

Edited by Charlotte Ames-Etridge

The teens teeing it up



Teen golfers Chloe Chan and Pongsapak Laopakdee talk winning the Hong Kong Junior Classic Tournament, and what's next, writes **Kelly Ho**

The drizzle and fog last week didn't offer much of a warm welcome to the junior golfers who arrived in Hong Kong from across Asia for the Hong Kong Junior Classic Tournament. Still, the haze over Clear Water Bay did not stop local golf prodigy Chloe Chan Cheuk-ye and Pongsapak Laopakdee of Thailand from shining on the course.

Chloe took home the Girls' Division trophy with a score of 69-71 for an even-par tournament total of 140. Her victory over the 36 other contestants marks the first time a local golfer has won a Junior Golf Tour of Asia (JGTA) tournament.

Speaking to *Young Post*, the 15-year-old said she was pleased with her performance, which thankfully wasn't affected too much by the weather at the three-day event. To have made history for Hong Kong on home soil only makes the win more special for Chloe.

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"I'm glad I managed to get decent results, even though the conditions were undesirable," she said. "The fact that the competition is held here makes winning the JGTA title an even better experience."

While it may seem unlucky that the first AJGA PBE-sanctioned event held in Hong Kong would be complicated by rain and mist, it's this element of unpredictability that first attracted Chloe to golf when she was just three years old. The King George V student also plays basketball and does athletics, but golf remains her "first love". It's a sport which allows her to be fully in control.



Pongsapak Laopakdee (left) and Chloe Chan show off their skills on the course

"I really love the individualistic aspect of golf. I don't enjoy basketball and athletics as much because I have to rely on others; I prefer playing independently," said Chloe, who often feels her maturity makes her stand out from her age group.

Meanwhile, Thailand's Pongsapak Laopakdee impressed the crowd by coming out on top in the Boys' Division. The 13-year-old drained a 15-foot putt for birdie on the 18th hole and shot 69-70 for a tournament total of 1-under-par 139.

Earning his first JGTA title in a tournament with players who, in some cases, were five years older than him, was a very pleasant surprise for Pongsapak.

"I'm really proud of myself, as I've worked so hard to win this tournament," he said. "But of course, I still [feel as if I] have to improve my short game and putting skills."

The victory is especially encouraging for the budding golfer, as he suffered a back injury last year which kept him away from the

course for a month. Pongsapak was scared that he wouldn't be able to get back to the same level he was playing at before.

"I had to visit the hospital every week, so I missed all my golf training sessions," he said. "I was worried that by the time I recovered, I would no longer be able to play at the same level I used to."

As a member of the Thailand junior national squad, Pongsapak has devoted most of his free time to golf since he was four. Not only does he train four days a week, but he also often plays tournaments on the weekends, meaning there is very little time when he isn't on a course, swinging a club.

The teen attends St. Andrews International School in Green Valley, on

Thailand's east coast. He admitted that juggling schoolwork with golf isn't easy, but added that nothing would stop him from advancing in his golf career.

"I think I'm handling both quite well at the moment. But I've been absent from school for two weeks now, so I have a lot to catch up," he said.

Both Chloe and Pongsapak plan to go to the US this summer to compete in the junior tournaments there, but with different objectives in mind. Pongsapak plans to take part in tournaments organised by the American Junior Golf Association, while Chloe will be competing against other junior golfers in a number of major tournaments in the hope of attracting the attention of golf coaches from universities across the US.

"My ultimate aim is to become a professional golfer. Competing with a US college can offer so many more opportunities than in Hong Kong," said Chloe.



Pongsapak (left) and Chloe celebrate their win at the Hong Kong Junior Classic at Clear Water Bay. Photos: Kelly Ho