



EXTENDED BREAK. Jin Young Ko of South Korea watches her tee shot at the Taiwan Swinging Skirts gold tournament at the Miramar Golf Country Club in New Taipei City, Taiwan, in this October 31, 2019 file photo. (AP Photo/Chiang Ying-ying, File)

South Korea's top 2 LPGA Tour players on longest break ever

By Doug Ferguson
The Associated Press

Jin Young Ko figures to be plenty rested whenever the Ladies Professional Golf Association (LPGA) Tour resumes.

Ko left the CME Group Tour Championship in Naples, Florida, on November 24 as the No. 1 player in women's golf, capping off her four-win, two-major season as the LPGA player of the year and winner of the Vare Trophy for lowest scoring average.

The plan was to return for the Asia swing in mid-February and work her way into the season.

She's still waiting.

The next event on the LPGA schedule is May 14 at the Pelican Women's Championship in Florida, and that's looking more doubtful with each rapid development of COVID-19.

"In the 17 years that I've been playing golf, this is the first time I've had such a long break from competition," Ko said in an e-mail interview.

She's not alone. Sung Hyun Park withdrew from the final round in Naples with a sore left shoulder. She was No. 2 in the world at the time. Park, like Ko, skipped the two events in Florida and two in Australia, targeting her return in Asia.

Ko already was in the United States at the start of the year, while Park decided to come over when the new coronavirus led to the four-tournament Asia swing being postponed.

Now they're back home.

Ko returned to South Korea when the Founders Cup, Kia Classic, and ANA Inspiration were postponed. She was the defending champion at Founders and ANA, the first major.

She's still working just as hard.

"I go to bed and wake up early," Ko said. "At least four times a week, I have a two-hour workout after breakfast. I practice golf every day and take my dog for walks when I return home. I also take naps occasionally."

Park couldn't think of another time she was away from competition so long.

"I can't wait for the day that we get back on the golf course," Park said. "I've accepted the fact that we won't be playing for a while. Health and safety is the top priority in this difficult situation for everyone. The only thing that I can do for now is wait patiently and practice and work hard to be ready for when the season is back on."

Park has slipped to No. 3 behind Nelly Korda, who has two top-10 finishes in three events in January and early February.

The biggest competition for South Koreans is earning one of the four spots in the Olympics, which is no longer urgent

with the games being postponed until the summer of 2021.

In the meantime, the wait — and the work — continues, along with perks the 24-year-old Ko never imagined.

"Although the 'offseason' has been long, I am also enjoying the downtime," Ko said. "I can't remember the last time I was in Korea in the spring with my family. It's been wonderful to see the cherry blossoms bloom."

Lange recovers

Victor Lange of South Africa was the first professional golfer to test positive for COVID-19, which might not have happened if not for his girlfriend getting hurt.

In a first-person piece for pgatour.com, Lange says he returned home after a PGA Tour Latinoamerica event in Mexico, went hiking for two nights in the mountains, and then to the beach as part of a holiday. When his girlfriend hurt her toe, they went to the emergency room.

They were screened for the new coronavirus, and when Lange said he had been out of the country in the last 21 days, hospital policy required a coronavirus test.

"They were checking me out before helping her, the one who was in pain," Lange said. "Added to my frustration is I had zero symptoms, I was feeling healthy and was trying to get them to take care of Gabriella."

The test came back positive. Lange assumes he picked it up during his air travel, though he's not sure.

He called everyone with whom he had been in contact, including his roommate during the tournament. He was re-tested about a week later and the results were negative for Lange and his girlfriend. Meanwhile, he said, South Africa entered a 21-day lockdown, giving him an additional three weeks of self-imposed quarantine.

"Sitting on the couch sure doesn't feel quite right to me, though," Lange said. "December and January are when you work so hard for the upcoming season, and then this is the time to really start playing. Instead, we stopped playing after one week."

PGA news

The Professional Golfers' Association (PGA) Tour is providing financial assistance to players if they need it — or want it — including one model in which they receive an advance payment of their projected FedEx Cup bonus.

Golf Channel obtained a memo sent to players in March.

Under the advance payment model, players can receive 50% of their projected bonus capped out at \$100,000.

If a player currently is No. 70 in the FedEx Cup, the year-end bonus for that position is \$140,000 in deferred compen-

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Las Vegas Raiders agree to deal with QB Marcus Mariota

By Josh Dubow
The Associated Press

ALAMEDA, Calif. — The Las Vegas Raiders have agreed on a contract with free agent quarterback Marcus Mariota to provide an experienced backup behind starter Derek Carr.

A person familiar with the negotiations said the Raiders reached a deal with Mariota, the No. 2 overall pick in the 2015 draft.

The Raiders were one of the teams rumored to be in the running for Tom Brady if he decided to leave New England as a free agent. They ended up with Mariota instead to give coach Jon Gruden a proven backup who could also challenge Carr for the starting role.

Mariota lost his starting job in Tennessee last season. The Titans acquired Ryan Tannehill from Miami last offseason and changed quarterbacks in October before going on a run to the American Football Conference (AFC) title game.

That made Mariota expendable in Tennessee less than five years after being drafted second overall. He made a big splash with four touchdown passes in his National Football League (NFL) debut in 2015 but never developed into the star the Titans hoped they were getting when they drafted him.

He lost his job six games into the 2019 season when he was pulled in the third quarter of a 0-16 loss at Denver. He completed a career-low 59.4% of his passes last season with seven TDs, two interceptions, and a 92.3 rating.

Mariota dealt with a revolving door of play-callers and receivers during his time



CONTRACT CEMENTED. Quarterback Marcus Mariota (#8) runs with the football in this August 23, 2015 file photo. The Las Vegas Raiders have agreed on a contract with the free agent quarterback to provide an experienced backup behind starter Derek Carr. (AP Photo/Mark Zaleski, File)

in Tennessee. He has 61 career starts and 63 games in five seasons, with his best performance coming in his second year in 2016 when he threw 26 TD passes and had a 95.6 passer rating.

He broke his right ankle in the second-to-last game of that season, a couple of hours before Carr went down with a similar injury to derail his most successful season as a pro.

Overall, Mariota has completed 62.9% of his passes, averaging 7.5 yards per attempt with 76 TDs, 44 interceptions, and an 89.6 rating. He has also been sacked 155 times as he has struggled to avoid pressure.

The Raiders were seeking a better second quarterback to team with Carr after having Mike Glennon and DeShone Kizer as backups last year.

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