

BORN DEAF, DIKSHA HAS A POINT TO PROVE IN PRO GOLF

She was born deaf. But Diksha Dagar has shown that she can turn adversity into advantage.

Dagar was the youngest Indian woman to win on the distinguished Ladies European Tour when she claimed victory in 2019's South African Women's Open aged just 18-years-old.

It was a phenomenal achievement for a country known for having produced some of the best Indian male players on the Asian, European and even US PGA tournaments.

Commenting on the similarities between Covid-hit 2020 and facing adversity, Dagar said: "In such a difficult year as 2020, just being able to play in tournaments such as the OMEGA Dubai Moonlight Classic make me incredibly lucky," reported the europeanladiestour.com.

"To be able to play professional golf is all thanks to my family and the people around me for offering me guidance, support and encouragement. Being born deaf, I never knew what it

was like to hear or that I was missing anything. It's this attitude that has allowed me to turn pro and compete with the attitude that I can play with the best.

"Golf has been an anchor in my life, bringing me great joy and happiness. To those suffering with their own problems, particularly young girls and women, I recommend accepting your respective situation and learning that whatever the

difficulty it is likely to only form a small part of your overall life.

"It's important to work hard and take advantage of the chances we're offered. There is always opportunity in adversity, so use it."

Dagar is among three players ready to shine from Nov 4 to 6 in the OMEGA Dubai Moonlight Classic which will feature a line-up of golfers who have played an extraordinary role in terms of setting a sporting example, particularly when it comes to female empowerment.

In what has been an uncertain year for women's sport due to the Covid-19 pandemic, this year's three-day tournament is the latest event aimed at inspiring the next generation of young girls to set out in pursuit of their dreams and to overcome perceived barriers.

The tournament will mark the return of sporting

events to Dubai and take place under the appropriately named theme "Time To Shine".

With the OMEGA Classic's unique day-and-night event format taking women's golf to a whole new frontier, it seems the perfect time to introduce two other awe-inspiring women heading out to Dubai to compete for the US\$285,000 prize fund at the iconic Faldo Course at Emirates Golf Club.

Another golfer is Welsh professional Amy Boulden who from a young age was touted as a future superstar of the game.

From the age of 13, Boulden had one of the most successful amateur careers in golfing history, winning three Home Internationals, representing Europe in the PING Junior Solheim Cup and being named BBC Wales Young Sportswoman of the Year.

Boulden's breakout potential seemed to be coming together as she turned professional at the age of 21. In her first season in 2014, she won her first tournament at the Association Suisse de Golf Ladies Open and went onto become the LET Rookie of the Year, after she made 12 cuts in 16 tournaments.

However, as the years progressed a first tournament victory on the Ladies European Tour continued to elude her as well as an unsuccessful attempt to secure playing rights on the LPGA Tour. This slump in form resulted in the loss of her Tour card in 2019.

But after showing seri-

ous resolve, Boulden took an important first step, regaining her place on the 2020 Ladies European Tour with victory at Qualifying School at La Manga Club in Spain last January.

Despite the pandemic and ongoing lockdown, Boulden was not yet done with 2020 as she stormed to victory in the VP Bank Swiss Ladies Open, her Maiden Ladies European Tour Win. She sits in fifth place on the Race to Costa del Sol European rankings.

Swede Julia Engström, aged just 19-years-old, has had a fantastic 2020, winning her maiden LET golf title with a sensational victory in Australia at the Women's NSW Open. Engström followed up with a second victory at the Lacoste Ladies Open de France last month, after carding a hole-in-one en route to a second-round seven-under 64.

With that win she is top of the LET 2021 Solheim Cup Points leaderboard and second on the Race to Costa Del Sol, a remarkable achievement in just her third year as a professional.

Formerly known as the OMEGA Dubai Ladies Masters, the inaugural tournament was played in 2006, with a strong rollcall of previous winners, including two-time winner, Annika Sorenstam, and four-time champion, Shanshan Feng. Sorenstam won the first two events back to back in 2006 and 2007, while the Chinese former world No. 1, Feng, won the tournament three times in a row from 2014 to 2016.



Dagar (above) turns adversity into advantage.

With five Asians in the Rolex world's top-10 rankings and 13 in the top-20 slots, the continent's prowess in women's golf is undisputed.

The foundation for his was laid by South Korean five-time Major winner Pak Se Ri, who made the breakthrough in 1998 with her US Open and US PGA Championships as a 21-year-old.

Since then her countrywomen have dominated world golf with several hitting the No. 1 spot over the last 25 years, with many also making their homes in the United States.

Then followed a slate of Thai, Japanese, Taiwanese and Chinese players who joined the South Koreans in keeping the continent's flag flying.

Early this month, two

KELLY AND BIANCA SHINE TO STIR SINGAPORE WOMEN'S GOLF DEBATE

South-east Asians hit the headlines with their stupendous showings in the Women's PGA Championships when Filipina Bianca Pagdangaman (tied-ninth, winning US\$83,765) and Malaysian Kelly Tan (tied-13th, winning US\$63,820).

In fact, Tan 26, shared the lead with American Brittany Lincicome after the first day with a three-under 67 in Pennsylvania while Pagdangaman, 22, gained a spot for next month's US Open with her top-10 finish.

This Asian renaissance raised a talking point among local golfers as to why Singapore women golfers aren't

featured in this tradition when size and build seem to feature not so highly in these "women warriors".

Basically, it is a question of opportunities and sponsorships in the real life scenario of "chicken and egg" debate. "Show your worth before we back you" seems to be the formula adopted by the big sponsors.

But this is the breakthrough that Singapore women golfers find hard to make although some like Koh Sock Hwee, 30, had shown early teen promise and is still going for it.

The two-time South-east Asian Games bronze med-

alist hit a snag when she turned pro in 2016 when money woes hindered her plans in many Tours, including her dream of playing in the US.

Koh, who graduated in 2012 with a degree in project and facilities management from the National University of Singapore, supplemented her income by giving tuition. That did alleviate some of her financial worries, but the challenge to play abroad still remains a major hurdle.

Until the Covid-19 pandemic hit, Koh was playing in China and Taiwan, and although events in the

two countries had resumed, border controls prevent Koh from travelling.

However, Koh is enjoying her playing and practising privileges at Sentosa Golf Club and earns some income from her teaching at the National Service Resort and Country Club.

In a similar situation is Amanda Tan, 20, a promising pro who practises at Sentosa Golf Club and takes lessons from Brisbane-based Australian coach Ian Triggs who provides online advice as travel has been restricted.

There are four other women players registered with the Singapore Professional Golfers' Association, namely Amelia Yong, Joey Poh, Khee Jiali and Elizabeth Ang. — GODFREY ROBERT

Photo: Ladies European Tour