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Fore-ward: Local sports agent finds right mix with focus on golf, football

Business First of Columbus - March 24, 2006 by [Jeff Bell](#) Business First

Jeff Chilcoat has never been much of a headline chaser for his Sterling Sports Management LLC.

"I've got my nose to the grindstone, doing other stuff for our clients," said the sports agent and attorney. "I haven't felt the need to do things to get publicity."

But even Chilcoat had to admit the firm's recent signing of international golf star Jeong Jang was reason to trumpet the news about how far Sterling has come since Chilcoat opened shop in 1997.

Jang is the defending Women's British Open champion and placed fifth on the LPGA Tour's money list last year, earning \$1.1 million. She and LPGA headliner Annika Sorenstam topped the tour with 15 top 10 tournament finishes each.

"It really gives us credibility in the golf world to have signed a player of this international scope," Chilcoat said. "It shows a little Columbus, Ohio, agency is capable of representing golfers from around the world."

Golf and football

Chilcoat and Sterling Vice President J.S. Kang followed the Jang signing by landing endorsement deals for her with Cobra Golf, Titleist and FootJoy, three of the top golf equipment and apparel brands in the world. Chilcoat would not disclose the value of the deals, but said they were less than some his firm has negotiated for some of its other top women's golf clients. They include LPGA Hall of Fame member Betsy King and women's tour stars Carin Koch, Jill McGill and Michele Redman.

Golfers, including several trying to make it on the men's PGA Tour, represent about half of Sterling's 50 clients.

The rest are football players, including several on the rosters of National Football League teams. Among those players are offensive lineman Adrien Clarke with Philadelphia, Tampa Bay offensive tackle Anthony Davis, Tennessee cornerback Antoine Harris and Kansas City long snapper Kendall Gammon. Sterling also represents several Ohio State University football alumni, including placekicker Josh Huston, long snapper Kyle Andrews, tight end Ryan Hamby and punter Andy Groom.

Chilcoat, the son of Columbus attorney David Chilcoat, launched Sterling within his father's law firm, Campbell Hornbeck Chilcoat & Veatch LLC, shortly after receiving his law degree from Capital University in 1997. The 35-year-old is now a partner in the firm and has two sports agents, Kang and Jon Krabill, working with him.



Jack Kustron, For Business First
Football players account for
about half of agent Jeff
Chilcoat's client roster.

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Chilcoat said referrals from his early clients helped Sterling get to where it is. It negotiates player contracts, lines up endorsements, arranges paid personal appearances, handles public relations work, and helps with tax planning and post-career counseling. It also connects players with legal services offered by his firm.

Business is good enough that Sterling can turn away more players than it signs, Chilcoat said.

"We're really blessed with great clients," he said. "I don't get a lot of dread phone calls or have to get them out of some sort of jam. We want to make sure we grow with the right people."

Kang said Sterling's clients appreciate the fact Chilcoat "does what he says he's going to do" when they sign with the agency.

"He's probably the most sincere person I ever met," Kang said. "Athletes are looking for sincerity and to know you're working hard on their behalf. We do that."

Korean connection

A native of Korea, Kang has worked on both sides of the Pacific Ocean as a lawyer and marketing consultant. In 2004, he approached several sports management agencies, including Sterling, about helping them work with the growing number of Asian golfers, especially those from South Korea who were becoming top players on the LPGA tour.

"I realized there was a big disconnect for a number of players in terms of not doing anything sponsorship-wise in North America," Kang said. "Jeff agreed with the niche I had identified and understood the LPGA perhaps like no one else because he was so vested in it. He had a gut feeling that matched my gut feeling about where this is headed."

Chilcoat had signed as clients twins Aree and Naree Song, teen golf stars with ties to Korea, shortly before Kang joined Sterling in January 2005. Kang also played an instrumental role in Jang's decision to sign with Sterling.

Chilcoat said the potential is great for endorsement deals for Jang and the Song sisters, especially in South Korea where women's golf has become a source of national pride.

"Women's golf is bigger than any other sports there," he said. "Korean players have the opportunity to earn more (in endorsements) than American players."

That's encouraging for Sterling, which receives 20 percent of the money its golf clients earn from endorsements. It doesn't get a cut of the prize money players win in tournaments.

The set-up is different with NFL players. Sports agents, such as Chilcoat, are paid no more than 3 percent of the value of a player's contract with his team and they get about 15 percent of income from endorsements.

While bullish about the earnings potential of his big-name golf clients, Chilcoat plans to continue working with more football players. He's aiming to grow with the right athletes so Sterling can stay the course on what has made it successful.

"We're really proud of ourselves because we're different than the stereotypical agent," Chilcoat said. "We've done things the right way and within the bounds of the rules."

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