

Back to the Future – LPGA Builds Symetra into Talent Pipeline

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The LPGA was founded in 1950 by a handful of pioneering women who made the fledgling tour their “labor of love” by administering the tournaments while competing in them at the same time for little or sometimes no financial reward. They roared into small communities and left their imprint on the fans who followed them and who sometimes housed and fed them. They went to minor league baseball games, boxing matches and anywhere people gathered to sell THEIR tour. This proud piece of history of the now, high-profile, multi-million dollar LPGA Tour has a striking resemblance to the ever growing and increasingly impressive Symetra Tour.

The Symetra Tour is the “farm team” for the LPGA. They are the rising young stars who are honing their game through competition and learning how to manage tough travel schedules and all the other challenges that come with life on the road. They travel the country, often to small venues, and make fans for life. Sound familiar? The difference for these young athletes is that they have the tremendous support of the LPGA behind them.

At the CME Group Tour Championship this week in Naples, FL, the 2015 rookies coming from the Symetra Tour got a taste of the full LPGA experience. From media training to walking the red carpet at the Rolex Awards dinner, they have a team of LPGA professionals – both inside and outside the ropes – helping them along the way. Mentors help them with roommates, questions about sponsors and agents, introductions and sometimes just a supportive ear. They have a myriad of “rookie hours” they need to fulfill doing a variety of things that they will need to learn to succeed out here. They ride around with rules officials, spend time in the Golf Channel trucks and talk to the media staff as the LPGA does its best to prepare these young players for success.

The Symetra Tour grew to 23 events for 2015 from Sioux Falls, SD to Rochester, NY. The players compete for purses that sometimes just cover their costs – or not. If they don't carry their own bag, most have a Dad or a boyfriend helping out because they can't afford a professional caddie. All are playing their hearts out to become one of the top-10 on the money list at the end of the season to receive their LPGA Tour card for the next year. They have gone from either having parents or college coaches making many of their decisions for them to figuring it out on their own. They are making a big transition that requires learning time management while still playing golf at an elite level – part of the necessary skills needed to follow their dream.

The Symetra Tour, the Road to the LPGA, just finished its 34th season and an exciting new event next year will combine the Symetra Tour and the Legends Tour – the women's senior tour – in the same venue. The similarities between how it “used to be” and this developmental tour will be all the more evident at the Chico Patty Berg Memorial in Fort Myers, April 13-19. The players will continue to engage and form fans for life but these days the new players get the full support of the LPGA to help them along the way.

One of the mantras LPGA commissioner Mike Whan likes to chant to his players is: “Think like a founder.” By that he means take ownership of this tour today in the same way the founders did 65 years ago. Whan's point is that the LPGA will thrive if the players make it thrive. That is a spirit that is now being instilled in the players at the Symetra Tour level. And with it, a whole new energy comes to the LPGA through the Symetra pipeline.