

Daniel Chopra recalls Asian roots on eve of Masters

Sweden's Daniel Chopra paid tribute to the Asian Tour on the eve of his Masters debut, saying it was in Asia that he learnt the game that made him a tough golfer.

Chopra, who is of Indian-Swede parentage, has won twice on the US PGA Tour, including the season-opening Mercedes Benz Championship in Hawaii in January this year, which earned him a ticket to Augusta National.

He said his experiences in Asia shaped his formative years as a fledgling professional and believes that more Americans should head to the Far East to become better players if they failed to gain playing rights on the PGA Tour.

'I love the Asian Tour. That's why I go back every year to play a couple of events. The Asian Tour was where I learned how to play the game. My friends are there and I always talk about how great a tour it is,' said Chopra.

'I always feel more American players should play on the Asian Tour. Instead of playing on the mini tours here, if they are not on the major tours, they should try to play the Asian Tour.'

'You learn by playing in different climates and cultures and you learn to travel well. You adapt to different types of conditions, different types of grasses and greens and in hot and cold weather. It makes you much tougher,' Chopra added.

Chopra moved to India when he was seven and was raised by his grandparents. He grew up playing golf alongside the likes of Jeev Milkha Singh, Arjun Atwal and Jyoti Randhawa, who have all won the Asian Tour Order of Merit titles.

The 34-year-old enjoyed a fairly good start to his professional career by winning eight times in mini events but struggled to cope with the demands of the game in the late 1990s.

During his depths of despair, Chopra took a loan from Singh to fund his career and the Swede immediately turned the corner when he won the Asian Tour's Mercuries Taiwan Masters in 2001.

After earning his PGA Tour card at Qualifying School in 2003, he has not looked back, winning the Ginn sur Mer Classic last season and then the winners' only tournament in Hawaii three months ago, which earned him a trip to the Masters.

He was also delighted to see Asian Tour trio Singh, Prayad Marksaeng of Thailand and China's Liang Wen-chong in this week's field through special invitations extended by Augusta National.

'It's great to see three of the Asian Tour players here this week. I know Jeev very well and know Prayad and Liang as well. It's good to have them here,' said Chopra.

Like a kid in a lollypop shop, Chopra's excitement at being in his first Masters is understandable.

'It's fantastic. I have waited my entire golf career to play here and it has taken a long time. It's worth the wait. I've studied the Masters as I've watched it every year since 1986, almost every single

minute and every hour of the television coverage,' said Chopra.

'I've read about it as well and studied it and I know what to expect. I came out here and felt totally comfortable, like I was playing on my home course although I've never played it before.

'I feel like I know every single hole and I look forward to playing every single shot and I knew where to place the ball from off the tee, where to place all the balls on the greens. I know all the lines on the greens and how it breaks. As a rookie coming out here that well prepared, that's a big advantage,' said Chopra.

(© IANS / India eNews)