



Ji-Yai Shin is the top Korean on the LPGA Tour this year. She's ranked No. 4 in the world and sits No. 2 on the LPGA money list behind American Angela Stanford. BRADLEY KANARIS — GETTY IMAGES FILES

Enter the Dragon Ladies

LPGA: Five 20-year-old Koreans breathe fire into tour

SINGAPORE — A group of five women dubbed the "Dragon Ladies" are taking the U.S. LPGA Tour by storm, breathing new fire into a sport that needed a boost with the retirement of Annika Sorenstam.

Rarely does a country produce so many athletes who mature into world-class competitors at the same time, but that is what has happened in South Korea.

They are all 20-year-olds — born in 1988 in the Chinese Year of the Dragon — and all broke through last year on the prestigious LPGA Tour.

Korea has a history of producing quality women golfers — 10 of the world's current top 30 are Korean — since still-playing trailblazer Se Ri Pak set the standard a decade ago with two major wins in her rookie year.

But the current crop, who are also known as "Se Ri's kids," are seen as the best ever, capable of dominating world golf for years to come.

World No. 4 Ji-Yai Shin is arguably the most talented, winning the HSBC Champions in Singapore earlier this month for her fourth LPGA victory.

But the others — Na-Yeon Choi, In-Bee Park, In-Kyung Kim and Ji-Young Oh — are not far behind.

Park has already won a major (the

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U.S. Open) as has Shin (British Open), with Kim and Oh posting their maiden LPGA victories last year while Choi pushed Taiwan's Yani Tseng all the way in the race to be named 2008 Rookie of the Year.

There are others, such as Seon-Hwa Lee and Eun-Hi Ji, who are a year or two older, but like the Dragon Ladies were inspired by Pak's exploits.

"We grew up together, trained together, and we all came of age last year. It's an exciting period for Korean women's golf," said Park.

"All my friends the same age as me had a really good year," she added of 2008. "I've been playing with them and knew they were really talented. It was always going to happen some time and it happened last year. I do feel a little bit that I'm part of something exciting."

Shin, who has already overtaken Hall of Famer Pak as the most prolific winner on the Korean Tour, said her veteran compatriot, who has won 24 times

on the LPGA, was responsible for inspiring so many young Koreans.

"We all watched Se Ri and started golf. Before there weren't that many juniors, but after Se Ri, everyone came," she said.

Most of the Korean players attribute their dominance to the work ethic in their home country, which sees them practise, practise, practise, as well as remaining calm under pressure.

Yet despite Korea being an increasingly dominant force in women's golf, no-one from the country, or indeed Asia, has ever made it to world No. 1 one, a position held for years by Sweden's Sorenstam and now by Mexico's Lorena Ochoa.

"Hopefully some day one of my compatriots will be good enough to rise to the very top," said Shin.

"The only reason [no-one has done so yet] is probably because so many Koreans are actually winning tournaments but no one player has continuously won a couple.

"Probably that's why, to the detriment of all the Korean players, that we actually have to rotate winning tournaments."

— Agence France-Presse

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Vancouver Open hits park courses

GOLF NOTES: Field of 220 expected for Sept. event

This will send historians scurrying to find out if the Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation courses have ever played host to an event the size organizers hope for at the new Vancouver Open in September.

Energetic pro Fraser Mulholland, who started the IGA MarketPlace Vancouver Golf Tour with a single pro-am event in 2006, has convinced the parks commissioners on the soundness of using all three full-size courses for a 54-hole simultaneous pro and amateur tournament in the fall.

The organizers hope to attract a field of 220 (70 pros and 150 amateurs) to the event that will begin Sunday, Sept. 13, with a pro-am at Fraserview. The non-pro-am participants will play at Langara, and then they'll switch on Monday.

The field will be cut to 120 following Monday's round and the final round will go at McCleery on Tuesday. Newly named Vancouver Parks Golf, the tournament will also highlight a fresh approach to the way the "muni" courses are viewed.

"It's a great first step," said Mulholland, a teaching pro at Seymour Creek who is hoping to secure a title sponsor for the pro side of the event but will have a minimum purse of \$25,000 regardless.

"The park board commissioners were obviously happy with our proposal."

It seems like an excellent idea for both parties. It will give Mulholland's tour some exposure in the city and show off the city's courses to a different set of players. And they'll attract media attention. The greens crews will be working all summer to get the courses in tip-top condition for the big tournament, which can only make the everyday greens-fee players happy, too.

Expected in the pro side of the tournament will be all the Canadian Tour players who live in this neck of the woods, and Mulholland is hoping veterans such as Ray Stewart and Dave Barr might be convinced to tee



Kent Gilchrist

SPORTS COMMENT

up along with James Lepp.

While it might sound like a long shot, don't bet against Mulholland. He has taken his fledgling tour from zero to 15 events in 2007 and 22 to last year, and has 200 paid-up members.

"There are some details to be worked out [with the park board], but everybody is very excited about having the tournament" said Mulholland. "It will be great for our tour."

"The gratifying thing is we had more than 700 players play in at least one of our tournaments last year."

First VGT event

Todd Halpen of Calgary, a Canadian Tour rookie last year, won the Brad Garside/Paine Edmonds, the first event on VGT schedule, Monday at Kings Links.

Halpen, who played on the UVic golf team until his graduation in 2007, shot an amazing one-under 71 in extremely windy conditions to beat Dave Bolton by a shot.

John Shin, Norm Jarvis and Jeremy Paradis tied for third with 73s.

Taylor second

Nick Taylor of Abbotsford and Darren Wallace of Langley helped University of Washington Huskies to a win at the Fresno State tournament recently.

Taylor finished second, his fourth top-10 of the year, and Wallace was tied for fifth as the Huskies beat UC Davis for the team title.

UBC women win

For the first time since the CN Gail Moore tournament started, the host UBC Thunderbird women's team won it.

Captain Kyla Inaba led the Birds to a 23-shot win over UVic at Shaughnessy. Concordia was third and Alberta fourth.

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