it was a month ago. When asked how she's responded to time off during the season in the past, Shepley shrugged.

"I don't know. I've never really done it before. I'll let you know in a couple of weeks."



HERB GARBUTT



PHOTO COURTESY CHUCK RUSSELL / GOLF CANADA

HIGHS AND LOWS: Jessica Shepley chips onto a green during the first CN Canadian Women's Tour event of this season in Richmond, British Columbia. The 28-year-old Iroquois Ridge grad won that tournament, but withdrew from this week's tour stop at Blue Springs Golf Club in Acton after shooting an opening round of 80.

Andreana blanks South Africa in debut

Tina Andreana's debut with the Canadian women's softball team was an impressive one.

The T.A. Blakelock grad pitched four shutout innings in her first-ever appearance for the national team on Monday, helping Canada to a 12-0 rout of South Africa at the International Softball Federation women's world softball championships in Caracas, Venezuela.

Andreana allowed only one hit and struck out a pair. Her teammates supported her with an eight-

run first-inning outburst, and the game was called after four innings due to the mercy rule.

The victory improved Canada to 5-1 at the tournament. The team was scheduled to conclude round-robin play Tuesday against the Netherlands (4-2), where a win would clinch second spot in Pool A.

Andreana recently completed her first year at Western Texas College, where she pitched the fourth no-hitter in school history.