

# Erica Battle

## Junior Golfer Destined For Greatness

by Perdita Savage Belk

Erica Battle has taken the junior golf world by storm. An amazing player in her own right, Erica is recognized nationally for her precise strokes and under-par-play that would rival professionals. Having played in well over 100 tournaments since the age of seven, Erica has parlayed her love for the game into what could very well be a promising future.

"I've never had a young player with the time management skills and narrow focus that Erica does," comments coach and Columbia golf pro George Bryan of Erica's tenacity and commitment to her craft. "She's by far the most gifted I've seen, both physically and mentally. She's definitely destined for greatness."

Not bad for the seventeen-year-old Irmo High School senior who started out fetching her dad's out-of-bound balls on the golf course. "I got tired of being hurled over fences into some strange back yard to find lost balls," Erica amusingly remembers of her first introduction to golf. "So, I started hitting with him at the driving range." She played in her first tournament a week before her eighth birthday and has come a long way since placing a "blistering" second. After



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graduation, Erica will become a golfing Gamecock, playing in the Southeastern Conference (SEC) for the University of South Carolina (USC) in Columbia.

"I decided on USC because I really like the coaching staff, the practice facility, and the SEC is one of the most competitive conferences," explains Erica, who maintains a 4.192 GPA and is a member of the National Honor Society and Beta Club. "Everything I needed was right there, so why go away?"

Quite a few collegiate golf programs heavily recruited Erica, including Wake Forest

and North Carolina State University, each obviously noting what a well-rounded young lady she is. "We've always stressed the importance of success in the classroom, setting high goals, acceptance of others...and hard work," emphasizes Daphne Battle of her only child. Mom and daughter have been a dynamic duo since the untimely death of Erica's father, Eddie, when she was fourteen. "Erica doesn't have to be poked, prodded or forced to do well as a student or athlete, it's a lifestyle that she has come to enjoy and expect from herself."

Erica, who shot a women's record 66 at the Walker Course at Clemson this year in the Professional Golfers Association Junior Series, now plays primarily in national tournaments sponsored by the American Junior Golf Association (AJGA). "Their tournaments are usually the most competitive, and you play from a longer [course] distance than most state tournaments," explains the self-described "people person" who was recently named Female Athlete of the Year by The State Newspaper. "I think most Division I college coaches recruit players with experience playing in AJGA events because if a junior can do well in those tournaments, they can do well in any tournament."



Battle pictured here in 1998 with Tiger Woods at the Hootie & The Blowfish Pro-Am.

Erica was also named the 2001 Beth Daniel Player-of-the-Year, an honor awarded by Hall of Fame Ladies Professional Golf Association (LPGA) Tour Player Beth Daniel.

The future is bright for this young woman whose competitive spirit and humble nature will take her far in golf—and in life. With the potential to "rewrite golf history" as she moves through the collegiate level and on

to the LPGA, Erica encourages girls of all ages to think about "teeing up." "I hope that when other black females see me out there, they think about giving golf a try. It's a really great sport, and I recommend it to everyone!" ■