

## Jennifer Mills sets an example on and off the air

by **Pamela Cosel**

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Behind the scenes of golf broadcasting with the woman who was the first of her kind

**Note:** *With the regular season of the PGA Tour put to rest last weekend in Michigan, the memories and excitement of the U.S. Senior Open tournament held previously in Colorado Springs yet linger in the air here. For a brief time, the city was in the sporting world's spotlight as legends of the game gathered at the foothills of the Rocky Mountains on the groomed grounds of The Broadmoor Hotel. It was a men's game. Yet, behind the scenes, there was one hard-working lady who has been a major voice on tournament television since 1994. Her face is well known to viewers of the Golf Channel and NBC. Read below and you'll learn a little bit about her heart.*

She is Jennifer Mills, and she knows her a-b-c's.

Rather, she knows NBC. And PGA, for that matter.

Mills is the ground-breaking female announcer on the fairways, in the clubhouse and broadcast booth, a woman expert in her knowledge of the game, who interviews the players after their rounds. They may have had eagles, birdies or bogies, or played their best that day—and while those statistics are important—Mills prefers to find out about the person. She wants to know what's inside—what they think and feel—and it's her job (no, her desire) to convey that to viewers, she says.

Let's look at Mills for a minute, however.

The letters she focuses on are of a more personal nature than a TV station's call letters. They communicate her values and the way she chooses to live when not on camera.

First, there's the letter "F." It stands for Family.

Her son and daughter are top priority to Mills. She made a life-changing decision in 2006 when she walked away from a dream job at the Golf Channel, no other job in the shadows, and decided to become a stay-at-home mom.

"I wanted to be there for my children," she said. "People thought I was nuts and were sure I had another job waiting for me when I quit the Golf Channel, but I didn't. It was a leap of faith."

Next, she champions three "G's" in her heart and actions. They are God, Golf and Gardening—in that order.

She doesn't preach her faith, but prefers to live it. "Media work can be kind of tough," Mills said. "I hope to set an example by what I do and say, and what I don't say, to convey my beliefs."

According to Mills, many of the golfers on tour are people of faith. "Bible studies are held every week when we're on the tour," she said, explaining that when players and their families are away from home and in hotels, getting together in that way helps form a strong bond.

The second "G"—Golf—has given Mills the opportunity to travel to the world's most beautiful courses since she became the sport's first female announcer. Arnold Palmer, along with businessman, Joe Gibbs, launched the Golf Channel and offered Mills a job in 1994 when she was seven months pregnant with her son. She began work two weeks after he was born and later took him with her on every trip into his young toddler years.

The “G” for Gardening is one of the ways Mills spends her time when she’s at home in Florida. She and her beau, Jerry, a landscape artist, spend happy hours ‘digging in the dirt,’ according to Mills who is never afraid to don the ‘grubby clothes and well worn garden gloves’ to create magic in her gardens. The two share ideas and time as they work outdoors at her property.

Mills’ two children are middle-schoolers and love the fact that mom is there for them—because in addition to her career in broadcasting, Mills also teaches. Using her degrees in English and Communication, her freelance contract with NBC allows her to be a teacher’s assistant for her children’s classes. No surprise the long-time writer primarily works with the kids on reading and writing in English classes. “It is so rewarding to be a part, and something I could never do consistently while working full time,” she said.

This is a major change from what Mills’ life used to be like. During her tenure with the Golf Channel, she could be on the road for as many as 20 to 25 weeks a year. “Now I’m only away 10 to 12 weeks a year,” she explained. It’s this extra time at home with her children that she values most.

Yet Mills’ work with young people doesn’t stop with her daughter’s or son’s classes. She contributes much time to a number of causes that instruct and guide young girls and mature women in life, using the art of golf. It’s her way of giving back—and therein lies a fourth “G” to add to her letters list.

Mills does quite a bit of public speaking, all related to golf, but with a different focus. She contributes time and expertise to The [Executive Women’s Golf Association](#) and [Women in the Golf Industry](#), the latter as a board member. Mills is also a spokesperson for The [Cliffs Communities](#) in the Carolinas. It is the site where Tiger Woods is building his first American golf course.

On the broadcast side, Mills is the host of “Better Golf for Women,” a new Turner Sports program where she flies to various cities around the country, teaching businesswomen how to *use* golf—as men do—in business dealings: to network, to build relationships and how the interaction can benefit them professionally and personally.

Another organization that has given Mills great pleasure is “Girl Power.” She and friend, professional golfer Annika Sorenstam, mentor girls ages eight to 16 in the game of golf with a clinic at the Lake Nona Golf and Country Club in Orlando. Annika and other golfers teach free clinics and stage golf outings for girls who might not otherwise be exposed to the game.

Asked if her daughter had ever participated, Mills said, “Yes, several years ago Annika gave her a personal lesson during the clinic. My daughter was immediately hooked. She wanted to be like Annika. Now we have regular 9-hole match play competitions. I give her two shots a hole from the red tees...and can’t beat her!”

Humble pie aside, Mills holds her own on the golf course. She recently captured the women’s club championship at her home club in Florida. Apparently being so often around the game of golf, she’s learned a thing or two.

However, lest one thinks Mills’ life is nothing but fun and games, she stresses that she put in a lot of hard work to get where she is. That’s what she advises young women to do when she speaks about her career. The most important element in preparation, according to Mills, is doing an internship in one’s chosen arena before or during college.

Mills was recruited to play basketball for Wake Forest University in Winston-Salem, N.C., and played only during her freshman year. Instead, she went to work part-time during college for a local TV station, WXII.

“I had done an internship during high school at the local station, WYFF, in Greenville, S.C. In college, I saw an ad at the NBC affiliate where they needed a sports photographer. I knew how to shoot so I applied,” she said. “I rode my bike down to the station, met with them and was offered the job.” That’s where her career in broadcasting began.

In later years, she hosted a show called "PM Magazine." It last aired in 1991, but was the first-ever magazine-format type of television program. It was Mills' experience and professionalism that got her noticed and tapped by the Golf Channel to be an announcer.

Given that, at the time, no other women were on TV as sports announcers, Mills set the pattern for those who have followed behind her. While it took a good amount of time for the men who worked in broadcasting to fully accept their female counterpart, she's gracious today about their camaraderie and, years later, is a mainstay in the professional sports world.

"I didn't set out to force the industry to go co-ed. Still, it's a byproduct whose time had come," said Mills.

One can't help but notice Mills is quite a role model—and one could say, a woman of letters—for her children and others whom she meets.