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EDITED BY ALI BOWES AND ALEX CULVIN

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Chapter 7

Sexism and Racism in Women's Professional Golf: The 2019 US Women's Open

Robbie Matz and Ali Bowes

Abstract

The chapter details the development of one of the most lucrative professional sports for women in the world, whilst drawing attention to institutionalised issues of racism and sexism in the sport. We discuss the history of women in professional golf, from the roots of the Ladies Professional Golf Association (LPGA), through the modern-day game where women now play for large sums of money each week. We then shed light on the development of a global tour which started with the likes of Annika Sorenstam, Lorena Ochoa, and Se Ri Pak dominating a once Americentric tour, and how the LPGA struggled to embrace this cultural shift via the Five Points of Celebrity marketing plan and the contentious English-speaking rule. The discussion then moves to focal point of the chapter: the US media's reaction to long time American professional golf coach and former radio broadcaster Hank Haney's disparaging comments before and at the conclusion of the 2019 Women's US Open. Twenty-five articles were collected from US golf and sport media outlets and coded resulting in four themes: (a) a downplaying of the remarks, (b) ambivalence to the women's game, (c), a privileging of men, and (d) a global Tour. The chapter concludes with remarks that highlight the media's struggle to find the appropriate framing and language to cover the incident and how an intersectional approach reveals that oppression of women on the LPGA Tour exists beyond gender.

Keywords: golf, women's sport, LPGA, sexism, racism, media

Introduction

Throughout history, women have experienced gendered discrimination and institutional barriers including restricted course access (George, 2010) and exclusion from junior golf tournaments (Crane, 1991). These obstacles haven't deterred women from fighting for their place within the game, with women's participation in golf reported as early as the 16th century with Mary Queen of Scots (Stirk, 1998). Golf was one of the first sports to be professionalised for women following the formation of

the Women's Professional Golf Association (WPGA) in 1944, later re-launched as the Ladies Professional Golf Association (LPGA) in 1950 (Hudson, 2008). The formation of this organisation provided women with an opportunity to make a living through sport, almost unheard of at that time. As the longest running professional sports organisation for women in the world, the LPGA Tour is now considered the pinnacle of the game. The 2020 season featured the current top 20 players in the world. In 1995, Crosset's ethnographic research on the LPGA Tour questioned 'who are these women that become professional golfers? Where do they come from?' (p. 207). It is fair to say that throughout the history of the Tour, this is something that continues to change.

At the time of Crosset's (1995) ethnography, playing on the LPGA Tour was almost exclusively reserved for white women who conformed to heteronormative expectations. This had been the makeup of the Tour on the whole since its inception. The Tour reinforced this premise in 2002 when commissioner Ty Votaw instituted a marketing plan that attempted to use sexualisation of players to attract new fans (Wolter, 2010); an action that occurred partly 'because the sporting public allows it' (Crouse, 2013, p.238). This framing was also evident through media coverage of players on Tour, including Nancy Lopez's final year on Tour in 2002 (Douglas & Jamieson, 2006) and Se Ri Pak between 1998-2001 (Kim et al., 2006). However, the Tour developed into a global business, attracting the best players and hosting events around the world. In the 2019 season, the Tour had approximately 220 active members (including the top 20 players in the world) of which 125 are international members from 32 different countries (LPGA, 2019).

Despite its strength as a professional sport in terms of financial success, global appeal and working conditions for women, there remains problems inherent in golf. This chapter documents the cultural shifts in the world of women's professional golf, highlighting some of the racist and sexist issues that have come to the forefront during the increasing global presence on the LPGA. The aim of the chapter is twofold: to detail the development of one of the most lucrative professional sports for women in the world which has drawn the best female players from across the globe, whilst drawing attention to institutionalised issues of racism and sexism in the sport. The discussion will centre on a specific moment during the 2019 season which highlighted these problems: radio host Hank Haney¹'s remarks regarding Korean players on the LPGA Tour made during the 2019 edition of the women's US Open on his show. The data set was comprised of online news articles from prominent US golf and sport media outlets (e.g., Golf Channel, ESPN) that covered the story from the initial airing of the comments, until the tournament conclusion.

¹ Hank Haney is an American professional golf coach and former radio broadcaster. A member of the World Golf Teachers Hall of Fame, he is best known for coaching Tiger Woods.

The history of women in professional golf

The history of women in golf is lengthy yet complex and marred with difficulties, and it has been noted that female golfers, like female athletes more broadly, were not well received in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. As such, women were forced to form their own club sections due to lack of membership and playing rights (George, 2010), and problems related to this exclusion have continued to this day. For example, the iconic 'home of golf', St. Andrews in Scotland, only allowed the first female members to join in 2014, and in 2017 it was reported that the women did not have changing facilities within the clubhouse (Murray, 2017). Likewise, the male-dominated culture of golf is well documented in the development of the professional game. Men's professional golf started as early as 1860 in the United Kingdom through the Professional Golf Association (PGA), over 80 years earlier than professionalisation of the women's game in 1944 (Hudson, 2008).

Now considered the longest running professional sports organisation for women in the world, the United States of America (USA) based LPGA was formed in 1950, following a brief mini tour ran by its predecessors, the WPGA, in 1944-1948. The tour is one of the earliest examples of women having the opportunity to play sport professionally, with women competing for prize money in formalised, commercialised competitions. In its first season, the LPGA hosted 14 tournaments for a total prize fund of \$50,000 (Bae, 2012). However, being a professional touring golfer incurred costs, such as travel, accommodation and entry fees. In 1976, 75% of women professional golfers found the expense and financial insecurity of the occupation a disadvantage to a career in golf (Theberge, 1980). Despite the opportunity to work as professional athletes, women's status in golf was one of outsiders (Crosset, 1995), emphasised by disparities in pay between the men's and women's tours.

In the 1970s, the LPGA total prize fund increased from less than \$500,000 in 1972, to \$2.2million in 1976, where the average winners share was \$11,900. In the same year, the men's PGA Tour totalled at \$9million, with an average winner share of \$41,400. Theberge (1980, p. 39) noted that: 'it is likely that the reward system in women's golf will undergo some change in the future'. That it did, becoming one of the most profitable sports for women to play professionally in the world. However, whilst the 2020 season of the LPGA, prior to COVID-19, was expected to be the biggest yet, competing for a combined prize fund of \$75.1million across 33 events (average purse of \$2.3million) in 11 countries and regions, it paled in comparison to the men's tour, with 49 events initially scheduled for a planned total prize fund of \$375million (average purse of \$7.7million) (Matuszewski, 2019).

Bowes and Kitching (2020) investigated women's experiences in professional golf, related explicitly to playing in tournaments against men, where professional LPGA golfers noted their subordinate positioning. Reasons that are used to justify inequality in pay between the sexes include: length the players can hit the ball, difficulty of course sets ups and crowd numbers/television

audiences. The perpetual belief that women's performances are inferior to men equates to the belief that men must receive higher prize monies, more media coverage, and more respect in the game. However, whilst women's golf is often considered to be in the shadow of the men's game in many ways, it remains one of the most lucrative sports for women to be involved in. Specifically, on the LPGA Tour, the opportunity to earn vast financial rewards (comparatively to other women's sports) has always been evident and for the 2019 season, 14 players broke the \$1million mark for tournament earnings (excluding any commercial income).

The development of a global tour

The positioning of the LPGA as one of the most lucrative environments for professional female athletes has coincided with its development into a global tour. Of the aforementioned 14 players to earn over \$1million dollars in 2019, seven were Asian: six South Korean (including the top three earners) and one Thai, alongside five Americans, two Australians, and a Canadian. This illustrates not only the global diversity of the Tour but also the trend of dominance by Asian players over the past two decades. The first international player (someone living outside of the USA) appeared on the Tour in 1968, with Canadian Sandra Post obtaining her LPGA Tour card in 1968. Following this, the numbers of international players steadily increased, reaching a peak at the turn of the 21st century. The Tour was being dominated by now Hall of Fame players Annika Sorenstam (Sweden), Lorena Ochoa (Mexico), and Se Ri Pak (Korea), and with this global success came international sponsorship. Samsung in particular was a key stakeholder in the sponsorship arena. The multinational corporation was sponsoring a tour event (Samsung World Championship) and had signed Se Ri Pak to a long-term contract (Kim, 2012). The success of Pak stoked belief that a successful career on the LPGA was tenable for future generations of Korean women, which 'highly influenced some young girls and their supportive parents to pursue an athletic career in (transnational) golf' (Kim, 2012, p. 102). Other Asian golfers would create movements in their home countries similar to Pak: Ai Miyazato from Japan and Yani Tseng from Taiwan would experience great success on the Tour in the late 2000's and early 2010's. Tseng won her first major championship in 2009 at the age of 19 and would win four more by 2013, earning her the nickname 'light of Taiwan' by the local media. 'Her unprecedented success made golf, a popular if still class-exclusive sport in Taiwan, much more widely appreciated by the general public' (Sun, 2019, p. 732).

In documenting some significant moments in the development of the LPGA into a global enterprise, Jamieson (2015) notes this emergence of its first 'global superstars' as central. Framed against a neoliberal view of the USA as a land of opportunity, the success of Ochoa, Sorenstam, Australia's Karrie Webb, and most significantly Pak, Tseng and Miyazato, among others from Asia,

enabled the Tour to expand its global reach. However, the globalisation of the Tour, with international labour migration at its heart, was not always welcomed in an organisation that valued white, heterosexual women. For example, Golfweek magazine ran an article which quoted Australian player Jan Stephenson as saying: ‘the Asians are killing our tour’ (Kessler, 2008, cited in Jamieson, 2015).

However, the global growth of the Tour, with the subsequent transnational migration of players, continued. Dating back to the appointment of the LPGA’s inaugural commissioner in 1975, the role has largely focused on movement ‘toward professionalization and corporatization of the [T]our’ (Jamieson, 2015, p. 506). As the Tour attracted top international talent - that led not only to the Tour becoming the premier tour for female professionals, but also allowed an expansion in events hosted abroad and increased foreign financial contributions to the Tour – commissioners searched for the appropriate framing of the Tour’s identity.

However, the LPGA had undergone years of tumultuous leadership. The controversial Five Points of Celebrity marketing plan under Ty Votaw (that attempted to market players on sexuality and framed them as heterosexual) was followed up by a contentious English-speaking rule under Carolyn Bivens (Wolter, 2010). In 2008, rooted in capitalist ideology, Bivens tried to implement a new policy that would require all tour players with two years of experience to pass an English oral exam – despite holding a third of its tournaments outside of the USA. The impetus for this mandate stemmed from an ideology that speaking English would attract and retain Western sponsors and fans. This plan was devised following the success of Korean player Eun-Hee Ji in 2008, where she won the Wegmans LPGA event but was unable to deliver her victory speech in English. Jamieson (2015) notes that the rhetoric around the proposed policy highlights the location of ‘foreign’ talent (specifically Asian athletes) as dangerous to the growth of the global tour if they are not contained and assimilated, whilst simultaneously negating the significance of their success to the growth of the Tour in global markets such as Asia.

Moving forwards, it was clear that the Tour was desperate for a vision to promote the idea of a global tour that embraced players who were commonly seen as the ‘Other’ to the normatively white, middle-class, heterosexual woman the tour was made for. The employment of Mike Whan as LPGA commissioner in 2010 brought with it a new narrative for the Tour - and golf - as borderless. As noted, Se Ri Pak’s introduction in 1998 led to her being considered ‘leader of a generation of elite female golfers hailing from Korea’ (Jamieson, 2015, p. 513). Despite the formation and existence of professional women’s tours across the globe, the LPGA as the pinnacle of women’s golf established a renewed and stronger presence abroad under Whan’s leadership². Today, the LPGA continues to

² Divergent viewpoints of the expansion can be understood through a borderless tour or a more cynical lens of new imperialistic endeavours by the Tour which reinforce the notion of American exceptionalism (Jamieson, 2015).

leverage the presence of international players in generated global interest. In 2015, roughly half of the \$61.6 million dollars allocated to the season purse originated from foreign money (Bae, 2015). This influx of sponsorship is a direct result of the 'superstar status' international players have in their home countries and the effort of the LPGA to elevate their marketing strategies to a global scale. In an interview with Tina Barnes-Budd, the Tour's Senior Director of Social Media Marketing and Communication, she noted: 'When we advertise on Facebook, for example, we target all countries where the LPGA plays or where players are from, which has helped grow our following' (Bae, 2015, p. 154).

Writing about the increasing global nature of the LPGA Tour, Jamieson (2015, p. 502) notes that much research into global sport features the experiences of men as 'individual global migrant laborers', and that 'analyses of women as global subjects...are still lagging in sport studies'. Jamieson (2015) highlights that the LPGA is uniquely situated as an individual sport with no direct link to a men's organisation, conducting its global business in a world where - in some places - women would not be welcome as members in golf clubs. In considering the LPGA as a global tour, she highlights the need to consider the LPGA embedded within wider networks of race and gender, positioning the largely USA-based tour in a post-title IX, post-9/11, post-civil rights era of race relations and racial formations that should imply a 'racially integrated society with equitable opportunity for all who avail themselves' (Jamieson, 2015, p. 504). However, she notes that this 'post-title 9/11 analytic requires a reckoning with the role of global sport in enforced, public performances of U.S multiculturalism and in assuaging fears of loss of White, 'American' global supremacy' (Jamieson, 2015, p. 505). It is with this framing we introduce a significant moment in the 2019 LPGA season which indicates the contentions and problems faced with running a global tour in women's golf.

Jeongeun Lee⁶, Hank Haney, and the 2019 US Women's Open

The 74th US Women's Open was held at the Country Club of Charleston, South Carolina, between the 30th May and 2nd June 2019. With a total purse for the event at \$5.5million (the largest ever for a women's golf tournament), the US Women's Open is regarded as the most lucrative of the year. On 29th May 2019, one day before the first round of the tournament, Hank Haney was hosting his usual program on SiriusXM PGA Tour Radio. His show featured a predictions segment with another golf instructor, Steve Johnson, who brought up the impending major championship:

Johnson: "You know, this week is the U.S. Women's Open, Hank."

Haney: "Oh, it is,"

Johnson: "The 74th Women's Open."

Haney: "I'm gonna predict a Korean,"

Johnson (laughing): “That’s a pretty safe bet.”

Haney: “That’s gonna be my prediction. I couldn’t name you, like, six players on the LPGA Tour,”

Johnson: “Yeah?”

Haney: “Nah, maybe I could, well, I’d go with Lee. If I didn’t have to name a first name, I’d get a bunch of them right. I don’t know...”

Johnson: “We’ve got six Lee’s...”

Haney: “Lexi Thompson...Michelle Wie’s hurt. I don’t know that many. Where are they playing, by the way?”

Before the show ended, the backlash and outrage from the golfing community had ensued. Haney and Johnson then attempted to justify and reframe their earlier conversation:

Haney: “I read some deal where, on the scoreboard, there’s a lot of girls — isn’t there a lot of girls on the LPGA Tour with the same name, right?”

Johnson: “Yeah. They have exactly the same name and they call them, like, there’s six of them. They’ve got a Lee no. 1, a Lee no. 2, a Lee no. 3. One of them was on the leaderboard a few weeks ago, she was the no. 6 Lee.”

Haney: “Okay.”

Johnson: “It just goes to show you, Hank. Everybody has an agenda. The guy who has an issue with this...”

Haney: “So because I say If I was going to name four players, I would, my comment would be ‘I’d pick a Lee.’ “

Johnson: “Yeah, exactly. I mean, I don’t know...”

Haney: “Anyway, I apologize if that offended people. I guess it did. I guess it did.”

Johnson: “You are not a racist. You are not a racist.”

Haney: “Well yeah, I know I am not a racist. But I guess it offended somebody. So, anyway. I definitely apologize for that. We’ll have to watch it. So, it’s probably not going to have a lot of more LPGA talk — that’s for sure — on PGA Tour radio.”

Johnson: “Okay, okay, yeah. Okay, we’ll boycott. Let’s boycott”

Haney: “Nooo, we’re not going to boycott. We’ll follow the U.S. Open. It’s this week.”

There was criticism across social media from golf commentators (including Golf Channels Samantha Marks and Jerry Foltz) and from a small number of LPGA players competing at the event

(including Karrie Webb, Lizette Salas and Brittany Lang). Former US Open champion Michelle Wie posted the following comments on her Twitter account, @MichelleWieWest:

As a Korean American female golfer, these comments that @HankHaney made disappoint and anger me on so many different levels. Racism and sexism are no laughing matter Hank...shame on you. I don't ever do this, but this must be called out.

Too many of these girls, Korean or not, have worked countless hours and sacrificed so much to play in the US Open this week. There are so many amazing players in the field. Let's celebrate them ... Not mock them (Guardian, 2019).

Initially after the incident, Haney released the following apology on his own personal Twitter account, @HankHaney:

This morning I made some comments about women's golf and its players that were insensitive, and that I regret. In an effort to make a point about the overwhelming success of Korean players on the tour, I offended people and I am sorry. I have the highest respect for the women who have worked so hard to reach the pinnacle of their sport, and I never meant to take away from their abilities and accomplishments. I've worked in this game with men and women players from many different cultures, and I look forward to continuing to do so (Guardian, 2019).

He was subsequently suspended by SiriusXM, with the radio station releasing a joint statement with the PGA Tour:

Mr. Haney's comments on women's professional golf were insensitive and do not represent the views of the PGA TOUR or SiriusXM. The PGA TOUR is committed to and proud of the increasingly diverse makeup of our fan base, not to mention the power and accomplishments of the game's world-class, global players -- both on the PGA TOUR and LPGA, whom we are working with more closely than ever before. SiriusXM proudly covers and supports both women's and men's golf and the athletes that make them great. At the PGA TOUR's instruction Mr. Haney has been suspended from the SiriusXM PGA TOUR Radio channel. SiriusXM is reviewing his status on SiriusXM going forward (PGA Tour, 2019)

The tournament was won by LPGA rookie Jeongeun Lee6, her first career victory on the LPGA Tour. She earned the name Lee6 by being the sixth Jeongeun Lee to play on the Korean LPGA (KLPGA) Tour, each distinguishing themselves from the others through the use of a number at the end of their name:

Lee6 likes to be known simply as “Six” with the number an addition owing to the makeup of the Korean Tour. “There’s six different players who have the same name, Jeongeun Lee,” the champion said. “It goes by one, two, three, four, five, six. I’m the sixth Jeongeun Lee player, and that’s why they put it down as Jeongeun Lee6. But this is my lucky number too, so I would love to put down Lee6 as my last name.” (Murray, 2019)

Prior to joining the LPGA, she had six career wins on the KLPGA, before attending LPGA qualifying at the end of 2018. Having won the qualifying tournament, Lee6 was the standout rookie in the 2019 LPGA season winning the Louise Suggs Rolex Rookie of the Year award with five events to spare, only missing two cuts all season. That earned her over \$2million, making her the third highest earner on the Tour. Evidencing the strength of talent in the country, it was the fifth year in a row that a Korean player had won the rookie of the year award.

Following her US Women’s Open victory, Haney tweeted:

My prediction that a Korean woman would be atop the leader board at the Women’s US Open was based on statistics and facts. Korean women are absolutely dominating the LPGA Tour. If you asked me again my answer would be the same but worded more carefully.

Haney was later fired by Sirius XM Radio for following his ‘racially insensitive’ and sexist comments. The rest of the chapter will critically analyse the proceeding reaction to Hank Haney’s remarks and his subsequent dismissal from popular golf and sport media sources.

Methodology

The data set was comprised of online news articles from prominent US golf and sport media outlets (e.g., Golf Channel, ESPN) that covered the Haney incident in its immediate aftermath and through the end of the tournament. In total, 25 online news articles were collected between the 29th May and the 9th June 2019. 14 articles were published before the conclusion of the tournament, with a further 11 published after the tournament was complete.

Considering an intersectional analysis that foregrounds both gendered and racial lines of oppression, data were thematically analysed by both authors independently using NVivo 12 software. A widely used method in qualitative sport research, Braun and Clarke (2014) identify thematic analysis as a theoretically flexible approach, that provides a ‘robust, systematic framework for coding qualitative data, and for then using that coding to identify patterns across the dataset in relation to the research question’ (p. 1-2). The protocol adopted encompassed a semantic thematic analysis of the collected articles followed a six-phase approach (Braun and Clarke, 2006): individually the authors

engaged in a process of familiarisation, followed by generating individual codes and searching for themes, or particular patterns of shared meaning across the dataset. The two authors then combined to review their individually identified themes, discussing, combining, defining and finally naming them, before the final stage of writing up.

The key themes - analytic outputs developed through and from the creative labour of the coding process (Braun and Clarke, 2019) – identified as running through the online news coverage of the Haney remarks were:

1. A downplaying of the remarks
2. Ambivalence to the women's game
3. A privileging of men
4. A global Tour

The social media data set was used to support the online news coverage where relevant. The themes are discussed in more detail below.

A downplaying of the remarks

Despite the initial backlash from a small number of players and sports journalists, including the aforementioned Michelle Wie, the general sense of the online coverage was one that downplayed the significance of the event. Although Michelle Wie had openly called out Haney for being both racist and sexist in his remarks, the media were far more conservative in their analysis. The remarks were identified as trite, insensitive and dismissive, among other descriptions:

On his SiriusXM Radio show Wednesday, one golf's top teaching professionals, Hank Haney, made eyebrow-raising comments about the LPGA Tour and its players (Marks, 2019)

Too bad for Haney, whose line about picking a Korean named Lee to win was as lazy as it was lame (Fields, 2019)

Many of the headlines written following the incident included qualifying language that dismissed the racist overtones of what transpired. Journalists crafted headlines that described Haney's actions as 'controversial comments', 'disparaging comments', 'remarks about women's golf', and 'women's golf comments'. These headlines fail to emphasise the significance of Haney's comments, perpetuating the dominance of white men within golf. As Burdsey (2011) notes, downplaying racist discourse acts to subjugate racialised groups in sport, normalising discriminatory practices or racial stereotyping and maintaining white privilege. In this way, it is problematic that only two articles

included the word 'racist' in their headlines, and still failed to present the headline without qualifying language, with both articles choosing to use 'racially charged.'

Upon completion of the tournament, and evidence of further downplaying of the incident, within the golf media his remarks were dismissed as a speculative prediction:

After Jeongeun Lee6 won the U.S. Women's Open Sunday, Haney tried to justify his dismissive remarks as being insightful. He patted himself on the back for predicting the winner (Mell, 2019).

Hank Haney has apologized multiple times and has been suspended from his SiriusXM radio show for predicting that a Korean golfer with the last name Lee would win the U.S. Women's Open (Schilken, 2019).

Again, the coverage of Hank Haney avoided using language such as racist or sexist, simply reframing his problematic views as a prediction.

Ambivalence to the women's game

Aligned with the theme above around a downplaying of the sexist and racist undertones of Haney's comments was an overall sense of ambivalence to the women's game. This ambivalence manifested itself in some of the articles with regards to how ill-informed Haney was, as a golf broadcaster, on the women's game:

Haney also showcased his lack of knowledge in reference to LPGA players (Marks, 2019)

One of golf's top instructors joked he didn't know the LPGA's U.S. Women's Open was being played this week in Charleston, South Carolina, and it didn't get better from there (Negley, 2019)

Writing for the Golf Channel, renowned women's golf journalist Randell Mell called it out more overtly:

Hank Haney was openly and unabashedly dismissive of the women's game on his SiriusXM Radio show last week. As a high-profile figure in an influential position, he basically said he couldn't care less about professional women's golf and its biggest event of the year...There's more than indifference to the women's game. There's still a lack of respect. (Mell, 2019)

The limited research on female golfers in the media demonstrates an ambivalent history. While Bowes and Kitching (2019) have noted a shift towards a greater awareness of, and coverage of, female golfers in the sports media, this was in competitions where women compete against men and

thus benefit from being in the male sport spotlight. Billings et al. (2008, p. 65) highlight that rising audience interest in women's golf brought about challenges to golf's 'masculine hegemonic entrenchment', although there is still a sense that women's golf is an afterthought within mainstream golf media. This devaluation exists across the spectrum of women's sports, and as such golf is a microcosm of a larger issue (Crouse, 2003).

After the tournament concluded and Haney reaffirmed his sexist and racist remarks, - albeit by reframing them as a prediction and thus evidence of knowledge about the women's game - the post event headlines reflected a long-standing issue with female representation in media: female athletes are glossed over in headlines or they are left out altogether (Godoy-Pressland & Griggs, 2014). Again, we can describe this as ambivalent – trivialising women's successes (Bruce, 2008), or perhaps more strongly as symbolic annihilation, sending a message that 'sportswomen don't matter' (Bruce, 2016, p.365). Only two of the nine headlines used Jeongeun Lee6's name, and when it was used, it was preceded by Haney's:

"Suspended Hank Haney claims vindication after Jeongeun Lee6 wins U.S. Women's Open"
(Bieler, 2019)

"Hank Haney calls himself 'The Great Predictor' after Jeongeun Lee6 wins the U.S. Open."
(Schilken, 2019)

In choosing to either leave out Lee6's name, or frame Haney as the main story, the golf media contribute to perpetuating the subordinate positioning of women in golf.

Another issue obvious in the reporting was the stark similarities in language chosen by media outlets to describe the incident, which highlights an issue surrounding women's golf writ large, as described by Mell in the same article as noted above:

That's one of the big problems the LPGA still faces. American media barely pays attention to the women's game. Aside from the tiny nucleus of writers regularly covering the LPGA, and Golf Channel's extensive weekly broadcast and digital coverage, there's a serious media disconnect. Most major news outlets don't bother going beyond picking up wire reports. Often, it's even that way at the majors. (Mell, 2019)

Mell points out that many media organisations are not dedicating staff to cover the event. The absence of any nuanced take or direct quotes from interviews with players in the field to gather actual insight into the incident is a problem. The homogenous headlines and reporting suggest that many outlets are pleased with the echo chamber practice of using wire reports without contributing to the

discourse. Previous research by Billings et al. (2008) posited that this “cut and paste” phenomenon is prevalent where outlets “attempt to cover all sides on an issue, even if one side is more compelling or accurate than another” (p. 67).

A privileging of men

Another point of contention in the reporting of the incident was the privileging of Haney’s story over the voices and experiences of the women on Tour. This was also evident in the focus on Tiger Woods in the media discourse. As noted by the multitude of headlines and text written about the incident, Hank Haney is best known as Woods’ former coach. Woods, who is frequently lauded for being a “Black” golfer dominat[ing] a sport that is almost exclusively White’ (Billing, 2003, p.30), has self-identified in the past as a composite of both his father’s and mother’s racial background which includes a majority of Thai and Chinese (Hall, 2001). When questioned on Haney’s radio show comments, Woods was quoted as saying ‘He deserved it’ and that Haney ‘Just can’t look at life like that. And he obviously said what he meant, and got what he deserved’ (Hoggard, 2019). In response to these remarks, Haney tweeted:

Amazing how Tiger Woods now has become the moral authority on issues pertaining to women. I spent 6 great years coaching Tiger, and not one time did he ever hear me utter one sexist or racist word. Now, in addition to being a 15-time major champion, I guess he thinks he’s also a mind reader? #glasshouses (Dethier, 2019).

Haney’s background teaching the most successful golfer of colour provides an interesting lens through which to view the media’s depiction of Haney. As previously noted, most articles written downplayed the severity of the events and Haney’s language. The relationship with Woods potentially gives Haney symbolic capital within golf (as both a coach and an ally for people of colour) and perhaps enabled a more gratuitous framing. Additionally, in Haney’s attempt to apologise for his initial remarks, he touted his resume of working with players from all backgrounds saying: ‘I’ve worked in this game with men and women players from many different cultures, and I look forward to continuing to do so’ (Brennan, 2019). Clearly, Haney attempted to leverage his previous experience to excuse his actions. Significantly though, what is clear is the privileging of Haney, and later Woods, by the golf media in the reporting of the topic, evidencing the gendered hierarchy within golf cultures.

A global Tour

As we have highlighted, the LPGA is truly a global tour, and this notion was stressed in the reporting of the Haney incident. Alongside highlighting diversity in the official PGA Tour statement, it was also noted by the LPGA:

The LPGA had spoken up for its tour after Haney’s comments, tweeting, ‘We are proud of the

many faces who represent the diverse and global nature of golf. We celebrate all our athletes for the people they are, the countries from which they come, and the unique stories that each of them have to tell. This game is for everyone.’ (Fields, 2019)

The international nature of the Tour was emphasised in other articles:

This is a national championship in name only these days, professional women's golf long having become a global enterprise and its oldest major a marker of the evolution (Fields, 2019).

The first 12 L.P.G.A. events of the season have produced winners from six countries; six of the tournaments were won by South Koreans. Mike Whan, the L.P.G.A. commissioner, has said he considers the global reach of the women's game to be its greatest strength (Crouse, 2019).

This global reach and identity are responsible for the Tour's growth over the years, and the health of the Tour would undoubtedly be in trouble if it were not for the influence of Asian players and the expanse of the Asian market. Following Haney's remarks, renowned women's golf journalist Randell Mell (2019) noted:

And there's another thing about the misguided notion that Asians hurt the LPGA's tour. You can argue they actually saved the LPGA through that economic swoon that nearly sunk the tour in 2011, when title sponsors were bailing out and the schedule shrunk to a bare-boned 23 events. Asian sponsorships and the LPGA's Korean TV contract were vital to the tour's survival. That commitment remains vital today. Six of the first seven events on American soil this year were sponsored by Asian companies, five of them Korean or Korean-American companies. LPGA commissioner Mike Whan made the most of Asian devotion to the women's game after he took the tour's reins, choosing to embrace it when so many people were trying to tell him Asian influence was hurting his tour. He knows better. He knows diversity and inclusiveness are keys to the LPGA's overall strength. Too many in golf aren't bothering to see the charms that Park, Ryu, Choi and other ambassadors bring to the women's game. It's troubling when they won't bother to see beyond stereotypes.

For Mell, there was clearly a troubling relationship between Haney's dismissal of the women's game, limited, nuanced understanding about Korean women in golf, and a wider disregard for an increasingly global game. As Jamieson (2015) noted, the globalisation of the Tour is not a move that has always been welcomed.

Concluding Thoughts

This chapter aimed to highlight issues of sexism and racism embedded within elite sport cultures, and specifically golf, using a snapshot of the 2019 US Women's Open. The aim was to draw attention to a number of things: the comments made by Hank Haney regarding the LPGA and the dominance of Korean women, the subsequent media reporting of the incident, and the way in which it acts as evidence for institutional racism and sexism within golf. One thing that was clear was the way in which the sport media – and specifically golf media – struggled to find the appropriate framing and language to cover the Haney incident. This resulted in, more often than not, the incident being downplayed and dismissed. It also shifted the focus from the tournament, and the women involved, to a male commentator who demonstrated a real disregard for the women's game.

As much as the LPGA well promotes the diversity of players, tournament sites, and sponsorships, on the whole the golf media does not always reflect this same diversity. There are clearly current media members that are strong spoken advocates for the LPGA and the diverse players that compete on the Tour, but the domination of white men behind the keyboard – or on the airwaves - has its problems. However, the coverage opened up space for commentators to be critical of the issues we raise here. Korean players have been a focal point of the LPGA Tour's global success for the past 20 years, and players like Lee6 will be an important part of its future. It is imperative that we do not equate their successes to an inclusive environment. Issues clearly persist in relation to the subordination of women in elite sport cultures, but a more intersectional approach highlights that lines of oppression do not stop at gender. In considering the significance of these issues on broader discussions of women operating in professional sport spaces, we must acknowledge the difficulties faced by global women making a living in sports dominated in the majority by white men, and the challenges that working in these environments will bring.

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