

Se Ri Pak ends Hall of Fame career in front of home fans

INCHEON, South Korea (AP) — Se Ri Pak ended her Hall of Fame career in tears in front of her adoring home fans in the Ladies Professional Golf Association (LPGA) KEB HanaBank Championship.

Overcome at the end of the sunny afternoon at Sky 72, Pak cried nearly throughout a retirement ceremony on the 18th hole. The Little Angels children's choir sang, players wore "SE RI" hats, and farewell messages were played in a video montage.

"A lot of emotion going on through my mind," Pak said.

It mattered little to the fans and players, many of them drawn to golf by Pak, that she shot an 8-over 80 and was tied for last — 15 strokes behind leader Alison Lee — before withdrawing.

"It wasn't easy out there today," Pak said.

Hampered by left shoulder problems, the 39-year-old Pak said in Phoenix in March that this season would be her last and she stepped away as planned after the first round of the tour's lone South Korean event.

"It wasn't a sudden decision to retire, but I think it will take time for me to absorb the fact that I will no longer be competing," Pak said. "Today I was really happy and grateful to see so many fans out there. It really moved me. I really wanted to show them my appreciation. I couldn't figure out how during the competition, but I was very moved by the open retirement ceremony. I was very, very extremely happy"

Pak won 25 LPGA Tour titles — the last in 2010 — and five majors, two of them during a rookie season in 1998 that gave women's golf its biggest boost since Nancy Lopez. The youngest



PAK-MANIA. Se Ri Pak of South Korea takes a selfie during her retirement ceremony at the Ladies Professional Golf Association KEB HanaBank Championship 2016 tournament at Sky72 Golf Club in Incheon, South Korea. Pak ended her Hall of Fame career in front of her adoring home fans. (AP Photo/Ahn Young-joon)

player to be inducted into the World Golf Hall of Fame when she was enshrined in 2007 at age 30, Pak won 14 times on the Korean LPGA and captained South Korea's Olympic team — with Inbee Park winning the gold medal — in Rio.

Pak last played on the tour in July, also shooting an 80 to miss the cut in the U.S. Women's Open.

Playing alongside defending champion Lexi Thompson and Chinese star Shanshan Feng in the final group, Pak bogeyed the first hole and four of the first six. She bogeyed the first five holes on the back nine, birdied the par-4 15th, and closed with three straight pars.

"When I reached the 18th, I was on the tee box, and I felt like I couldn't make the shot," Pak said. "I think I cried all throughout the 18th hole. Actually there was a

flood of emotions that I really didn't expect to feel. I didn't expect myself to feel this way.

"From the fairway of the 18th hole and the green I could see the gallery and the fans and there was just a lot of love and support. I think it was one of the best moments. I've had a lot of victories in my career, and I have to say it was one of the best, happiest moments of my career."

She managed to hit a good drive and a layup on the par-5 18th, then left her wedge 15 feet short. She watched Feng's putt stay to the right, and had a better line, but still missed on the right edge. Thompson then missed — also to the right — from three feet, setting off a flurry of camera clicks as the attention turned back to Pak — 18 years after she sparked the rise in South Korean and Asian women's golf.

"Pak-mania" ruled in the

summer of '98, especially after she won the U.S. Women's Open in a 20-hole playoff against amateur Jenny Chuasiriporn. When Pak returned to South Korea that fall, she had to be hospitalized for exhaustion. Television cameras even came into her hospital room to give the latest news.

Pak was a catalyst for more young players to believe they could compete on the strongest circuit in women's golf. Today, six of the top 10 players in the world and 22 of the top 45 are South Korean.

"I think if we had no so-called Se Ri Kids, the Korean golf scene would be quite different today," Pak said.

Lee shot a 65 to take a three-stroke lead. The 21-year-old American birdied the final two holes and four of the last six on the Jack Nicklaus-designed

Ocean Course.

She matched her best round of the season marred by a torn labrum in her left shoulder.

"I actually injured [my] shoulder back in February and I didn't know what was wrong," Lee said. "My swing was changing and all that and I definitely wasn't performing the same way I used to. It hurt a lot, a huge portion of my mental game. I was struggling a lot on the golf course not only because of my injury, but because I was scared. I was scared of the ball. I didn't know where it was going to go."

After a birdie try on 16 horseshoed out, the UCLA student made a 12-footer on the par-3 17th and got up-and-down for birdie on 18 after nearly reaching the green in two.

In-Kyung Kim, the winner two weeks ago in China, was second along with fellow South Korean player Jeong Min Cho, Sweden's Anna Nordqvist, American Lizette Salas, and France's Karine Icher.

Evian winner In Gee Chun and U.S. Women's Open champion Brittany Lang shot 69. Thompson was at 70 with Brooke Henderson, the Canadian teen playing the third of six straight weeks in Asia.

South Korea's Ha Na Jang, the winner last week in Taiwan for her third victory of the year, had a 71. Feng and Ariya Jutanugarn, a five-time winner this year, shot 73. Top-ranked Lydia Ko was tied for 63rd at 75.

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Difficulty level: Medium #71594

Instructions: Fill in the grid so that the digits 1 through 9 appear one time each in every row, column, and 3x3 box.

Solution to last issue's puzzle

Puzzle #68546 (Easy)

All solutions available at www.sudoku.com.

3	6	9	5	7	2	4	8	1
8	1	5	4	9	6	3	2	7
7	4	2	1	8	3	6	5	9
9	8	4	7	5	1	2	6	3
2	7	3	8	6	9	5	1	4
1	5	6	2	3	4	7	9	8
4	3	1	6	2	8	9	7	5
6	9	7	3	1	5	8	4	2
5	2	8	9	4	7	1	3	6

Mark your calendar! The Asian Reporter Foundation's Annual Scholarship & Awards Banquet will be held Thursday, April 20, 2017!