

ELGL Recognition Speech for Girls in the Game, Thursday, 2/27/2025

The theme of the event is “**Strong Starts Here**,” celebrating the strength inside of every girl and how to develop that strength physically, emotionally and mentally. We would ask that an acceptance speech incorporate some of the personal story of growth of the league and challenges faced along the way, along with the lessons that you personally may have learned, be it through learning how to work with others to help them grow, being a role model, and how to use your voice for empowerment and change in the world.

Good evening,

I am Tracy Raoul, President of the Ebony Ladies Golf League and on behalf of the League, we thank you for this very prestigious honor.

With me tonight are Lorraine Rice, a member since 1974, Verleaner Lane, a member since 2022, and Tracy Horne, daughter of our Founder, Mrs. Louise Horne. Tracy was present as a young child during the League’s inception, witnessing first-hand the time, energy, wisdom, and commitment of Louise to start a women’s golf league.

Louise believed a lady’s golf league was needed in Chicago to:

“Bring us together so that something can be done about our apparent inactivity; in spite of the fact that most of us play golf occasionally, in scattered groups at various golf tournaments throughout the season.

She continued, “There is a great need for all of us to get together to play golf, compete against each other, as well as have a lot of fun.”

Louise was a visionary and foresaw the need to empower women as one collective to build a strong coalition of women golfers playing golf in male dominated environments that shunned their presence, didn’t allow access to the course, and sometimes made them play late in the day making it impossible to complete 18 holes.

She envisioned a league of women golfers playing regularly, with set schedules of events, paying dues to maintain and garner prizes for event winners, teaching other women how to play golf, and ultimately enjoying the camaraderie of fellow women golfers.

And with that vision, motivation to create change, and desire to strengthen women, “**Strong Starts Here**”, the *Ebony Ladies Golf League* was chartered in March of 1974; and is the first African American women’s golf league in Illinois.

The Ebony Ladies currently have 81 members and we’re growing. As I noted in my “*why I want to be president*” speech in 2021, when membership was only 46, I said, “I want to grow the

game and provide access for more girls and women that look like me to play golf, a sport we were prevented from participating in and mastering.” Thankfully, I am accomplishing this through our membership that accepted the vision and annually invites ladies to join.

In the early 1980s, my aunt Dorothy introduced me to golf, but I wasn’t interested because quite frankly she was the only Black woman, I saw playing golf and I foolishly said, “*my friends don’t play golf.*”

There are countless women that don’t play golf let alone a sport of any kind and that’s why *Girls in the Game* is invaluable for our youth to see themselves and women actively participating and creating associations through sports. To see the positive impact sports have on women physically, mentally, emotionally, financially, and for some spiritually. I wish I had *Girls in the Game* when I was a teenager.

But I have *Girls in the Game* now, and through my involvement with other not-for-profit organizations centered around providing exposure, opportunities, and the wherewithal for underrepresented individuals to delve into the multi-billion-dollar golf industry, we’re helping girls learn caddying, helping them develop their golf game both recreationally and competitively, and like Louise, *Girls in the Game*, and many others in this room, we’re active because we see the void and we want to fill it. Therefore, if your friends don’t play a sport or aren’t engaged in campaigns that give back or pay forward, then get them involved.

I love golf because it teaches values that are applicable to life, such as integrity, honesty, patience, focus, time-management, perseverance, punctuality, and so much more. These are values we teach our children; these are values every sport and athlete that applies them will excel; these values are life-lessons for success that must be nurtured and always applied; these values as well as the lessons taught through *Girls in the Game*, will define us as daughters, sisters, mothers, aunts, friends, athletes, employers, bosses, owners, workers, citizens, or whatever context you undertake, and applying these values will ensure your successes.

We thank Louise for creating the platform for Ebony Ladies to stand here tonight, 51 years later and we humbly thank *Girls in the Game* for the honor of recognizing the Ebony Ladies Golf League as a *Field of Dreams* Champion for 2025.

Together, with *Girls in the Game*, and many others, prayerfully, we will continue impacting the lives of our girls throughout Chicago and beyond; and collectively we’ll help them see, embrace, and develop their personal strengths, powers, goals, and pathways to good health, friendship, and success and have as Louise said, “**Lots of fun**” in that process.