

Playing their way into colleges

April 17, 2010 By MARK HERRMANN mark.herrmann@newsday.com

Mark Herrmann

Stephanie Eybers used to go out to play golf with her dad at a club near their home in Northern [Virginia](#) and the game had an immediate impact on her. "I hated it," she said.

"When he finally stopped forcing me into it, I got to love it," Eybers said, adding that she realized when she was in the ninth grade that she had a natural swing. Now, as a senior, she shoots in the 70s and just received a full scholarship to St. John's.

Brian Goff did take up golf as a child, he just never took it seriously. He was too intense about his junior hockey career in Rochester, N.Y. Goff was the goalie on several state All-Star teams and was all set on playing Division I, except for one problem. "He knew he was never going to be 6-foot-2," his father, Jim, said of the 5-9 teenager.

So the younger Goff had what he called "a heart-to-heart talk" with a golf teacher near his home and decided to give up hockey. He still isn't a scratch player, but he has improved by about 10 shots in the past year. He shoots in the mid- to high-70s, which was good enough to get him recruited by Hofstra. He will start in the fall, fulfilling his dream of being a Division I athlete.

What Eybers and Goff have in common, along with fast improvement and the fact they will be playing here for the next four years, is their route. Both took the accelerated way toward learning at a prep school where the education includes five hours of golf a day.

Each will graduate next month from the [Hank Haney](#) International Junior Golf Academy, having studied a bit under [Haney](#), who is Tiger [Woods'](#) personal teacher, and Haney's disciples. The Haney school, in Hilton Head Island, S.C., is part of a growing trend, similar to academies that have trained future tennis pros for years.

"It's sort of like college in that you're away from home," Eybers said, "except it's a little stricter and more scheduled."

The schedule includes starting regular school classes at 7 a.m., then playing or practicing golf all afternoon, doing a fitness regimen-weight training, cardiovascular exercises-at least twice a week, then having dinner, then study time.

"I absolutely love it," Eybers said. "The golf is the best part."

She always had planned to go to boarding school, one specializing in her first sports passion, skiing. When golf caught her attention, she and her family began comparing schools. She made the choice she did because [South Carolina](#) is closer to home than another good one in [Florida](#). She also liked the idea of learning from Woods' mentor.

Because he has spent so much time on his famous pupil's comeback, Haney was at the academy usually only early in the week. "He goes to every player and works with them for five or 10 minutes. He's really good and he only needs five or 10 minutes," Eybers said, adding that her lessons focused on her grip and timing her swing so her hip would move forward before her arm descended.

Goff's schedule is different because he graduated last spring from upstate Webster Schroeder High School and is taking two morning classes at the [University of South Carolina](#). In golf, he applies a hockey player's discipline and willingness to be taught.

"The head instructor works with you whenever you want," he said of Haney's chief assistant. "Two days a week, you just go play, however many holes you can. The other three, it's all instructional. Two-and-a-half hours on the range, two-and-a-half hours on short game, with a coach breathing down your neck."

It has paid off. Goff was impressed by Hofstra coach [Joe Elliott](#). Goff won't be on scholarship, at least not this year, but he probably will be a big part of the team. "When I went there, I fell in love with it," he said.

Practices alone ought to be worth enrolling. Hofstra's team works out at Garden City Golf Club, one of the most revered and exclusive layouts in the country.

The St. John's women's team practices at Harbor Links in Port Washington. "I saw it when I came up to visit. It's really pretty," Eybers said.

She likes the fact that the Red Storm has a solid team, yet still has openings in the lineup. "They're losing five seniors," she said. "I wanted to be part of a team that can win a championship. I visited other schools, but I didn't have the feeling I belonged. When I went to St. John's, I loved everything about it."

Her father runs a sporting goods business and her mother is a high school soccer coach. Both are thrilled with her choice. "Especially," she said, "that it's a full ride."