

# S'PORE GIRL ROUGHS IT OUT FOR LPGA GOAL

Family support keeps Christabel Goh going as she battles on 2nd-tier tour

By SANJAY NAIR

CHRISTABEL Goh's dinner is served from a portable stove atop a toilet bowl. Next to the stove is a pepper shaker which is just beside the flush in her cramped hotel room in Iowa.

On the menu is chicken alfredo. It is an inexpensive meal but it helps keep her going.

Hours earlier, Goh herself had been fried on the golf course - in one of 12 Symetra Tour events that she failed to make the cut last year.

The circuit is a stepping stone to the lucrative LPGA Tour, but the 24-year-old Singaporean has made only small strides since turning professional and moving to the United States in 2010.

Goh said: "It's a painful process. Everyone knows the glamour surrounding golf but few realise the hard work we put in just to make the grade."

The affable youngster did not earn any prize money last year, and had to depend on handouts from her family.

Father Loo Guan, 57, an in-flight supervisor with Singapore Airlines, bought her a two-storey house in Reunion, Florida. Besides that \$150,000 investment, he also covers her living expenses of about \$20,000 annually.

But the elder Goh, who plays to a 12-handicap, had a cheeky warning for his daughter.

"When I stop working, which could be in a few years, she has to be financially independent. She hasn't got much time. Living on her own has matured her and I'm confident she will make it."

Despite her meagre earnings, the former Tanjong Katong Girls' School student, who took her first swing at the age of nine while ac-



The 24-year-old Goh has every reason to laugh despite finishing last at the HSBC Women's Champions in Singapore earlier this month. She earned \$4,570 for four days' work, more than doubling her career winnings of \$3,400. Back home, it was a welcome break before returning to "work" on the Symetra Tour. ST FILE PHOTO

companying her dad to a driving range, feels she is headed in the right direction.

Last week, Singapore's sole representative at the HSBC Women's Champions picked up \$4,570 despite finishing last. Her career winnings before that was \$3,400.

She is saving most of it for her

latest tilt at Symetra.

Singapore Management University graduate Heng Su-Ann, also 24, is expected to be the only other Singaporean playing on the Symetra circuit.

The 16-event developmental series boasts a total purse of around US\$1.7 million (S\$2.1 million).

More importantly, the top 10 money earners get a full LPGA card the following season.

Past graduates include the retired former world No. 1 Lorena Ochoa of Mexico and Australia's seven-time Major winner Karrie Webb.

Naturally, the girls on the Sym-

etra circuit all want to emulate these two superstars. So it is serious business on the course.

But, off it, they are a friendly bunch.

Goh said: "We all get along with one another. I could go to any one of them for help to film my swing and they'll do it."



Cooking dinner in an Iowa hotel toilet's makeshift kitchen is par for the course for Singapore golfer Christabel Goh. She plays on the developmental Symetra Tour as she aims to make it big time. PHOTO COURTESY OF CHRISTABEL GOH

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 I struggle a lot on approaches so I need to give myself a better chance on the greens, which is where my strength is.  
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Her clique includes players from Chile, Sweden and Costa Rica. They regularly hang out at each other's homes, exchanging swing tips over dinner and watching their beloved *Desperate Housewives* television series.

But it can get lonely on the road. Goh drives to events across the US by herself in a 2.4-litre Hyundai Sonata, another present from dad. Her longest trip took 16 hours non-stop from Illinois to Florida, with tunes from her favourite singer Elvis Presley to keep her awake.

"I clocked more than 30,000km last year. It's tiring, but far cheaper than flying with my golf equipment," said the fervent Manchester United fan. "That car is my best friend and second home."

Goh is driven to make the cut. Together with Ted Eleftheriou, her American coach of two years, she trains six days a week - five hours each time - at a course near her Florida home. They work mainly on her pitching to create easier putting opportunities.

"I struggle a lot on approaches so I need to give myself a better chance on the greens, which is where my strength is," said Goh, who ranked a respectable 42nd out of 60 top players at the Women's Champions event in putting average.

She has shot erratically on Symetra, ranging from a squeaky three-over 75 to a disastrous 12-over 84.

If she sorts out her issues from tee to green, the Singaporean could be seeing her neighbour and world No. 7 Suzann Pettersen more often at top-flight events.

For now, she has to continue to grind it out - even if it means more cooking in the toilet.

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