

FUTURES Tour
Alumnae--
Lorena Ochoa

Photo by: Scott Halleran/Getty Images
Courtesy of LPGA Tour



FUTURES Golf Tour News Release

Princess in a Golf Shirt: Nigerian Joins FUTURES Golf Tour

APRIL 18, 2005

Careers are launched in a variety of ways on the FUTURES Golf Tour. Some players join the Tour as new pros right out of college or high school. Others become FUTURES Tour members as the first-ever players from their respective nations, as was the case in 2004 when Hong Mei Yang became the first woman professional from the People's Republic of China to win in the United States.

Yet another pioneer joins the FUTURES Tour this season from Nigeria, a newcomer-nation to professional women's golf. And while Americans may see Celina James as just another new face in the tournament field, those from her African homeland watch with more than a passing interest as the daughter of a king tees it up for the first time as a pro.

"If you want to improve your game, you have to leave home," said rookie James, 20, of Rivers State, Nigeria. "There was no competition for me there. All the older women said, 'You don't belong here anymore. Go!' So, it is something I felt I needed to do."

James grew up playing soccer, but when she was nine years old, a local woman with a 16 handicap arrived at her home to take the young girl to an area golf course for a formal introduction to the game. At first, the youngster was not interested, but by age 13, she told her father, Alfred Diete-Spiff, the King of Tombras and an avid golfer with a 3 handicap, that she wanted to become a golf professional. That was the beginning of her dream.

James worked steadily and played the best competition she could find in Nigeria, Africa's most populous country. In a southern African nation slightly more than twice the size of California, she traveled and played in amateur

events sponsored by the Nigerian Ladies Golf Union. Of some 20 tournaments each year, James won five to seven events for five years and was the Nigerian Ladies Golf Champion from 1999-2003. In the All-African Challenge, which featured players from 18 different African countries, James' team finished fourth in a format that used the two best scores from each three-player squad.

"We decided it was time for her to come to the United States to compete against the very best," said her stepbrother Emmanuel Diete-Spiff, 23, a commercial pilot based in Dallas. "She wants to make a career out of golf and she has wanted it since she was a kid. Her future ambition is to get on the LPGA Tour and start a foundation for kids and women's golf back home."

The long-term plan was launched last October when James traveled from Africa to Texas to live with her stepbrother. She prepared for the FUTURES Golf Tour's Qualifying Tournament in November and even though she missed the 54-hole cut in the Tour's annual qualifying event, she was able to obtain a lower playing status. That enabled her to get into some events to take her first steps as a pro.

In actuality, it was a giant step for the top-ranked Nigerian female player, who is the daughter of one of her father's four wives and one of an estimated 30 children by the king (a state position similar to that of a governor by U.S. standards). James' dad became the ruler of Tombras in 1998, which is a new state created out of the region known as Rivers State. Situated by the Atlantic Ocean, Rivers State is known for oil production, fishing and tourism. It also has most of the region's better golf courses. Whenever James would leave her father's home in Tombras to play golf, she would travel four hours by boat to Rivers State.

"At home we don't have a lot of greens on golf courses," said Diete-Spiff. "We have browns, which is sand mixed with crude oil that is rolled and swept to make it smooth. It makes your ball turn black when you putt, but you have caddies with wet towels."

(SEE James, PAGE 2)

This Week:

Jalapeno FUTURES Golf Classic
April 22-24

Palm View Municipal Golf Course
McAllen, Texas

Purse: \$70,000

Winner: 9,800

Runner-up: \$7,000

Contact Number: (956) 688-3444

Next Week:

IOS FUTURES Golf Classic
El Paso, Texas

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And how does a young girl who is born in a nation that has long struggled with political instability and corruption set her sights on a professional golf career? Based on estimates in the Library of Congress's Country Studies Records for the year 2000, more than 60 percent of Nigeria's population lives below poverty level, laboring largely (70 percent) in subsistence agriculture. A Republic moving from military to civilian rule and gaining independence from the United Kingdom in 1960, Nigeria has worked to gain trust in a global business market through its exports of petroleum and petroleum products, cocoa and rubber.

As all of Africa wrestles with the devastating effects of the epidemic AIDS virus, Nigeria -- one of the 10 most populous countries in the world -- struggles with a mortality rate that registers a life expectancy of 50.49 years for its total population. In some ways, golf would appear to be a long shot for a young African girl's dreams. And as one of 30-some children, which is typical in some African cultures, it would seem that her dreams could have been lost in the shuffle of a large family.

Not so, says her stepbrother.

"Every child is special and our father loves all of them," said Diète-Spiff, who tries to bring comfort to his sometimes-homesick sibling by cooking an African vegetable curry soup called "egusi" at his Dallas home. "As a family, you pick out the talented ones, the ones with ambition, and you try to help them reach their goals. Celina knows it's the time in her life to start a career. She wants to play professional golf and reach out to people. She has a big heart and wants to help the less-privileged."

Now in America, James has switched to golf clothing from the traditional dress of royalty, which sometimes includes wearing large, heavy brass beads around her neck.

"You don't dress sexy there," she said with a smile. "You have to tuck in [your shirt]."

"In the States, we want to be like normal people," added Diète-Spiff. "We want to make friends, hang out and be focused on our careers. We don't expect special privileges at all."

From a nation with more than 250 ethnic groups and a multitude of tribal languages, James (who speaks six African dialects and English) says she is not afraid of her adventure in America this season. She has already developed a fondness for McDonald's chicken salad. And any free time when she is not practicing or playing golf is spent listening to African and African-American gospel music or visiting movie theaters.

"I'm happy," said James. "I will meet new people and play with the best in golf. My game already has improved a lot."

Charged with answering regular phone calls from the king for updates on his golf-pro daughter, the younger Diète-Spiff believes the season likely will hold many challenges and surprises for his sibling.

"I'm really, really proud of Celina because she's a wonderful girl," said Diète-Spiff, who is still trying to beat his stepsister in golf to win bets for lunches when they play. "She is known back home as a winner."

And regardless of her tournament finishes on the



FUTURES Golf Tour as a rookie this year, in many ways, Celina James already is.

Founder's Mother Passes

Helen Trainor, mother of FUTURES Golf Tour founder Eloise Trainor, died at home in Canaan, N.Y., on April 13, three weeks before her 96th birthday. The native of County Kerry, Ireland was a long-time resident of upstate New York. Memorial contributions may be made to Charlie's Pantry (food bank) of the Immaculate Conception Catholic Church, c/o Eloise Trainor, 118 Dermody Road, Canaan, N.Y. 12029.

Naming Our Par Player

The FUTURES Golf Tour will track the performance of a mythical even-par player on our web site (futurestour.com) throughout the season to see how she stacks up each week in competition, as well as in season earnings. Many of you nominated potential names for this hypothetical web-player.

Listed below are six potential names that the Tour has pared down from your nominations. Please go to futurestour.com and cast your vote for ONE name by next Sunday (April 24). We will give the FUTURES Tour's Par Player her name next Monday, which will be used throughout the 2005 season.

Nominated names by readers are as follows:

1. Marva Leslie Dunn; 2. Eve N. Par; 3. Patty Parfect; 4. Ivana Wynn; 5. Gwen Gwen; and 6. Anita Par.

Tour Chat

MARCELA LEON of Monterrey, Mexico was emotionally torn when she learned that the LPGA's Corona Morelia Championship in Mexico this week fell on the same calendar week as the FUTURES Tour's event in McAllen, Texas.

"Can I have a twin?" she said recently, after accepting a special invitation to compete in the LPGA Tour event. "I was so excited that the FUTURES Tour was going to McAllen and people in my hometown were excited, because McAllen is only two hours away. But then this opportunity came along and I had to make a decision."

Leon played junior golf with FUTURES Tour alumna **LORENA OCHOA** of Guadalajara, Mexico, and the two are the nation's only two women touring pros. Leon also competed in last month's LPGA event in Mexico City, the MasterCard Classic. "It was a great experience to play in an LPGA tournament and to see how I stood against the competition," said Leon. "I think I have what it takes. It's just a matter of time."

Leon said many residents of her Monterrey hometown have houses in McAllen, and many residents of McAllen also have homes across the Mexican border in Monterrey. Even though Leon, the FUTURES Tour's only Mexican citizen, will be competing in this week's LPGA Tour event, she believes her country's new excitement over golf will bring golf fans to McAllen for this year's inaugural FUTURES Tour event.

"You can now see a boom in Mexico with kids playing golf," she said. "At the last LPGA event I played [in Mexico], little kids came up and asked me how I do this or that in golf. They want to be good at golf. I have always tried to represent my country the best I can and now, to see kids playing the game, it feels like I've helped do something to get them interested. That's the great part."

FUTURES Tour Statistics

FUTURES Tour Official Money List

As of March 19, 2005

Rank	Player	Events	Wins	Earnings	Rank	Player	Events	Wins	Earnings
1	*Sarah-Jane Kenyon	2	1	\$9,857	51	Sarah Huarte	2		\$517
2	*Jin Young Pak	2	1	\$9,739	52	Yvonne Cox	2		\$511
3	*Seon-Hwa Lee	2		\$7,717	53	Katie Futch	2		\$497
4	*Lori Atsedes	2		\$7,405	54	Jessica Krasny	2		\$491
5	*Sun Young Yoo	2		\$6,909	55	Courtney Wood	2		\$488
6	*Becky Iverson	2		\$5,908	56	Su A Kim	2		\$475
7	*Aimee Cho	2		\$4,169	57	Lisa Chang	2		\$439
8	*Sasha Medina	2		\$4,039	58	Rachel Bates	2		\$412
9	*Hye Jung Choi	2		\$3,087	59	Jennifer Jordan	2		\$409
10	*Kyeong Bae	2		\$2,761	59	Jan Dowling	2		\$409
11	Chiharu Yamaguchi	2		\$2,755	61	Christi Cano	1		\$381
11	Ashley Prange	2		\$2,755	61	Beth Hermes	2		\$381
13	Kristy McPherson	2		\$2,385	63	Marianne Morris	2		\$374
14	Allison Hanna	2		\$2,173	64	Julie Turner	2		\$345
15	Jen Hanna	2		\$2,074	65	Sarah H. Johnston	2		\$315
16	Alena Sharp	2		\$2,066	66	Anna Knutsson	2		\$302
17	Mollie Fankhauser	2		\$2,004	66	Samantha Fox	2		\$302
17	Cristina Baena	1		\$2,004	66	Tamara Johns	2		\$302
17	Dana Lacey	2		\$2,004	69	Kim Lewellen	1		\$267
17	Naree Song	1		\$2,004	69	Jeanne Cho	2		\$267
21	Courtney Trimble	2		\$1,988	69	Stephanie George	1		\$267
22	Tara Bateman	2		\$1,946	72	Sue Horton	2		\$260
23	Erica Blasberg	2		\$1,876	72	Kylie Pratt	2		\$260
24	Nicole Castrale	2		\$1,722	72	Blair O'Neal	2		\$260
25	Anna Rawson	2		\$1,626	75	Katrina Leckovic	2		\$247
26	Kris Tamulis	2		\$1,605	76	Heather Stirling	2		\$224
27	Virada Nirapathpongorn		2	\$1,550	76	Kelly Cap	2		\$224
28	Jessica Lewis	2		\$1,491	78	Misia Lemanski	2		\$215
29	Meaghan Francella	2		\$1,439	78	Tiffany Faucette	2		\$215
30	Jenny Gleason	2		\$1,174	78	Sunny Oh	2		\$215
31	Danielle Downey	2		\$1,166	81	Brandi Jackson	2		\$185
31	Karen Dennison	2		\$1,166	82	Saki Uechi	2		\$182
33	May Wood	2		\$1,060	82	Katie Ruhe	2		\$182
34	Jeanne-Marie Busuttil	2		\$1,059	82	Heather Zielinski	2		\$182
35	Kathy Choi-Rogers	2		\$959	82	Kimberly Adams	2		\$182
36	Janell Howland	2		\$950	86	Jennifer Lucas	1		\$166
37	Bo Mi Suh	2		\$939	86	Krista Bartlett	2		\$166
38	Kelly Lagedrost	2		\$924	88	Anna Temple	2		\$149
39	Allison Fouch	2		\$843	88	Jana Peterkova	2		\$149
39	Kim Augusta	2		\$843	88	Seul Ki Kim	1		\$149
41	Ji Min Jeong	2		\$793					
42	Libby Smith	1		\$757					
42	Courtney Pomeranz	2		\$757					
44	Danah Ford	2		\$683					
45	Meredith Ward	2		\$671					
46	Meredith Duncan	2		\$660					
47	Marcela Leon	2		\$653					
48	Natalie Wong	2		\$639					
49	Kristin Dufour	2		\$612					
50	Kristina Tucker	2		\$575					

* a minimum of six tournaments is required to be eligible for the LPGA Exempt Card and Qualifying School Opportunity

Top Alumnae Finishes on the LPGA

Finish	Player	Score	Money
2	Lorena Ochoa	202 (-14)	\$101,967
T7	Nicole Perrot	207 (-9)	\$32,286
T7	Moira Dunn	207 (-9)	\$32,286
T10	Young Kim	208 (-8)	\$20,572
T10	Heather Bowie	208 (-8)	\$20,572
T10	S. Prammanasudh	208 (-8)	\$20,572

*Check out where our FUTURES Tour alumnae placed at last week's LPGA Takefuji Classic in Las Vegas, Nev., at lpga.com.

FUTURES Tour Tournament Schedule

Date	Tournament	Golf Course	Charity	Purse	Champion
March 11 - 13 Pro-am: March 9 & 10	Lakeland FUTURES Golf Classic	Cleveland Heights Golf Course 2900 Buckingham Avenue Lakeland, FL 33803 (863) 682-3277	The First Tee of Lakeland at YMCA Par 3	\$ 65,000	2005 Champion: Jin Young Pak
March 18 - 20 Pro-am: March 16 & 17	Tampa Bay FUTURES Golf Classic	East Lake Woodlands Golf & Country Club 1055 East Lake Woodlands Parkway Oldsmar, FL 34677 (727) 784-7270	Various Local Charities	\$ 65,000	2005 Champion: Sarah-Jane Kenyon
April 22 - 24 Pro-am: April 21	Jalapeno FUTURES Golf Classic	Palm View Municipal Golf Course P.O. Box 220 McAllen, TX 78505 (956) 688-3444	McAllen Hispanic Chamber of Commerce	\$ 70,000	Inaugural Event
April 29 - May 1 Pro-am: April 28	IOS FUTURES Golf Classic	Underwood Golf Complex, Sunrise Course 3200 Coe Avenue El Paso, TX 79904 (915) 562-7255	The Rotary Club of West El Paso Foundation	\$ 70,000	2004 Champion: Hong Mei Yang
May 6 - 8 Pro-am: May 5	Lawrence FUTURES Golf Classic	EagleBend Golf Course 1250 E. 902 Road Lawrence, KS 66047 (785) 748-0600	Various Local Charities	\$ 70,000	Inaugural Event
May 26 - 28 Pro-am: May 25	Northwest Indiana FUTURES Golf Classic presented by Horseshoe Casino Hammond	The New Innsbrook Country Club 6701 Taft Street Merrillville, IN 46410 (219) 980-9060	Lake Area United Way	\$ 70,000	2004 Champion: Naree Song
June 3 - 5 Pro-am: June 2	Quality Concepts Kankakee FUTURES Golf Classic	Kankakee Elks Country Club 2283 Bittersweet Drive Saint Anne, IL 60964 (815) 937-9547	Harbor House & The Illinois Elks Crippled Children's Corp	\$ 70,000	Inaugural Event
June 10 - 12 Pro-am: June 9	Lima Memorial Hospital	Lost Creek Country Club 2409 Lost Creek Boulevard Lima, OH 45804 (419) 228-8244	Lima Memorial Hospital Foundation	\$ 70,000	2004 Champion *Danielle Downey
June 17 - 19 Pro-am: June 15 & 16	Michelob ULTRA FUTURES Charity Golf Classic presented by Ameren and Miles Chevrolet	Hickory Point Golf Course 727 Weaver Road Forsyth, IL 62535 (217) 421-7444	Various Local Charities	\$ 70,000	2004 Champion: Aram Cho
June 24 - 26 Pro-am: June 23	Bank of Ann Arbor FUTURES Golf Classic	Lake Forest Golf Club 3110 W. Ellsworth Road Ann Arbor, MI 48103 (734) 994-8580	TBA	\$ 65,000	2004 Champion: Lindsey Wright
July 8 - 10 Pro-am: July 7	CIGNA Chip In For A Cure Connecticut FUTURES Golf Classic	Gillette Ridge Golf Club 1360 Hall Boulevard (RT 218) Bloomfield, CT 06002 (860) 726-1430	Chip In For A Cure	\$ 70,000	2004 Champion: Nicole Perrot
July 15 - 17 Pro-am: July 14	Albany FUTURES Pro Golf Classic	Capital Hills at Albany 65 O'Neil Road Albany, NY 12208 (518) 458-5689	Albany Police & Fire Foundation	\$ 70,000	2004 Champion: Nicole Perrot
July 22 - 24 Pro-am: July 21	Laconia Savings Bank FUTURES Golf Classic	Beaver Meadow Golf Course 1 Beaver Meadow Road Concord, NH 03301 (603) 228-8954	The Havenwood-Heritage Heights Trust Fund (Resident Support Fund)	\$ 65,000	2004 Champion: Erica Blasberg
July 29 - 31 Pro-am: July 28	M&T Bank Loretto FUTURES Golf Classic	The Links at Erie Village 5900 North Burdick Street Syracuse, NY 13507 (315) 656-4653	The Loretto Foundation	\$ 65,000	2004 Champion: Michelle Murphy
August 5 - 7 Pro-am: August 4	Children's Hospital FUTURES Golf Classic	Cross Creek Golf Club 12800 Bay Hill Drive Beltsville, MD 20705 (301) 595-8901	Children's National Medical Center Foundation	\$ 70,000	2004 Champion: *Courtney Wood
August 12 - 14 Pro-am: August 10 & 11	Betty Puskar FUTURES Golf Classic	The Pines Country Club 3062 Point Marion Road Morgantown, WV 26505 (304) 296-3462	Betty Puskar Breast Care Center	\$ 70,000	2004 Champion: Jimin Kang
August 19 - 21 Pro-am: August 18	Hunters Oak FUTURES Golf Classic	Hunters Oak Golf Club 500 Amberly Lane Queenstown, MD 21658 (410) 827-0800	TBA	\$ 65,000	2004 Champion: Smriti Mehra
August 26 - 28 Pro-am: August 24 & 25	YWCA FUTURES Classic	Regents' Glen Country Club 1000 Golf Club Drive York, PA 17403 (717) 505-4653	YWCA of York	\$ 75,000	2004 Champion: Malinda Johnson

*Rain-shortened to 36 holes