

Reilley Rankin

LPGA Star with Strong Family Ties

LPGA player Reilley Rankin has been many places in her golf career, but she still calls Hilton Head Island home.

Born in Beaufort and raised on Hilton Head, Rankin started playing golf at age five. At around age 10, Rankin started taking golf lessons from Skip Malek in the Hilton Head Junior Golf Pro Pal Program. She continued to work with Malek for about seven years and later attended golf school on the island. Rankin's uncle, David Reilley, a former USGA member and owner of Hilton Head's Aunt Chiladas restaurant, encouraged her to play in the US Junior Girls Championship when she was in high school. He took her to Montana to play in the tournament where he caddied for her.

"That was the biggest breakthrough at that point," Rankin said. "That sparked my interest to want to play and get a scholarship. It showed me that I could play at that level." David Reilley, along with Rankin's uncle, Tom Reilley, owner of Reilley's, helped pay for her travel expenses.

"Growing up on Hilton Head was nice because my whole family lived there," Rankin said. She has about 50 family members on the island, and she said the support has played a major role in her success.

Rankin said her parents have always done whatever it takes to support her. "I feel fortunate about the way I was raised and the guidance I had,"

Rankin said. "I've learned a lot of important lessons, but I always think they (her parents) deserve a lot more credit than they take."

Rankin was a three-time American Junior Golf Association Rolex All-American, SEC Freshman of the Year, NCAA Freshman of the Year, SEC Player of the Year and a three-time All-American. She won four consecutive collegiate tournaments and was a semifinalist at the Women's Western Championship.

In 1999, after jumping off a 67-foot-high rock into a lake, Rankin broke her back in three places and broke her sternum, and bruised her heart, lungs and aorta. She is fully recovered now. "I'm very lucky to be alive," she said. Rankin led UGA (University of Georgia) to the NCAA Championship title in 2001, and in July of that year turned professional. In 2002, she joined the Futures Tour and tied for fifth. In 2003, she finished fifth on the season-ending Futures Tour money list and won two Futures Tour titles. — Amy Coyne Bredeson



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