



JAPAN



By Hiroaki Wada
USGTF-Japan Member
Tokyo, Japan

The increase in the number of junior golfers was positive news in Japan. Many kids dream of becoming successful tour pros. These days, however, to be successful as a tour player seems to be getting much more difficult, which is shown by the fact that even active tour pros cannot stay on tour for years. There are some reasons for the changes happening now. The number of golfers and tournaments is increasing, and the prize money is getting higher, which attracts more and more kids with great athletic ability who want to be a tour pro. This change raised the overall level of tour players and created a more competitive environment.

It will be increasingly important that teachers evaluate whether their students can perform well enough at tournaments. Teachers should suggest a better life than the life of a tour pro for the students who need a different career. What is required of teachers now is not just to teach techniques.

What I value in teaching junior golfers

For the reasons stated above, I stopped accepting new junior students. Instead, in discussions with my current students, I give advice on how to create their own system to earn enough money from business to use as a step towards their dreams. Their system brings them the option to continue to play golf without financial support

from their parents or sponsors.

Creating the system with my students leads to my goal of establishing a new type of academy that focuses on students' second careers. In the academy, I suggest how to enrich students' lives by making use of the experiences they had playing golf.

As a matter of course, playing in tournaments costs a lot. Their biggest issue is a lack of money caused by decreasing sponsors, which means that they will have fewer career options. Since they are enthusiastic about playing golf, they don't want to give up pursuing a chance to be a successful tour pro. Also, they want to keep their golf career as long as possible.

The current situation of tour pros is different from the situation years ago, when players could play in tournaments just one or two years after becoming members of the JLPGA. For these reasons, relying on someone's funds when they aim to achieve success as a tour player is obsolete today. I think that it is important for them to earn money from other jobs to continue their golf professional career and to learn how to pursue their dream while getting a stable income. It is also the responsibility of golf teachers to talk about this kind of issue with their students. Teachers need to warn of the difficulties their students will face in the future when they give up their career as tour pros. It is a teacher's role to lead the students into retirement without anxiety. At the same time, players need to accept reality.



Important items for female tour players

I also provide commentary on JLPGA tournaments.

What is most important for female tour players is enthusiasm for playing golf, which is crucial when overcoming difficulties. Second is the driving distance. The ability to hit at least 240-yard drives is required to survive on the current female golf

tours. Third is distance control. Of course, though it is important to master distance control with each iron, what I prioritize is their ability to have equal to or greater than a 45° descent angle with their 7-iron and to stop a ball on hard greens. I use TrackMan, a launch monitor, for this measurement. It is also useful for both practice and tests of distance control.

When evaluating their putting ability as a tour pro, I try not to depend only on statistics. This is because I think that, for them, believing in themselves and making a decisive putt is much more important than the statistics. It is also important that they are able to practice intensively for hours. They need to establish clear standards for their putting, such as whether they understand the importance of the putting stroke more than the outcome of putting. If they judge their performances only by the results, it is difficult for them to be successful players.



Holding a women's tournament as a promoter in September 2020

In 2020, due to COVID-19 restrictions, various sports competitions were canceled in Japan. My son was a baseball player in high school. Although I was looking forward to seeing my son's last high school matches, all matches were cancelled and I could not see my son play. The subsequent feeling

led me to organize a tournament.

The goal of holding the tournament was for both players and spectators to gain some enjoyment from the tournament. Prize money was sponsored by the supporters of the tournament. The players recommended by these supporters were selected for the tournament in return. I made a lot of effort to encourage a feeling of unity between the supporters and the players. For example, by removing various rules from the tournament, the supporters could enjoy watching it close to the players. Holding the tournament helped activate the economy in the areas around the golf course. The success of the promotion provided me with a new perspective on the ideal sport-related business.



What I want to tell junior golfers who aim to become a tour player such as Hideki Matsuyama, Hinako Shibuno and Yuka Saso

I want to tell junior golfers that planning their own lives, including the time to retire, is important when

striving for a dream to be a successful tour player. The career of a professional athlete is very short. Life after retirement is much longer than their athletic career. Many elite junior golfers tend to assume that golf is the most important thing in their lives. However, they should understand that spending time with family or on other activities is far more valuable than just practicing golf. Golfers who spend most of their lives only playing golf often feel an obligation to achieve great results in all tournaments. I have seen such golfers who feel unhappy because they cannot do anything they want to do, even after they become tour players. I also had the same experience.