

BY GODFREY ROBERT

KOREAN SURGE SPARKS PLENTY OF DEBATE

WORLD NO. 1 KO SPEARHEADS WORLD WOMEN'S GOLF RANKINGS DOMINATION

South Korean women golfers have taken the world by storm to a point that every time a LPGA event or Ladies' Major come around they form the central theme in any discussion or debate.

And while the discourse focuses on their performances and abilities, it also flows into areas seldom imagined.

Take the dialogue about driving distances. Recently there was so much talk about the women's world No. 1 Ko Jin Young's swinging of the "big stick"

It was said that the Korean swings the driver nearly 30 miles per hour slower than her male No. 1 counterpart, Brooks Koepka of the United States.

Yet Ko, 24, uses a driver with a nine-degree loft, 1.5 degrees less than Koepka, a fact that breaks the myth that golfers with slower swing speeds are supposed to use drivers with more loft.

Golf Digest and TrackMan went into extensive explanation about how that is possible, with changing driver designs and altered swings.

DEBATE

Even US President Donald Trump initiated a debate last year when a South Korean delegation led by President Moon Jae-in met him on an official visit to Seoul.

In the Korean delegation was pioneer golfer Pak Se Ri, who started the Korean surge into world golf with her Major victory at the 1998 US Open during which Trump was a spectator.

So Trump had a specific question because he wondered why American women golfers weren't playing as well as the South Koreans in the major tournaments around the world.

It has been 22 years since that famous triumph, and now that Pak had retired, a legion of her countrywomen are making waves on the world golfing scene.

Pak did not pinpoint a singular answer for the Korean surge because the reasons are many, ranging from the Korean work ethic, patience, persistence, perseverance and a herd instinct which was obvious through the millennium when the lasses from the Land of the Morning Calm won title after title and saw a resurgence of golf in the country.

Now 17 of the top 40 in the Rolex World Rankings are South Koreans, with eight in the top 20, all set to land



Ko Jin Young (above) with the Rolex Player of the Year trophy and the Vare trophy.

in Sentosa for the HSBC Women's World Championship from Feb 27 to March 1.

So as Singapore golf fans brace themselves for yet another assault at world-acclaimed Sentosa Golf Club's Tanjong course, many of them have only one reason for their spectatoring.

As one golfing enthusiast put it: "We love the Korean women golfers because they are attractive, pretty, well-dressed, charming and have a mean game that is pleasing to watch."

Among them are Ko Jin Young (No. 1), Park Sung Hyun (2), Kim Sei Young (5), Lee Jeong Eun (7), Ki Hyo Joo (13), Park Inbee (15), So Yeon Ryu (18) and Amy Yang (20).

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— KO JIN YOUNG (ABOVE)

ning two Majors and going from Rookie of the Year 2018 to Rolex Player of the Year 2019, besides winning the Vare Trophy.

On that, she told Swing: "It's been a great two seasons so far. I look forward to hopefully competing in the Tokyo Olympics and achieving what I have dreaming of for so many years."

Golf made a return to the Olympics after 112 years in the 2016 Olympics, and Ko's compatriot Park Inbee won the gold medal in Rio, Brazil.

For the year, Ko wants "to focus on improving my short game skills and swing mechanism and routine through practice."

Now based in Korea, Ko was greatly overwhelmed when being always compared to former world No. 1 Annika Sorenstam of Sweden. "I am greatly honored to be compared to Annika. No more words needed," was how she responded to that elevation.

Ko made international headlines last year for playing 114 holes without a bogey, beating Tiger Woods' record by four holes.

Having finished joint-third at the US\$1.5 million HSBC event the past two years, Ko said: "I have good memories with this event. Course condition has been great and the sponsors and volunteers have been perfect. I look forward to playing at Tanjong again."