

BY
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PROS AND CONS...

With every job there are pros and cons. Some remunerate well but have a poor working environment. Others offer security of tenure but limited holidays. Others still provide prospects for climbing the company ladder but are found wanting when it comes to paying out loyalty bonuses.

In weighing up job possibilities, the majority will contemplate all of the ups and downs... and then side with a task or profession that has a greater number of pros than cons.

In the cut-throat world of top-level professional golf, however, it's long been a case of more cons than pros.

Professional golfers are, in essence, individual contractors. In general they pay an annual fee for the privilege of joining an organisation, or Tour, that will provide playing opportunities for its members.

It's then entirely down to that player to perform well enough to survive the cut – which usually comes after the second round of a 72-hole tournament. Only then will he be guaranteed a pay cheque come Sunday evening.

The size of that cheque depends, of course, on how high up on the leaderboard he finishes.

On most recognised professional circuits, the champion earns less than 20 per cent of the total purse. For example, the winner of the on-going HSBC Women's Champions will collect US\$225,000 from the overall prize fund of US\$1.5 million.

The 10th-placed finisher at Sentosa Golf Club will bank US\$31,561. Those that fail to end in the top-34 are looking at earning less than US\$10,000.

Still not a bad week's work. Yet by the time you've deducted the cost of flights, accommodation, caddie fees, living expenses and local taxes the figure will have dwindled considerably.

A fortunate few at the pinnacle of the game can command significant fees from golf club manufacturers and other sponsors whose logos are liberally displayed. For them, prize money is simply the icing on the cake.

As a limited-field, no-cut, invitation-only event, every one of the 63 participants at the Serapong Course will win at least US\$3,663.

For Koh Sock Hwee (right) – team and individual bronze medallist for Singapore at the 28th SEA Games – that's good news.

Last year she won the Singapore qualifier but was ineligible to receive prize money from the tournament as she was still an amateur.

This time, having once more topped the standings in the qualifying event, Koh, at the ripe old age of 26, has taken the plunge and joined the ranks of those who play for pay.

It's a courageous move and one which her many admirers hope pays handsome dividends – if not immediately then at least within the 18-month timeframe she has set to try and carve out a viable livelihood for herself.

Even to get to where she is today, it's been a financial struggle. By Koh's own admission, her savings have nearly dried up and she's been "scrimping and saving".

In order to fund her visit to last year's LPGA Qualifying School in California, Koh tutored maths for long hours and took on other part-time jobs.

Level-headed individual that she is, Koh is under no illusion as to the challenge she faces and is driven on by the admirable dream of becoming the first Singaporean to play on the LPGA Tour.

Had circumstances been different, Singapore may already have celebrated an LPGA champion in the form of

**'I'M HAPPY AS I AM
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— KEE BEE KHIM (RIGHT)

Kee Bee Khim, the Republic's original "queen of the fairways".

For those that are not familiar with her remarkable accomplishments, the pioneering Kee won the first of her more than 20 Singapore Island Country Club's women's championship titles in 1970, aged 18.

As well as claiming multiple victories in Malaysia, Thailand and Indonesia, Kee went on to dominate the women's game in Singapore through to the late 1990s.

While at the height of her powers in the late 1970s, she beat some of the world's best female golfers in the Collegiate Far East Open, an early LPGA Tour foray into Asia.



There were those who felt Kee would have hit the jackpot by turning pro, even though there were far fewer events then.

But Kee, a remisier by trade, resisted the temptation, opting instead to remain a "career amateur".

"I'm happy as I am – a good amateur golfer. I intend to stay that way," Kee was frequently quoted as saying. She stayed true to those words and has never publicly expressed regret at that decision.

Much may have changed in the ensuing decades. Yet then, as now, the cons of becoming a touring golf professional far outweighed the pros.

