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Orinda golfer's success acknowledged on and off the course

By Jon Kingdon



Matthew Lin Photo provided

Tiger Woods described golf as "A lonely sport." For many professional and amateur golfers, such is the case. For Orinda resident, Matthew Lin, it's quite the opposite. Golf has allowed him to succeed on the course and on many levels away from the game.

This past summer, Lin was awarded the Presidents' Leadership Award by the United States Golf Association-American Junior Golf Association (USGA-AJGA) which has annually honored one male and one female golfer since 2005. Among the thousands of AJGA members, Lin, and Madeline Bante (Englewood, Colorado) were chosen as the golfers "who demonstrate leadership, character and community service through their involvement with the Leadership Links program."

In awarding Lin and Bante, USGA President Stu Francis described the pair as "exceptional leaders who are an inspiration to us at the USGA, their generation and everyone in the game. We can't wait to see their careers unfold."

Upon learning that he had won the award, Lin's reaction was anything but subtle: "I had just taken the last final of my sophomore year and I was really tired. When I learned that I won the award over thousands of applicants, I was ecstatic and jumping up and down with my parents."

Matthew's parents, Patrick and Darlet, were a tad more restrained. "We were a little bit surprised and thankful," Patrick Lin said. "Surprised because there were so many amazing kids that were doing really neat things. We were very thankful because Matt is the kind of kid that does these projects not for the recognition but because he enjoys doing those things."

Lin has raised over \$20,000 for former 49er great Ronnie Lott's All Stars Helping Kids (ASHK), \$7,000 for C.T. Pan's (a Taiwanese professional golfer) Foundation which supports youths, many from Taiwan who aspire to play golf at United States colleges, and has worked at CityTeam in Oakland, which serves Oakland's homeless and a women's shelter.

"I will go to CityTeam and donate necessities and serve food to the people," Lin said "It's an opportunity to get to know these people while making friends and learning more about their needs."

Lin, who is fluent in Mandarin, acquired his charitable drive from his parents. "I'm just really grateful for the opportunities that I have had because of my parents and all they've gone through. My parents passed down to me an overwhelming sense of feeling lucky to live in America. From this thankfulness comes an instinctive desire to help others and I've seen how a little bit of kindness goes a long way."

What Lin's parents went through was not easy but imbued them with a real appreciation for those who helped them upon their arrival to America. "My dad's family came to the United States without any money," Patrick Lin said. "We benefited from the people that helped us out with things as simple as a free lunch at school and professors and teachers that mentored us along the way."

Darlet Lin, who was born in Africa when her father was in the Peace Corp, also appreciates what she found in coming to the United States. "We both came from humble beginnings, and we really benefited from living here," Darlet said. "With all of the hardships going on everywhere, we always told our kids (Matthew and his sister Samantha, also a top golfer at the University of Chicago) that we're lucky to be here and we've always tried to be positive."

So how did Matthew raise such a substantial amount of money for the charities? "I started giving free golf lessons in my backyard to young kids because I love teaching golf, especially those who do not have a lot of experience," Lin said. "Being able to see the excitement in their eyes when they hit a really good putt for the first time or hit a chip in the middle of the club face is really satisfying. Golf is just such an amazing sport and I'm trying to share it with other people."

It was from these 'free lessons' where Lin raised funds from his students' parents. "I gave them the option of donating to ASHK or C.T. Pan's Foundation via the AJGA," Lin said. "Over the last four years, I've also

raised money from my friends, my church, and the community. I love Orinda. It's a great environment and there are so many opportunities and great people that I have met and connected with."

And then there is Lin's talent as a golfer. The Lins belong to the Orinda Country Club where Matthew won their Junior Championship in 2021, shooting a four under par 67. Lin is also a Junior Club Member at The Olympic Club in San Francisco and is ranked #85 in the USA for the Class of 2024 (#18 in California).

Growing up in Orinda, Lin was a multi-sport athlete. "I played competitive basketball, and I was on three different teams until the eighth grade," Lin said. "I also played varsity tennis on the Head Royce varsity team as a freshman. I didn't really start to focus exclusively on competitive golf until my sophomore year."

It was in the eighth grade when Lin began taking regular lessons from Justin Lee, the pro at the Blackhawk Country Club who has observed firsthand, Matthew's meteoric growth as a golfer going from a twelve handicap to a +4.1 handicap.

Lee initially saw Lin's athletic skills but also his commitment to fully reach his potential. "Matthew has a lot of natural athletic ability, being able to move the ball and his body fairly well," Lee said. "It took a lot of hard work on his part to get to where he is, and he did a very good job with that. Matthew is the happiest kid in the world. His attitude is to just enjoy life and a big part of it is his faith which is why he is such a happy-go-lucky kid."

Lee also sees a connection with the happily achieving and contributing attitude that Lin possesses to his success at golf. "It definitely helps him," Lee said. "You need to have that type of attitude to succeed in this game. Having a positive mentality and a belief in himself carries over to his playing and performing so well."

It's the psychological aspect of the game that Lin finds most satisfying. "It's such a mental sport," he said. "It's a perfect balance of being relaxed and stressed at the same time while staying patient and making smart decisions. When I'm playing, I will take the time to look at the sky and be thankful that I've been given the opportunity to play golf."

Lin, who has started visiting colleges including a number of top academic Division I schools, utilizes the mental demands of golf as a carry over to his academic work and is a community leader at the Head Royce School while practicing golf six to seven days a week.

"One of the great things about being a golfer is that since you spend so much time on the course, you really have to learn to be efficient, whether it's focusing on one technique or one process or one thought," Lin said. "Because of this, I'm able to be efficient with my time, studying, learning how to study, and putting in the work. I really enjoy school and love learning about things I'm not knowledgeable of and in the end, it's kind of fun."

When Lin was headed to play in the Notah Begay III Championship, Lott, to acknowledge the contributions that Lin has made to his foundation, took the time to send him a video with these words: "Greatness comes from your heart and your mind . and make sure you make a lot of birdies," both of which Lin took to heart.

"Ronnie Lott is a great guy I'm just trying to follow in his footsteps in that he always asks, `What can I do for you?' and I'm want to bring the same message to have the opportunity to help others," Lin said.

Working so closely with Lin, Lee sees the upside for him as a golfer and as a man. "The biggest thing with Matt is, regardless of his golf and what he does in school, he's just a good person and that will take him a long way," Lee said. "The values that his parents have instilled in him have given Matt a great platform to work off of. They have given him opportunities and he has taken advantage of it as much as he can. He's very mature for seventeen but it's a continuing growth and process for him. His future is very bright whether he plays golf or decides to do something else."



Darlet, Matthew, Patrick and Samantha Lin Photo provided

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