

SPORTS

'Major Queen' takes on the LPGA Tour

Chun In-bee keeps expectations modest after an epic season

BY KIM DU-YONG

In 2015, Chun In-bee made a name for herself both in Korea and around the world. Including a U.S. Women's Open victory, she triumphed at major golf tournaments in Korea and Japan, earning the nickname "Major Queen."

This season, Chun has decided to mainly play in the U.S. LPGA Tour, and many consider the 21-year-old to be the top contender for LPGA Rookie of the Year.

"It's too sad that 2015 has passed so quickly," Chun said in an interview with the JoongAng Ilbo. "I ask myself whether I can have the same achievements I had in the 2015 season in the future."

Chun collected eight trophies last year — five in Korea, two in Japan and one in the United States. Among her

eight wins, five came from major tournaments. She collected prize money totaling 2.47 billion won (\$2.04 million) last year, behind only world No. 2 Park In-bee among Korea's female golfers.

Chun is getting attention well before her debut as an LPGA Tour member. The LPGA Tour listed her as No. 5 on its list of golfers whom fans should keep an eye on this year. Kim Seiyong, the 2015 LPGA Rookie of the Year, was the only Korean golfer ranked above Chun, at fourth on the list.

Just like Kim Hyo-joo, who was runner-up for the LPGA Rookie of the Year award, Chun is moving to the LPGA Tour after conquering the local KLPGA Tour. However, there is also pressure for her to meet the high expectations people now have for her performance. Other challenges will include adjusting to a new environment and long stints on the road.

"Speaking objectively, I think it will be difficult for me to get better results than I did in 2015," she said. "If I set my goals too high, I think that would stress me out, so my first aim is

to make the top 10 in prize money ranking."

In Korea, Chun is regarded as a woman of many gifts. In addition to her golf talents and beauty, she was also known for being a math prodigy as a child.

"People say I should learn to speak English well because I'm smart, but that's not true," she said. "Some people also say that I look like actress Han Ga-in, but these kinds of evaluations make me stressed out."

Chun, who turned pro in 2012, said that her victory at the U.S. Women's Open in July was a turning point in her golf career, in that she experienced the sport "in another dimension."

"I watched a video of my performance at the U.S. Women's Open, and I noticed that I was smiling when I missed a par putt in the last hole of the final round," she said. "I realized my relationship to the game was on a different level. I was doing way more than just enjoying golf."

Having nerves of steel is considered one of Chun's biggest strengths, which may be why half of her 12 wins

as a professional golfer are from major tournaments. Even Park In-bee, who is also known for ability to stabilize her mind, acknowledges this.

"It's a really significant achievement that she's based in Korea but can also do well in the United States and Japan," Park said. "I have big expectations for her performance in major tournaments in the future."

Among her 12 wins as a pro, two were from golf courses with Western grasses, and she says terrain won't be a problem as she transitions into the LPGA Tour.

"I had such an inherent sense of Western grasses that at first, I doubted my connection to Korean grasses," she said. "But regardless of the terrain, I had good results in 2015. Since I got rid of my negative thoughts, I can now play my game anywhere."

But English is still a challenge for her, and Chun said she didn't like English as a student.

"It's still difficult for me to speak freely in English, but as I kept speaking it with my foreign caddie, I'm getting better," she said. "I hope I can have many opportunities to conduct

interviews in English [by winning the events]."

Besides her performance on the LPGA Tour, fans also wonder whether Chun will see any romance this year, as she revealed earlier that she's never dated before.

"I've gotten a lot of questions recently about my ideal type of man," she said. "However, I never think about having a boyfriend. Although there is a male entertainer whom I do like, I think it's not realistic [for me to meet him]."

Chun's other goal is to compete in the Summer Games in Rio de Janeiro in August, where golf will be an official Olympic sport for the first time since 1904.

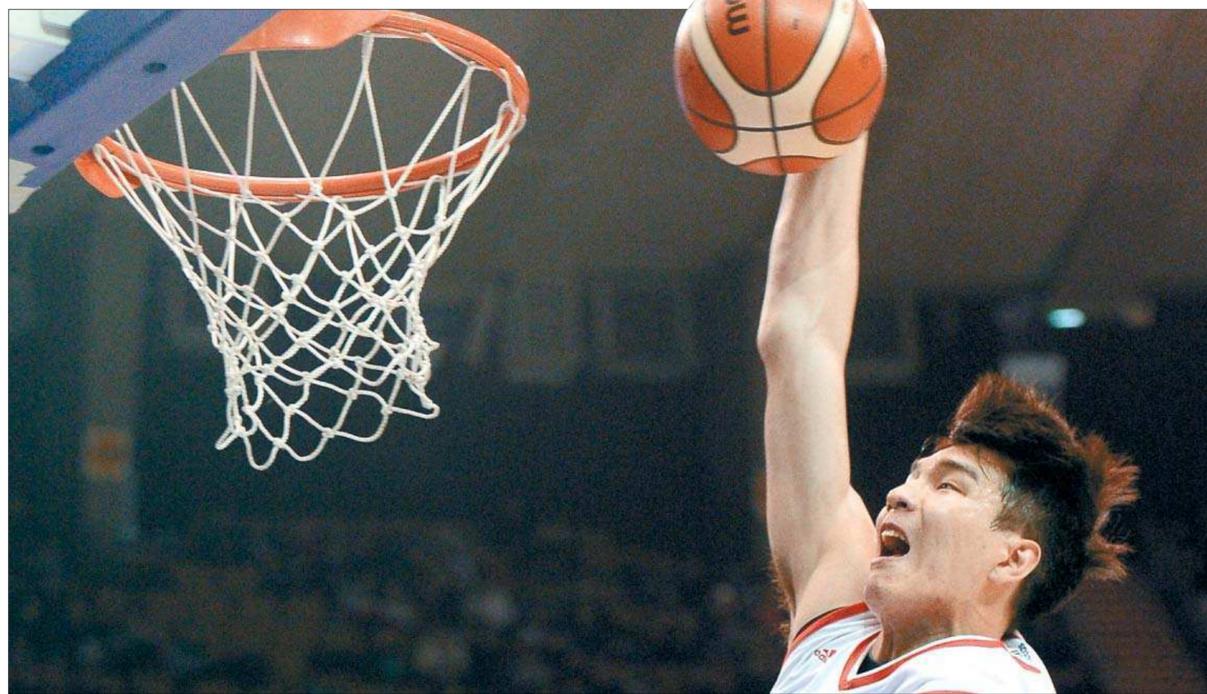
Chun is currently ranked 10th in the world, which is the sixth-highest among Korean female golfers. Since only the top four golfers can compete in the Summer Olympics, getting good results is necessary.

"Although competition will be fierce, I believe I can do well if I enjoy the process of chasing an Olympic spot," she said.

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Golfer Chun In-bee at the Hyundai China Ladies Open last month. Chun will compete as a U.S. LPGA Tour member this year.



Stuffed — Changwon LG Sakers center Kim Jong-kyu dunks during the Korea Basketball League All-Star Game dunk contest at Jamsil Gymnasium in Seoul on Sunday. Kim was the winner of the event among local players, while the Busan KT Sonicboom's Marqus Blakely was the champion among foreign players. The Sonicboom's Cho Sung-min took home first in the 3-pointer shooting contest. In the All-Star Game, the Senior team, comprising players born before 1988, beat the Junior team 107-102. Seoul SK Knights guard Kim Sun-hyung, who played for the Senior team, was voted the All-Star Game MVP for the third season in a row.

Djokovic achieves 'perfection' in Qatar Open

DOHA, Qatar — After being crushed by Novak Djokovic 6-1, 6-2 in the Qatar Open final on Saturday, Rafael Nadal admired the Serb's handiwork.

"I played against a player who did everything perfect," Nadal said. "I know nobody playing tennis like this ever. Since I know this sport, I never saw somebody playing at this level."

"When I say perfect, it's not one thing in particular. It's everything. If not, it's not perfect."

Even Djokovic impressed himself. "It did feel as close to perfection as it could get," said Djokovic, who didn't

drop a set all week.

"From the first to last point I managed to impose my own tactical strategy. I came out on the court with the right intention, right intensity, and with a great deal of confidence I carried from the last season."

This marked his 16th straight final — and 12th title — since he lost in the Qatar Open quarterfinals last year.

Going into the final, Djokovic and Nadal were tied at 23 wins apiece in their career matchups, the most between any players in the history of the Association of Tennis Professionals.

At 24-23, Djokovic holds a career edge against the Spaniard for the first time. Djokovic has won nine of their last 10 matches.

Djokovic posted 30 winners to only nine for Nadal in the 73-minute match.

Djokovic broke Nadal's serve twice in each set, and saved the one break point he faced in the opening game of the match.

"Everything was going well," Djokovic said. "I could swing freely. Any shot I did just felt so comfortable. There are those days when you see the

ball like it's a watermelon, and this was that kind of day."

Nadal, who was playing in his 99th career final, said he's happy with his progress since coming back from a long injury layoff at last year's Qatar Open.

Still, the 14-time Grand Slam champion wouldn't predict when he'd win another Grand Slam title.

"Maybe I am three weeks away, maybe I am five months away, or six or nine, or maybe I am forever away," Nadal said. "You never know how these things go." AP

Korea's racers finish strong at IBSF World Cup



Yun Sung-bin competes in the men's skeleton World Cup race on Saturday in Lake Placid, New York.

BY JOO KYUNG-DON

Korean skeleton racer Yun Sung-bin won a silver medal at the International Bobsleigh and Skeleton Federation (IBSF) World Cup in Lake Placid, New York, on Saturday.

At the fourth World Cup of the 2015-16 season, Yun finished with a combined time of 1 minute 48.76 seconds after two races. The 21-year-old racer, now ranked fourth in the world, clocked 53.99 seconds in the first race and 54.77 seconds in the second.

World No. 1 Martins Dukurs took the gold medal with 1:48.28. The Latvian has placed first in every World Cup this season. His older brother, Tomass Dukurs, was third at 1:49.13.

This was Yun's first silver medal this season and the second in his career. The Korea National Sport Univer-

sity student previously claimed silver at last season's World Cup event in St. Moritz, Switzerland.

Yun has been improving throughout the season. He started the season in 12th place at the first World Cup event in Altenberg, Germany, moving up to fourth at the second World Cup in Winterberg, Germany, and then won bronze at the third World Cup in Königssee, Germany.

At Lake Placid, Yun particularly set a course record with his start on Saturday at 4.70 seconds, beating Russian skeleton racer Alexander Tretiakov's 4.74 seconds in 2006.

Yun, who finished 16th in the 2014 Sochi Winter Olympic Games, had one silver and two bronze medals in last season's World Cup series.

Meanwhile, Yun's teammate Lee Han-shin finished 19th after clocking

1:51.62.

Yun is one of Korea's winter sports athletes hoping to medal in the upcoming 2018 Pyeongchang Winter Games, along with two-man bobsleigh team Won Young-jong and Seo Young-woo.

In their World Cup races at Lake Placid, Won and Seo won bronze after the United States' Carlo Valdes and Steven Holcomb and Germany's Nico Walther and Christian Poser.

At this event, the Korean skeleton and bobsleigh teams put stickers on their helmets and sleds to commemorate their bobsleigh coach, Malcolm Lloyd, who died of cancer on Sunday.

Lloyd, who died at the age of 68, coached Korea from 2013. The Welshman previously coached countries including Russia, Italy and the U.K.

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Drinking, gambling are most punished by KBO

BY AN HEE-SOO, JOO KYUNG-DON

The Korea Baseball Organization (KBO) on Friday punished two pitchers — Lim Chang-yong and Oh Seung-hwan — for illegally gambling in Macau.

The governing body of Korea's top professional baseball league said Lim and Oh, who are currently free agents, will be banned for half their team's games if they return to the KBO League.

Both were also recently ordered to pay a fine of 7 million won (\$5,800) after prosecutors decided their actions constituted a summary offense.

The punishment for the two former Samsung Lions players is different from the KBO's previous actions against players charged with illegal activities. In 2009, the league slapped Lions infielder Chae Tae-in and former LG Twins pitcher Oh Sang-min with a five-game suspension, 2 million won fine and 48 hours of community service after they were charged with illegally gambling online.

The KBO said it decided to hand out a "severe" punishment for Lim and Oh. As KBO teams each play 144 games this year, this translates into a 72-game ban. But is the punishment really severe? Ilgan Sports, an affiliate of the Korea JoongAng Daily, reviewed previous punishments for law-breaking players.

Match fixing: banned for life

In March 2012, Korean baseball fans were shocked to learn that active professional players were involved in match fixing. Then-LG Twins pitchers Park Hyun-joon and Kim Sung-hyun admitted to consulting with a gambling broker and deliberately pitching to get bases on balls.

After prosecutors decided to indict the players, the Twins announced they fired the players from the team and would ask for lifetime bans from the KBO once their sentences were announced.

After Park and Kim were sentenced with six months in prison with two years of probation, the KBO handed them lifetime bans, saying that it was harshly punishing the players to discourage match-fixing from ever happening again in Korea.

Repeated drinking incidents: indefinite disqualification of status

Former Lotte Giants player Jung Soo-keun was known to be a heavy drinker, and his drinking habits eventually forced him out of the KBO League.

In July 2008, Jung assaulted a security guard at his apartment while drunk. The four-time KBO stolen base champion was later fined 7 million won by the court, and the KBO followed up with an indefinite disqualification of his player status — the second-heaviest punishment after a lifetime suspension. If a lifetime ban is equivalent to a "death sentence" for a player, an indefinite disqualification status is similar to "life in prison," which could be lifted in the future.

Eleven months later, Jung was able to return to the field after the KBO



KBO discipline committee head Yang Hae-young speaks about players' punishment on Friday in Seoul.

decided to lift his ban following a request from the Giants. But in September 2009, Jung was again involved in a drinking brawl at a bar in Busan.

The Giants decided to release Jung after the incident, saying that his drinking indicated Jung didn't understand how serious his situation was. The KBO again handed him an indefinite disqualification of his player status, which forced Jung to retire.

Drunk driving: suspended for the rest of seasons

Last June, LG Twins pitcher Jeong Chan-heon fell into hot water after he drove drunk and collided with a motorcyclist. The Twins handed him a three-month suspension and 10 million won fine, but the KBO stepped in, suspending the 25-year-old for the rest of the season and ordering him to complete 240 hours of community service.

Jung was found guilty when the Twins had already played 69 games in the season, so he was technically given a 75-game suspension.

In September, teammate Jung Seong-hoon was also convicted of having driven drunk in the parking lot of his apartment building in August. The 35-year-old infielder had used a chauffeur service back to his apartment after a night of drinking, but he made the mistake of getting behind the wheel in order to park his own car.

The Twins later slapped Jung with a 10 million won fine, but the KBO again meted out its own punishment, suspending him for the rest of the season and making him serve 120 hours of community service. Since his actions were discovered near the end of the season, he only missed 13 games.

In June 2013, former Nexen Heroes infielder Kim Min-woo got into a car accident while drunk and driving with a suspended license. The Heroes hit him with a 30-game suspension and 10 million won fine, but the KBO stepped in to ban Kim from playing for three months, ordering him to serve 240 hours of community service.

The KBO has been stricter about players getting into trouble while drunk than with other illegal activities. Last year, for example, the KBO punished Hanwha Eagles outfielder Choi Jin-haeng for doping by issuing a 30-game suspension and 20 million won fine.

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