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## SPORTS

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ELDER STATESMAN

Breaking  
down  
golf's  
barriers*Program helps get game  
out of the country club*MICHAEL GRANGE  
Sports Reporter, Toronto

Dominique Claxton is 14 and lives in a townhouse in the heart of Toronto's Jane-Finch corridor, a neighbourhood with a dense concentration of low-income housing and populated by new Canadians from all corners of the globe.

He's also got an excellent grip, a solid alignment and a nice, even, tempo to his young golf swing. He's pleased to show it off to a visitor by hitting solid 7-irons into a net set up in a corner of the gymnasium at Driftwood Community Centre.

His favourite player is no shocker either. "I like Tiger Woods," he says. "Everyone likes Tiger Woods." Has he ever heard of Lee Elder? "Yes," he says. "I know he's the first African-American to play at the Masters, and I see him on the Golf Channel all the time."

The trailblazer himself watches the scene before him with a warm smile. Almost a quarter century before Woods burst onto the scene with his 1997 Masters win, Elder did what no other black man had done: Walk onto the grounds of Augusta National Golf Club as a player, not staff.

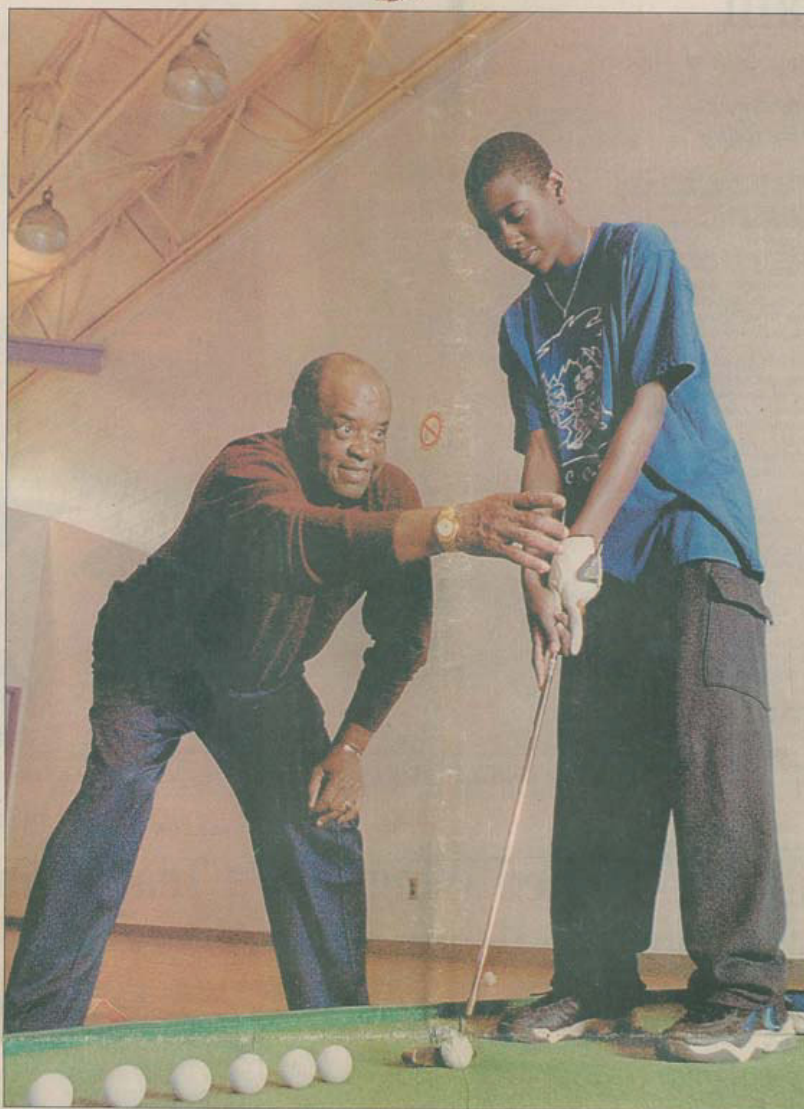
A four-time winner on the PGA Tour, Elder's grace under pressure was recognized at the Masters this past April, the 25th anniversary of his historic appearance.

Elder, 65, doesn't care if his accomplishments are on the tongues of young golfers everywhere. His goal is to make sure the mark he left on the sport he loves isn't erased.

Even with the amazing popularity of Woods, whose ethnic background is parts Thai, African American and native Indian, the face of golf hasn't changed much since Elder made his historic trip up Magnolia Lane.

"I felt that we would have more blacks, more diversity in golf by now," Elder said during a visit to Toronto yesterday. "But golf is a sport that you have to practise all the time, and you need the opportunity to play it."

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Golfer Lee Elder works with Dominique Claxton, 14, at the Driftwood Community Centre yesterday.

TIBOR KOLLEY/The Globe and Mail

# Breaking down barriers

ELDER from page S1

Elder, as his competitive career winds down, has been working hard at getting the game out of the country club. In 1997, he launched the Lee Elder National Junior Golf Foundation and Tour as a way to introduce the game to children in places where it's not normally available.

That goal brought him to the community centre last night where he participated in a golf clinic put on by a Toronto resident who, helped by a few of his friends, has the same dream.

Kingsley Rowe was introduced to the game by his father in Montego Bay, Jamaica.

"Of course, at first I didn't like it," said Rowe, a Scarborough, Ont., resident in his his mid-50s who plays to a five handicap. "But now I thank him so much for it. It's helped me to maintain the discipline I was brought up in."

He describes himself as a "businessman with a social conscience" and said he had long wanted to do something to remove barriers that prevent people from being exposed to the game he loves.

"It's still an elitist type of game," Rowe said. "That's what I'm driving to change. Unless you remove the cost barriers these kids won't be able to play."

His first step was to lean on his fellow members and the staff at the Board of Trade Golf Club in Woodbridge, Ont., where he's been a member since the early 1980s.

With the help of Dave Garner, the club's head professional, Rowe has founded the National Junior Golf Foundation. Rowe learned of Elder's program and invited him to come to Toronto to look at what he was trying to do here.

Guided by a curriculum provided by the Royal Canadian Golf Association's FutureLinks program and with the use of donated equipment, a group of 25 children from the neighbourhood are being schooled in the game's fundamentals each Wednesday evening during the summer.

Rowe's goal is the same as Elder's. "I just love golf and have a passion for these kids," he said. "I want

## LEE ELDER

**Born:** July 14, 1934, in Dallas

**Started golf:** At age nine he began caddying as a means to put food on the table after his parent died.

**Joined PGA Tour:** 1967

**Tour wins (4):** 1974 Monsanto Open; 1976 Houston Open; 1978 Greater Milwaukee Open and American Express Westchester Classic.

**Joined PGA Senior Tour:** 1984

**Senior Tour wins (8):** 1984 Suntree Senior Classic; Hilton Head Seniors International; 1985 Denver Post Championship; Merrill Lynch/Golf Digest Commemorative, Digital Seniors Classic; Citizens Union Senior Golf Classic. 1986 Merrill Lynch/Golf Digest Commemorative. 1988 Gus Machado Classic.

to expose golf to them so they can gain the game's social benefits."

Elder's foundation has set up chapters in four U.S. cities. Rowe wants to follow suit with similar clinics across Toronto and the country.

With the right support, he can see public courses setting aside playing times for youth who can't afford green fees; a revival of the caddy programs that introduced people such as Elder to the game; and maybe even scholarships.

For his part Claxton simply enjoys the special feeling of hitting a golf ball solidly, even if it is in a gym, into a net.

A long, lean, athletic type, Claxton hasn't missed an evening at the clinic, and when school lets out he wants to spend the summer working on his golf game — not unusual for plenty of Grade 9 kids across Canada — but not the norm in this part of Toronto.

But the golf bug bites everywhere, all it needs is an opportunity. Elder knows the symptoms, and his life is evidence of the good that can come of it. "Everyone needs a chance," he said.

Claxton just keeps swinging.