

Tim O'Neal has been struggling to break into the PGA Tour.

PGA tour proves to be rocky path

HARDEEVILLE, S.C. (AP) — Tim O'Neal watched carefully, head down, as his pitch from just off the green rolled perfectly into the cup on the ninth green at Tradition National Golf Course last month.

"T-O. That was great," cheered playing partner David Robinson at the eGolf Professional Tour event.

O'Neal smiled back, a nice shot on a good day. There just haven't been enough of those moments for O'Neal to reach his ultimate goal.

Tiger Woods' phenomenal rise and accomplishments seemed destined to lead to a wave of talented minority golfers, a new generation topping leaderboards throughout the country.

O'Neal and Stephen Reed, two African-American pros, can tell you how tough it is just to break onto the PGA Tour.

"I'm the youngest out of probably about five or six good minority players in this country," the 27-year-old Reed said after playing a group behind O'Neal at Tradition National. "And they're all struggling."

Woods is now the only player with African-American heritage on the PGA Tour.

Meanwhile, as with many players of all racial backgrounds, O'Neal and Reed have struggled with the need for sponsorships, coaching and money as they fight to earn a tour card. In a nation where Whites' household median income is \$21,000 more than Blacks, both O'Neal and Reed think just keeping financially afloat is a major barrier to minority players.

"You have guys that can play at this level," O'Neal says. "But they just don't have the finances to go do it."

O'Neal played college golf at Jackson State and turned pro in 1997, the same year Woods won his first Masters' title.

O'Neal secured backing from celebrities like actor Will Smith and Wade Houston, the former University of Tennessee basketball coach and father of NBA star Allan Houston.

He appeared ready to deliver on his promise in 2000 at PGA Tour Qualifying School.

However, on the final hole of the event's final round, O'Neal didn't realize he only needed a bogey to gain his card, took unnecessary risks and made double to miss the tour by a stroke.

"It was kind of a screw up on my part," he said.

O'Neal had a chance at redemption four years later, needing birdie on the last hole to qualify. He knocked his approach within 8 feet, yet missed the putt to get him in.

He played on the Nationwide Tour the past four seasons, his best showing coming in 2006 when he had five top 10 finishes and earned \$150,250.

O'Neal slipped off the Nationwide after last year. He tried for exempt status on the Asian Tour earlier this year, finishing tied for 41st. Only the top 40 qualifiers gained cards.

So he keeps teeing it up wherever he can. The week after playing in South Carolina, O'Neal tied for 50th at the SAIL Open in New Delhi, India.

"It's one of those things that I've always done," O'Neal said. "I feel like that I just so happen to be a minority trying to chase a dream like everyone else."

Reed is the son of Houston golf pro Paul Reed and (See Golfers, Page 11)

Georgia teen fast rising in golf

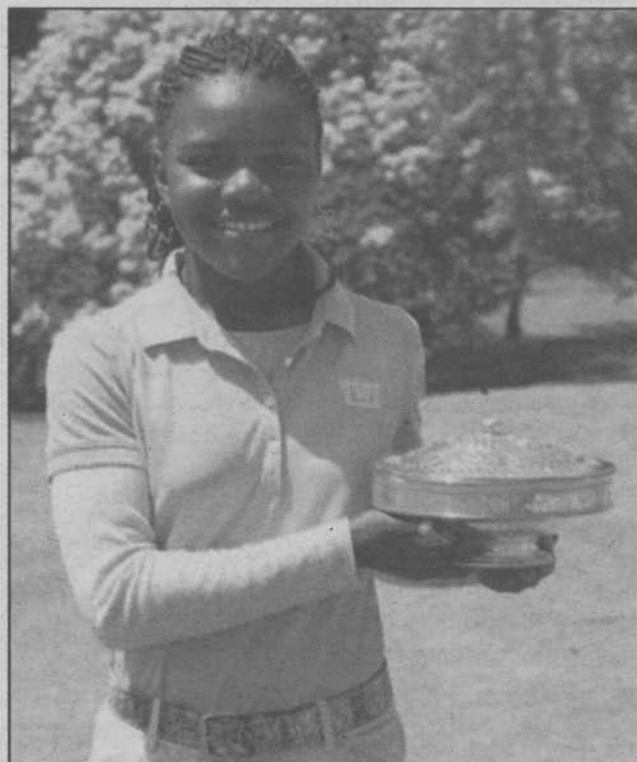
PEACHTREE CITY, Ga. (AP) — With a mouthful of braces and a yearning to get her driver's license, Mariah Stackhouse comes across as the typical teenager.

Then she picks up a golf club.

That's when she becomes the next Black hope.

In a sport desperately lacking in African-Americans outside of Tiger Woods, Stackhouse certainly stands out. Having just turned 15, she's already climbed as high as No. 29 in the American Junior Golf Association's national female rankings and currently stands 33rd, making her the top-rated Black player on either the girls or boys list.

"If I get an opportunity to play professional golf," she said, "I'd definitely like to give that a try."



Georgia teenager Mariah Stackhouse, 15, has been drawing comparisons to Tiger Woods for her stellar play on the links.

Her rise to prominence provides a handy roadmap for African-Americans trying to reach the top levels of golf, but also reveals just how many obstacles there are along the way.

"It's a big financial investment and a huge sacrifice," said her father, Ken Stackhouse. "I've known (African-Americans) who played before us, and their concerns were always the same. They never really got all the support they needed financially. As a consequence, they were never able to rise to the level Mariah has. Fortunately, she had support early enough to make a difference."

For Mariah, it started with a doting father — "I was always a daddy's girl," she said (See Stackhouse, Page 11)

A 40-Year Journey: Faces and Places 2009 Photo Exhibit Las Vegas, NV

Internationally acclaimed photographer John Broussard has created an exhibit showcasing 40 years in photojournalism and creative photography. The exhibit is a collection of original photographs and poems covering 4 decades, showcasing his photographic journey. Having traveled throughout the USA, Asia, Africa, and Europe, Mr. Broussard welcomes the opportunity to showcase carefully chosen, thought-provoking images.

Featuring:

Judge Johnnie B. Rawlinson, Nevada Senator Steven Horsford, Dr. Sonya Douglass Horsford, Bubba Knight, Alice Key, Isaac Sawyer Helen Anderson-Toland, and others.

The exhibit will be on display March 28 – June 27, 2009

You are cordially invited to meet Mr. Broussard at a reception on Saturday, April 11, 2009 2-5 p.m.

Location

West Las Vegas Arts Center
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