

LPGA policy draws heat

Ron Kroichick, Chronicle Staff Writer

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Two organizations lashed out at the LPGA in the wake of the golf tour's new policy requiring members to speak English or face suspension.

The National Korean American Service & Education Consortium, based in Los Angeles, released a statement in response to Tuesday's news of the LPGA rule.

EunSook Lee, executive director of the group, expressed her "strong opposition" to the policy.

"Events like the Olympics remind us that sports are about building unifying bridges and celebrating excellence of the human spirit," Lee said in the statement. "Clearly, the LPGA fails to realize that broadening the talent pool to welcome international players is in the best interest of the Association.

"This policy is discriminatory, particularly against South Korean players who are significantly represented within the LPGA membership. We are also concerned the new policy may violate state law. (This) is a great step backward in the advancement of golf and we urge the Association to rescind its new policy."

The tour will require all of its players to pass an oral evaluation of their English skills by the end of 2009. Players who fail to speak the language "effectively" will be suspended until they meet the as-yet-undefined standard.

Forty-five of the 121 international players on the LPGA Tour are from South Korea, fueling the perception the rule is directed mostly at Koreans. Golfweek magazine reported the tour held a mandatory meeting with South Korean players at last week's tournament in Oregon, though LPGA officials insisted the meeting included all international players.

At any rate, the policy also came under fire from the National Council of Asian Pacific Americans, which issued its own statement suggesting the policy "recalls the exclusionary and discriminatory history of golf."

"The LPGA has taken tolerance and diversity back several giant steps after there have been some great strides toward opening the game of golf to all people," NCAAPA chairman Floyd Mori said in the statement. "The language requirement is clearly aimed at a specific cultural group of players who have excelled in the LPGA."

Libba Galloway, deputy commissioner of the LPGA, said in an interview Tuesday that "this is an important thing for the players and for the tour to succeed." Galloway has indicated the LPGA is confident in the legality of the policy.

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