

Editorial: A MIIS opportunity

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It certainly makes sense that the Ladies Professional Golf Association would prefer that players on the women's tour know how to speak English. It would aid in basic communications, of course, and, more importantly from the organization's standpoint, it would help women's golf compete for TV air time, sponsors and other promotional opportunities.

But mandating English proficiency for players wanting tour cards goes a giant step too far, well beyond numerous other sporting organizations that have essentially embraced internationalism.

If Major League Baseball demanded English proficiency, think of all the Dominicans and Japanese who might have been eliminated. Say goodbye to superstar Manny Ramirez of the L.A. Dodgers.

The men's golf tour faces the same sort of sponsorship issues as the LPGA but hasn't seen the need for English tests. Ditto for the National Basketball Association, whose rosters include players from more than 30 countries and territories.

Chinese big man Yao Ming needed an interpreter just to understand the coaches when he arrived here from China in 2003.

The LPGA plan is to require English proficiency for new members and to suspend veterans who haven't largely mastered English by 2009.

It is tempting to suspect the move might have been prompted by the rise of South Korea into the top tier of women's golf. LPGA membership includes 121 foreign golfers from 26 countries, including a whopping 45 golfers from South Korea.

While the LPGA says the planned ban is not aimed at the Koreans, some players say it feels otherwise. Some are said to be talking to their lawyers.

While the LPGA is being unfair, this isn't to say that it is being completely wrongheaded. Its challenges are different from the more entrenched men's tour and certainly from the NBA's. The rise and fall of the organization is tied to whether corporate sponsors will cough up money for tournaments and whether the sports channels will broadcast women's events.

If the tournaments are dominated by women with limited English skills, some of the luster will be lost. Broadcasters want to be able to interview the winners. Sponsors want to be able to send their CEO types out for friendly outings with the players.

The LPGA showed foresight two years ago when it started a program to help international players learn English and navigate American culture. Rather than convert that into a lose-lose scenario by linking it to suspension, it would be far wiser to expand the program and to provide English-immersion opportunities for the golfers.

To that end, the Monterey Institute of International Studies this week offered to work with the LPGA to design a custom language-learning program. In addition to its foreign studies emphasis, MIIS focuses on translation and interpretation aimed at a student population with a large Asian

component. What better school to offer such a program, and what better location than in the shadow of Pebble Beach?

In a letter to LPGA Commissioner Carolyn Blevins this week, MIIS offered to develop a special curriculum including the analysis of golf match videos, role playing and emphasis on the vocabulary of golf.

Taking up MIIS on the offer could help the LPGA avoid a giant blunder. It could be a partnership made in golf heaven.