

# Black pro golfers an endangered species

Over the past few years, the outstanding achievements of African-American athletes in a particular sport — golfing — have served as inspiration for others to imitate their success as champions and their economic gains.

But even with the publicity accompanying Eldrick “Tiger” Woods’ triumphs on the Professional Golf Association tour, the paucity of African-American professional golfers, male or female, is very noticeable. In other words, there are hardly any.

Now, there was time, in this country, back in early 1900s, when the cry was racism or segregation in golf. People would have been correct, because even though African-Americans were caddies on some of the best golf courses in the nation, they weren’t allowed to play in the PGA tournaments.

So, United Golf Association was formed by and for Black men in the mid 1920s and later admitted women in 1930. The UGA began holding tournaments annually in 1926 and the National Open and Southern Open along with amateur tournaments attracted hundreds, then thousands, of golfers each year.

The complexion of golf changed after the civil rights movement in the 1960s and certainly was dealt tremendous upheaval in 1967 when Charlie Sifford won the Long Beach California Open and earned all of \$8,000 on the tour that year.

On Sifford’s heels, and inspired by his success as a UGA golfer, is Lee Elder who not only won 18 of his African-American tournaments but in 1974 was the first African-American golfer to play in the distinguished Masters Tournament in Augusta, Georgia.

Before Elder’s success, Althea Gibson, the most outstanding African-American women’s tennis player with championships at the French Open, Wimbledon and the U.S. Open, also played on the Women’s Professional Association’s golf tour in the 1970s.

In 1964, Renee Powell, a native of Canton, Ohio,

won the United States Golf Association (USGA) championship and joined the Ladies Professional Golf Association (LPGA) tour in 1967, becoming the second African-American on the tour following Gibson.

Powell is a second-generation golfing legend. She is



## SPORTS PACE

By Huel Washington

the daughter of William Powell, the first and, perhaps, the only African-American to plan, build, own and operate a golf course.

Now, 88, he established Clearview Golf Course in 1948 in Canton after two years in development. It was placed on the National Registry of Historic Places in 2001.

Although it is not widely known, Joe Louis, who held the heavyweight boxing championship longer than any other fighter, was a golfing enthusiast. Louis made his home in Detroit, Mich., where he started his boxing career but frequently made trips upstate to Ypsilanti and Idlewild to participate in golf tournaments. He was addicted to golf.

Louis’ son, Joseph Barrow Jr., has formed the Joseph Louis Barrow Golf Club in Arizona that is helping African-American youngsters develop an interest in the sport and assisting them financially.

Golfers who reach age 50 can try out for a spot on the Champions Tour (formerly the Seniors Tour). Jim Thorpe, a former football player at Morgan State University, has made a sizeable fortune since passing that age about six or seven years ago.

Before Thorpe, Jim Dent, one of the longest hitters on both tours, when he was playing regularly, also made a pretty reasonable living. Dent is now over 60-years-old but still plays.

And Detroit’s own Calvin Peete, a man with a physically handicapped arm who not only won a few tournaments on the PGA tour, but came out of retirement and has played with the seniors. Peete taught himself how to play after hurting his arm in an accident.

The influx of young women from Asian countries like Korea, Thailand, and China, and players like Seri Pak and Grace Park on the women’s tour have proven that the golf isn’t that difficult to get into and play. This should encourage others of all ages and races to consider the golf.

With athletes like Charles Barkley, Michael Jordan, Jerry Rice, Tim Brown, Clem

Daniels, and many others playing in celebrity tournaments, it has some attraction power.

And the purses are phenomenal. The winner of last week’s PGA tournament, Geoff Ogilvy, won \$540,000 for 269 in four rounds. The

women’s winner for a three-round total of 208 at Kahuku, Hawaii, received \$150,000.

There have been some rumors that Michael Jordan, who was born in 1963, just might attempt to get a championship tour card. Jordan, who is a Hall of Fame basketball player, who tried his hand at baseball for a couple of years, plays golf almost every day, indoors or outdoors and whenever possible.

Woods has won eight major tournaments, and when he won his first junior ama-

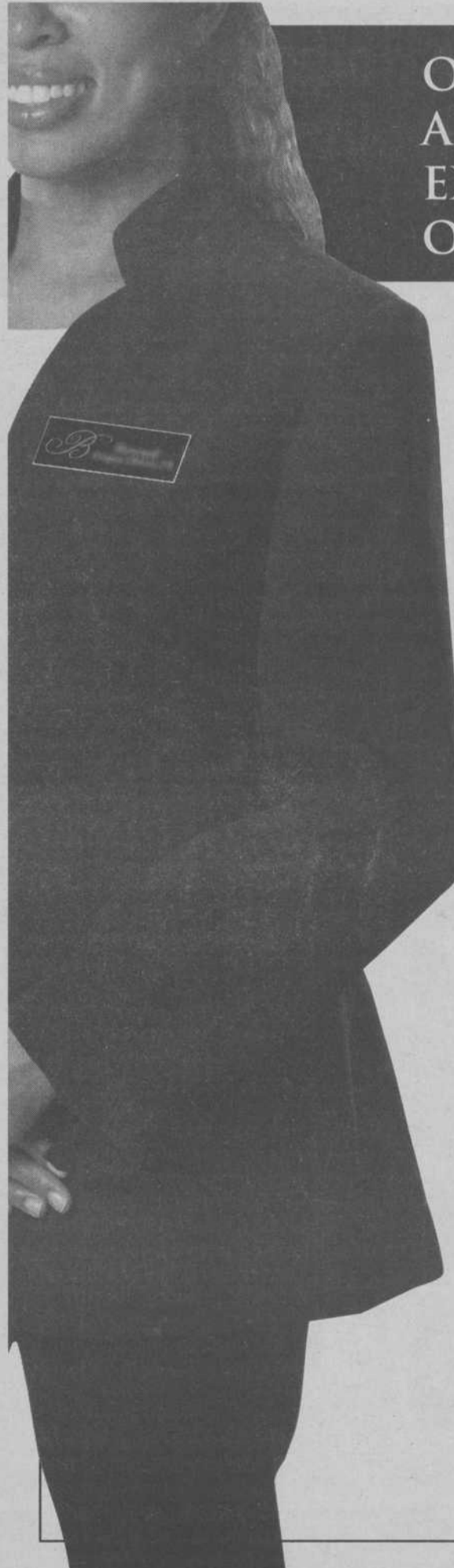
teur title in 1991, that should have been inspirational for young African-Americans to see that Blacks can play golf — and well. In 1993 he won his third amateur title.

Today, Woods, who started playing golf as youngster by following his father, Earl, on the golf course, after two years on the Stanford University golf team, vaulted to number one on the tour and in the past few years has earned millions of dollars. He is currently listed as number two behind native Fijian

Vijay Singh.

The economic costs of playing golf are, perhaps, too much for many of today’s African-American young men and women. But if the Asian women and other players can come up with money for golf clubs, shoes, bags, and balls, young African-Americans can and should, find a way to play golf, also.

All sports require sacrifices, either of time or money, and most of the time, both. There’s gold on those greens and fairways, too.



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