Korean Professional Female Golfers Have Become the World’s Best, But at What Price?

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to discover the reasons of Korean female professional golfers’ success on LPGA tour and the sacrifices came with that success. The lives of Korean and American LPGA tour players have been living on since they started to play golf. In order to understand players’ thoughts deeper and better, the qualitative research was conducted. The major differences between them were education they have received and opinions they have about their lives once they leave LPGA tour. While athlete-student concept was spread and circulated in Korea, student-athlete concept was embraced and progressed in America from early education and even till college education. The majority of the problems and difficulties Korean LPGA players faced after they retired were closely linked with early school education. One of the solutions will be enhancing early education for all student-athletes by making mandatory for student-athletes to fulfill their obligations as students first.

Key words : Korean and American LPGA tour players, life after the tour life, athlete-student vs student-athlete, education

I. Introduction

A typical early Monday morning, at the site of the Ladies Professional Golf Association (LPGA) tournaments somewhere in the United States, can be described as follows. It was a busy place. In the clubhouse, registration, volunteer check-in, setting up temporary LPGA work stations, and much more was going on. A group could be seen gathering around the putting green. They were the LPGA tour players who were participating in the tournament, along with caddies and many of the players’ parents. Judging by their dark hair, skin color, and other physical characteristics, many of the players appeared to be Asian. In fact, the majority were Koreans. As they were waiting for the fog to lift and go away, they were rolling putts or talking...
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with their caddies and going through the same first day preparation rituals they had gone through the previous Monday at another LPGA tournament somewhere else. The majority of these players played in the previous week’s event, which ended yesterday for those who made the 36 hole cut on Friday.

The first round of the tournament will start on Thursday, but for the three days the players will be busy; some will be trying to qualify for this event; others will be playing in a two-day pro-am event with the event’s financial sponsors and other local dignitaries; all will practice, some with a private golf coach: along with their caddies they will walk the course, making notes of areas to avoid, distances from landmarks to the green, and mapping out a strategy for playing the course. Then, it will all come to an end on Sunday afternoon, the players will load up, get in their cars and today’s scene will replay itself, beginning a week from now at the next stop on the LPGA tour. Korean LPGA tour players are showing great performances all around the World and Korea has become the country with the best female golfers. In the LPGA, the Korean tour players are known to work the hardest and this work ethics of Korean LPGA tour players have been with them since the very beginning of their careers (http://www.golfworld.com).

This was maybe because of All for one national attitudes and beliefs we, Koreans have been accustomed with since we were very young and this has been the beliefs and concepts stood by Koreans from the very beginning of sports have started in Korea. Unlike other countries, due to the strong perceptions towards victory supremacy, achievements by coaches and teachers, and over-attention of parents on their children’s athletic careers, the main focus has been only on producing great athletes in Korea (Kwak, Kim, & Joo, 2011). The first place, gold medal, or winning have been the only thing that mattered and accounted in Korea. The second and third place or silver and bronze medals, or loosing have not been acknowledged specially for professional athletes. Winning was the only thing mattered. The system introduced in September 18th, 1973 which offered a special way to enter colleges for those who were attending school but played sports and this laid the foundation for Elite Sport (Kwak, Kim, & Joo, 2011). There were able to enter colleges, even the best colleges only with their athletic performances, academic grades were disregarded (Kang, 2002). The Elite Sport system in Korea has produced many great athletes but the majority of these players did not have any type of preparation for the lives they’ll have to face and live in once they leave the athletic careers (Kang, 2004; Yu & Yi, 2004).

Even with successful LPGA tour careers, the Korean players have to face very difficult transition to social life because they do not have much opportunities and careers they can pursue once they leave the tour life which is very different from America (Lee, 2012). According to Rosenberg (1981), the retirement for athletes showed very similar psychological reactions as those people who were suffering with terminal