

Maria Verchenova

Heading back on Tour, with a baby in tow!

There are a legion of golf fans out there, male fans, to whom the following news will come as a shock. She has been off the Ladies European Tour for a little while now and for good reason. 'Fellas, brace yourselves.'

Maria Verchenova, the first Russian to win a Tour card

in professional golf and with model good looks to boot, is married. Not only that, she and husband Valery have just welcomed a daughter, Maria, into the world this past September.

I jovially suggested to Verchenova that there will be many fans around the world who will be devastated at the news that she is now taken, let alone 'with children'. Requests for dates and proposals have come in thick and fast to Verchenova's social media pages and website from red blooded males across the globe for years now.

Golf chat site members have suggested that Verchenova could be the 'saviour' of women's golf, while other hopeful souls have tried warning off potential rivals for her affections in the cyber community with pronouncements like 'Hands off guys, she's taken' – by them.

Verchenova giggles at all the fuss but laughs hard about some of the cases she's seen. "I have a few crazy fans on my website who write to me every week, some of them are non-stop. It's very funny, my caddy absolutely loves it."

With 'little Maria' still only 5 weeks old, Verchenova admits to feeling 'a bit tired'. From the sound of her voice, she was clearly more than 'a bit' but of course, is embracing the joys of parenthood with husband Valery and the full gamut of emotions all new parents go through in the early weeks.

The joy little Maria is bringing to her own parents is also gratifying to her, Verchenova says they are over at the house almost every day. "Especially my mum, she can't wait for me to disappear somewhere so she can look after little Maria."

"I have sleepless nights now. I remember you told me when I was pregnant to get out and do things before the baby came along..... I remember those words now."

Bone tired she may be but the always athletic Verchenova defied her weariness and pushed herself to starting hitting golf balls just two weeks after her daughter's September 18 birth. She's now increased her activity with gym work and is starting to feel stronger after a period, before her pregnancy, when her body had let her down with illness and injury over the past few seasons.

A back injury curtailed her 2011 season however, in proof that every cloud has a silver lining; the injury

indirectly paved the way for the opportunity to meet her future husband at of all places, a driving range.

"I couldn't play on Tour when I injured my back so I was doing a little bit of teaching in Moscow and I ended up teaching Valery," she said. Their Teacher – Pupil relationship blossomed into love and the couple were married in Dubai in the presence of close family and friends.

"I'm not doing any teaching anymore though, when you get back to playing I don't think it really works to teach at the same time. I was swinging like some of the amateurs within a week so I stopped doing that," she laughed.

The Dubai Ladies Masters tournament has always been a favourite tour stop for many including Verchenova, so it is apt that Dubai will mark the occasion of her return to the Ladies European Tour at the season-ending event in December.

"I've started hitting balls and have played the golf course a few times since the baby was born, but it's too cold in Moscow now so I can't practice outside. We plan to go down and practice in Dubai for four weeks before the tournament."

"I absolutely love Dubai.

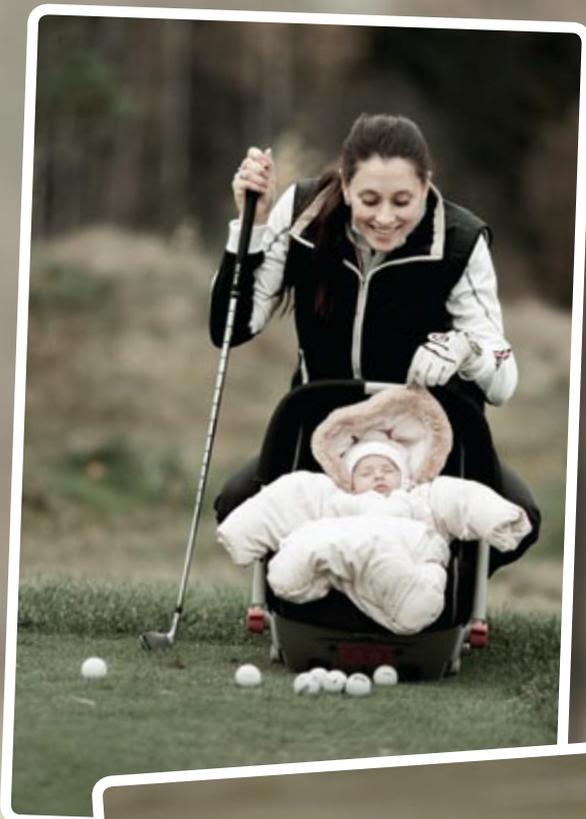
It's the best place for golf in winter time. The shopping is even better. And the best thing, I absolutely adore the food in Dubai, so many good restaurants."

Verchenova's last tournament on the LET was also her first back from the injury layoff, at the Turkish Airlines Open in May. Well into her second trimester at the time, Verchenova was pleased to make the cut (a tie for 51st) and is looking forward to playing again in 2013.

"I don't think I'll be playing as much as I did before, probably only 7 or 8 events a year in Europe. I can't wait to go and play again and it will be something new for me to travel with my daughter," she said.

"I am looking forward to see my friends on tour and my caddy. I got lots of messages from girls on tour when Maria was born and my best friend Stefi (Stefanie) Michl was writing me lots since then, we stay in touch all the time. And I'm very grateful to my sponsors Wilson and Duca del Cosma for sticking with me during my time away too."

"Little Maria will be coming down to Dubai with us and I plan to take her with me every time I play, so she grows up knowing how I look."



Paul Prendergast
www.golfplusmedia.com.au

