

Gainbridge LPGA

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Lake Nona Golf & Country Club

Annika Sorenstam

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: All right, thank you everyone for waiting through as we were figuring out the mic problem there.

Thank you for joining us here at Gainbridge LPGA virtual interview room. Without further ado, Annika, thank you for taking the time. How are you doing?

ANNIKA SORENSTAM: Thank you. No, it's great to be here and I'm doing great. Hometown, home course, home place. It's great to be here, and fantastic that Lake Nona is hosting the LPGA. Been here for 21 years and really haven't had a major tournament like this, so we're proud to showcase our little gem here in mid-Florida in Orlando.

Great to be home and having my husband on the bag, so we have a lot to be happy for.

THE MODERATOR: Let's go back to the decision to play this week. We did see you at the PNC Championship, in the celebrity division of the Diamond Resorts Tournament of Champions. When did the opportunity to play officially on tour cross your mind?

ANNIKA SORENSTAM: Well, this was a very late addition, I must say. I was planning to play with my dad at the PNC Championship, as you mentioned, in December. We have done that two years in a row. It's been really a lot of fun.

And then we partnered up with Diamond Resorts, and the idea was to play in this event. As much as them helping out the ANNIKA Foundation moving forward, I have it on the side of my hat, here as you see, Diamond Resorts, but they've been great.

And then literally in the middle of January there were rumors that the LPGA will come to Orlando and come to Lake Nona. It wasn't really after the Diamond Resorts that I heard it was true. And first initial was no, no. I'm done with LPGA. I'm not going to play. That's really not where my level of golf is.

But considering my plans for the summer and turning 50 in

October, wanting to play the Women's Senior Open, and I figured I just need some tournament rounds. I need some experience back inside the ropes and focusing on 18 holes, making putts, no Mulligans and no gimmies.

I thought this maybe could be something. I was really persuaded more from my family and my parents, our kids, and then neighbors and then members, and the pro here at Lake Nona said, Of course you're going to play. So it was really a late addition and not something that was on my mind.

Once I decided, I'm excited to be here and appreciate the opportunity to come back and see all these players. It's funny, because this field has -- I know it's a limited field, but they have I think 40 players that are playing here this week that are Annika alumni as we call them, meaning they have played in one or more of our events around the world the last 13 years.

I've seen many of these young players grow up, whether it's Anna Nordqvist, the Korda sisters, Maria Fassi, Leona Maguire, Bronte Law. I mean, you name it, I've seen them grow up and play in either invitationals or intercollegiate. It's fun to be here. I've had several practice rounds with the young players that I work with. Played with Danielle Kang yesterday who I have been talking to a little bit.

And so now to be inside the ropes playing with them, it's kind of fun and also makes me being more being relative and also being more in tune in what the courses are like and what they go through every week.

THE MODERATOR: When did you switch gears from maybe more recreational golf to preparing once again for a full-fledged tournament?

ANNIKA SORENSTAM: I'm not really sure where that switch is, but I've been practicing the last few months, and no doubt about it I've been trying to work out and do what I can between mommy duties and all the other duties that's important to me nowadays.

When kids go to school I go to the gym and hit some balls, and sometimes my husband, Mike, will pick up Will from



school and then he will drop him on the driving range and we go practice together, because he's been bit by the golf bug. He's been my training partner the last few months, so it's been a lot of the fun.

THE MODERATOR: You mentioned about playing Diamond. What did you learn about your game playing against -- not against LPGA Tour players but -- having them beside you and also competing well on your own as a celebrity in the celebrity division?

ANNIKA SORENSTAM: I think the biggest thing is obviously when you get older you have some other priorities in your life, and mine is to be a mother and a wife and businesswoman. We spend a lot of time with the ANNIKA Foundation and the different roles that I have. It was recently announced that the president of the IGF and golf course design and I still have corporate partners.

But competing competitively is not my main priority, so find that switch and just kind of turn it on, it's not as easy as I thought. I've been away for 13 years. A lot of things have happened. I don't have the hunger that I did. I'm not stomping at the bit like I used to and can't wait to hold the trophy on Sunday.

I'm just excited to be out here and be playing and swinging the club. My priorities and also my expectations are nowhere where they need to be, but I'm trying with what I have and I'm looking forward to being part of this and looking forward to the summer and playing in the Senior Women's Open. We'll see how that goes.

THR MODERATOR: You mentioned how huge it is for your family to be involved with this week. How special is the moment for you the fact that your kids will be able to watch you inside the ropes and with your husband on the bag? Talk about how special a moment this is for you.

ANNIKA SORENSTAM: Yeah, I mean, it's really special. It's a family affair. To have Mike on the bag is fun. We get along well and work well together. I enjoy sharing this experience with him.

And then for the kids to be part of it, I mean, we live on the 16th hole. We can literally roll out of bed and be on 16 tee. This is our backyard, and we know the neighbors, we know the other members, my parents are here and to get the support from them, I mean, Mike's sister will come.

Even though it's limited with COVID, we still feel like we got some great support. Yeah, it's just a fun thing. A lot of members have come out already, and they see me normally I'm playing pickleball or they might see us here for Easter brunch, Thanksgiving dinner. So that's kind of how

they associate me.

They haven't really seen me play. When I was living here and I was competing I always traveled around the world but they never saw me. So now they're seeing me, and we have some friends coming out. For them I'm just a good friend. Some of them hardly knew I was a golfer, so it's going to be fun to be here.

Again, if it wasn't for Lake Nona I wouldn't be playing here. This is, again, not a comeback. It's an appearance, and I'm just thrilled about that.

THE MODERATOR: You're paired tomorrow with Anna Nordqvist and Madelene Sagstrom. I know you have special relationships with both of them. What are you most excited about teeing off with them tomorrow as you begin Gainbridge?

ANNIKA SORENSTAM: Yeah, it's a Swedish group, so we'll probably be speaking a little Swedish here and there. It's funny. I've seen them both grow up playing some of our events, and Anna was one of our first 13 -- actually maybe 15 years ago; got the Annika scholarship. So I've seen her go to ASU and develop as a professional and see her winning a major.

So I think that's really special. And Madelene, I never got a chance to play with her, but I saw her success on the Symetra Tour. We've spoken a few times, her and her mom. We sat down in Starbucks and she was firing away with questions about caddies, sponsors, agents, you name it. So been there to kind of be a little support group to her.

It's been nice to see them both do so well, and for Madelene to be the defending champion is very cool. So, yeah, I'm excited about the pairing and I look forward to it.

THE MODERATOR: You talked about playing with Danielle yesterday. I know she looks to you as a mentor, too. What was that like?

ANNIKA SORENSTAM: That was really cool. I got to the tee and she already stood there. I said, Do you want me to hit? She goes, Sure, and I thought she already hit the shot. I hit it and she says, My turn. I'm super nervous.

So of course she stripped it down the middle and we had a good chat, shared some stories and she was bringing up some old experiences when she played in the ANNIKA Invitational. She was telling me, Do you remember when you had the media training and you asked me to share some of the things I would do if I was you, and it was really fun. She had a super last few months, and nice to see her really take her game to a different level.

We just kind of talked about that and she works with a great instructor, so it's more just being there as a support and be able to answers some questions. All I do is really share any experiences and my knowledge. I said, You're on your on after that, but it's fun.

THE MODERATOR: I know a lot of people are in the chat hoping to ask questions. Before we open it up, I just want to take a second to talk about the Aon Risk-Reward Challenge. This week it's No. 15. The elements of this hole, what do you think makes it particularly challenging, and what decision factors go into your approaching this hole as someone that has played it multiple times?

ANNIKA SORENSTAM: Yeah, I have played it multiple times, and for somebody who hasn't really seen or doesn't really know what 15 is about, it's a Par-5 and it's a dogleg and it's just -- you got lake on the whole side of the fairway, so you kind of play straight with a nice little drive.

A lot undulation in the fairways, so you can get some interesting kicks. If it's downwind it's really a Par-5 you can reach in two, but you have a bunker also along the left side. So it's really a good risk-reward type of hole, because if you hit some good shots you can have a great chance at eagle and certainly birdie.

If you're a more conservative player it might play a little more to the right off the tee and then layup to maybe a favorite distance. But then you have a green that's very -- the shape of the green is so interesting. The front left is low and then the right side is up, so it's a big slope in the middle and you really need to know your distances.

What I like about the 15th green is our house is just behind the 15th green, so I'm very familiar with the green. We see it every morning through the kitchen when I have my cup of tea. It's beautiful. It's surrounded by the water.

The green is really where I think things can happen there. You got to be very careful with some of the undulations. It's not a big green. It's very narrow.

Today when we played there was -- it's starting to dry out a little, but you put some spin on it and it can go either direction, which is what we noticed today.

THE MODERATOR: Equal support has been an increasingly important topic lately. There are several companies out here especially working with the LPGA to provide that support and step up. What are your thoughts specifically to how Aon is rewarding players, not only on the LPGA but also PGA TOUR, with a million dollar prize as the winner of this competition at the end of the season?

ANNIKA SORENSTAM: Oh, it's fantastic. I mean, it's really, really cool to see that, and that's what I like with the risk-reward. You take the chance if you want to go for the big prize. I like it. I wish we would've it had it when I played, but I look forward to being part of it in this tournament this week. It's great for the support of women's golf and golf in general.

THE MODERATOR: Questions.

Q. I know that you have a relationship at least a little bit with Tiger, and I wondered your thoughts at the news yesterday and this morning and feelings towards all that.

ANNIKA SORENSTAM: Yeah, I mean, I think -- I saw you yesterday. We were talking, and then I went to hit some balls. I didn't look at my phone, and I was on my way to the tee and just picked up my phone just to quickly see what's going on with the kids and the news popped up.

Really just -- I mean, I got sick to my stomach. I felt this kind of sting in my heart, like what's happening, because really at that time it was probably 3:00 or so. There was really not much information. I remember going up to the tee and sharing it with Danielle. I was kind of in shock. It was awful. It was terrifying.

The storyline at that time was very, very scary. It turned out to be an awful accident as far as what I seen and read a little bit. I'm just glad that he's alive. I'm just glad that he seems to going to be okay. I'm not really familiar with the injuries but heard he was in surgery, so I'm wishing him and his family the very best. Our thoughts are with him.

Hopefully he will have a safe and full recovery. The guy is tough, but it's been some bad breaks.

Q. Two things. First of all, you mentioned your expectations aren't where they used to be. Can you give us an idea about roughly where they might be?

ANNIKA SORENSTAM: That's a good question, Doug. I'm not really sure. I'm familiar with the golf course, but this course is playing longer that I'm used to, 6700 yards I believe that the actual yardage is. We'll see.

The rough is a little thicker than I'm used to seeing here, so shooting around par I think will be a good thing for me. I'm going to obviously do the best I can. I think the biggest difference nowadays is I'm just not as consistent as I was. I mean, when I played at my peak I practiced every day and I had a lot of feel and my swing was just -- I can repeat it.



Nowadays I'm good for 14 holes and I don't know what's coming the other four. It's a little more surprise on the course, but that's okay. Like I said, my expectations, they're -- it's just more about being here and more about being inside the ropes and focusing a little bit about golf, and we'll see how it goes. That's really the purpose of this; nothing else than that.

Q. Secondly, you mentioned the U.S. Women's. Would you consider, depending how this week goes and wanting to stay inside the ropes for later events, would you consider taking a spot at the ANA? You didn't let me finish. You're supposed to let me finish the question, Annika.

ANNIKA SORENSTAM: I think I know what you were saying. No, I have no other plans. I mean, like I said, if it wasn't Lake Nona I wouldn't be here. This is not -- I'm in a different place in my life. LPGA has a huge part in my life, in my heart and wonderful memories, but that's not why I'm here, to create more.

On the contrary. I'm going to let the ANNIKA Foundation alumni go out there and have fun and be successful. But, again, I take my golf seriously. When I do play later in the summer I want to feel like I can compete, I can go out there and post some reasonable scores. To do that, you have to get back inside the ropes.

I think Diamond Resorts, when I played there, I realized it's just very different. I mean, when you don't do this for a living 13 years is really a long time and a lot of the things have changed. I'm thinking at the long-term, thinking about the journey rather than just the outcome this week.

Q. Good luck this week. You had mentioned Madelene Sagstrom and she was on your Solheim Cup team. She released a very personal story on Monday, and I was just hoping I could get some reaction from you to what she had released.

ANNIKA SORENSTAM: Yeah, no, I saw that story in the Global Post. First of all, I mean, it takes a lot of courage to do what she did, to be able to share some intimate personal stories from her childhood that must have just been obviously haunting her for years and years.

You know, when I see her obviously we're not going to be talking about it on the golf course, but I've reached out and told her I'm proud of you, and if you need anything I'm here to support you in whatever you need. That's such a personal thing.

But also I think it's important to know, I mean, she has such

a platform to be able to share these stories that can help others. I think that's really what she wanted to do. She said, if I can help one other person then it's all worth it. And I think she will. I think she will help more than one person to understand that this is quite common and it's not the victim's fault.

So I think this is good. She's in a good place in her life. She has a great boyfriend, and I feel like she has some harmony in her life. I had a practice round with her for Diamond Resorts and she just seemed to be at peace. I just want to just in a way congratulate her on that, because that takes, again, courage. That's not easy to do.

So as a Swede, as a golfer, as a friend, we're here to support her.

Q. Has any part of this week so far felt like you never left?

ANNIKA SORENSTAM: Sorry?

Q. Has any part of this week so far felt like you never left the tour?

ANNIKA SORENSTAM: Oh, no. I mean, it's a lot of new things, certainly a lot of new protocols with COVID and just regulations. I mean, I think the tour has just improved in a lot of ways making it more efficient in certain ways.

I think there are some players out there and some caddies that I recognize, but there are a lot of new faces. I guess the routine of just practice round and pro-am is a little bit about the same, but it was just nine holes. It was different. We used to play 18 holes in the pro-am.

So there are a few changes out here. I have gotten briefed on a lot of things, especially this new LPGA portal, the app. A lot of things happen on the app. I was told about the integrity training, had to do that, and then I think the biggest thing that I messed up was the practice round tee times. I was told that you're supposed to be ready by 7:00 on Saturday. I didn't hear 7:00. I just heard Saturday. I kind of somehow messed up.

Luckily I was able to play with Anna on Monday anyway and with Danielle on Tuesday. It was a little different, but you got to get used to these new rules. By the time I figure them all out then I'm out of here. (Laughter.)

Q. One more. Gabi Ruffels, her first LPGA event as a pro. What is the best advice that you received as a young professional on tour?

ANNIKA SORENSTAM: No, I mean, I just saw her twice

now, and she seems super excited to be here. She's coming in with a great resume, so I'm sure she has a lot of confidence with that.

I think just come out here and enjoy yourself; look and learn. That's what I did the first year. Kind of figure out your routines and what works for you. I think that's probably the most thing. I know she's competent in her own game, but when you come out as a professional it's very different. You don't have a coach or anybody planning your trips. Now you got a caddie. You're your own boss and now you have an employee.

It's a lot of responsibility. It's week after week, so you got to learn how to pace yourself. Early on it's so easy to want to be part of everything that you're out there Monday through Sunday and you're exhausted. You have to be out there and make sure it's quality over quantity.

I'm sure she's going to be very, very successful. I like the way she plays and the way she approaches the game. She has a very strong mind, and that's something you're going to need out here.

Q. You had mentioned this being a tune up for the U.S. Senior Women's Open, schedule permitting. With the Olympics being held during the same time, were you able to work out a way to juggle your responsibilities with the IGF and be at the championship, or how are you going to work that out?

ANNIKA SORENSTAM: Yeah, we're talking to them. They've been very positive. I mean, that was one of the first things I brought up is that there might be some conflict in the summer. How do you feel. Antony Scanlon, who is kind of the executive director said, Of course you're playing. We love having an active president. I said thank you very much.

So we're still working out the details. It's a few months until then. But I will be in Tokyo at some point and support golf and do my duties. They know that I take my role very seriously and I'm going to do the very best I can.

It's also been very helpful to be around players, to be among the potential candidates, whether it's the U.S. or Mexico or Sweden. They have questions and concerns, and I've been able to talk to them about the things that I know and what they have to look forward to, or just some of the things that kind of are on my mind or concerns.

So it's been good to have active before the games and obviously during the games as well.

Q. Quick follow up to that. You mentioned you will be

this Japan. Will that be sometime during the Olympics, or will you be able to go in advance with some of your responsibilities?

ANNIKA SORENSTAM: Well, as of now they're not letting anybody in. The country is on lockdown. So not even some of the heads at the IOC have been able to go. We'll see what time will bring and then also what the necessary steps are. I know they have a great team. I'm not necessarily involved in the course setup or anything like that. It's more representing the game and being part of when the games are being played.

Also future events that we hold that I'm involved with.

Q. I actually have two questions, one is quick. How often do you play your home course, and did that ramp up as you get ready for this tournament?

ANNIKA SORENSTAM: Well, we moved here in 2000 so I've been here for 21 years. I can tell that you the first -- I mean, obviously I was competing in the beginning, but I stepped away in 2008, and since then I really haven't played much. I think the first ten years I really didn't step on the course maybe more than two or three times a year.

To get to our house nowadays you have to drive between the back tee and the men's tee on the 16th tee. That was as close as I got to the golf course. People always say, How good of shape is the course? I said, I don't know, but I'll look on the tee box when I go home.

You know, I really haven't played that much those 2008 to literally just to last year when I started to play in the PNC when there was something to look forward to, get ready for. When I heard about Diamond Resorts, that's when I started to play.

So it's really just been the last two months that I've really been out there. I mean, of course I'm very familiar with the course, but still when I'm playing on my own, with my family, there is a lot of gimmes out there. You don't finish up a score and might hit an extra ball, a breakfast ball off the tee. So it's a little different than what I'm doing this week.

Q. And then my second question is when you start the ANNIKA Foundation years ago with the goal of helping young female golfers and now you see where you're in a tournament with 40 to 50 who have come through it, how does that make you feel?

ANNIKA SORENSTAM: Well, it's a really cool feeling. I mean, I feel like I'm part of their journey, even if it's just a very, very small part. But to see them grow up, and I



mentioned Anna Nordqvist, how for her to be the first scholarship award winner you can say, and she was then like 15.

Then for her to go to ASU and see her turn professional. And then Leona Maguire is one, Bronte Law is one, Maria Fassi especially, and the Korda sisters. We have quite a few. As a matter of fact, we have 167 on the Symetra Tour. So I've seen many of them, and I think it makes you proud to see that first of all, that girls' golf, women's golf is in good hands. You see the growth.

To see tournaments that we have had in Argentina and see these girls come and play, get scholarships and play in Arkansas or whatever at some of these great universities and to be able to be a recruiting place for these young girls to be able to showcase their skills has been tremendous.

Obviously I wouldn't be able to do this if it wasn't for the team, the foundation, the partners, like 3M and Rolex have been tremendous in this, and MasterCard. We have become a global recruiting place where we have seven global tournaments around the world. So it's so neat, and to be able to walk inside the ropes -- like Anna Nordqvist said when we played, I mean, I've known her, like I said, for a long time, but she said we never played.

So now I'm out there and she wants to look at me and see how I go about things. I'm trying to, Okay, maybe I should listen to my own advice, how you go about your pre-shot routine and how you prepare for a tournament. Yeah, it's really warming. It makes me -- I mean, makes me want to continue what I do. You see that it's working, you see the results, these young girls living their dream and doing awesome. I mean, they're great ambassadors for the game. Maria Fassi is the great example. She won the Annika Award. To see what she has come and what she is doing now, I mean, it's just cool.

So hopefully we can continue to do this once COVID restrictions ease up a little bit to continue our mission. We're hoping to go to Europe in the summer like we always do for ANNIKA Invitational Europe, and then towards the fall to go to Argentina. New Zealand I'm not really sure. They seem quite strict. Then have our college events.

Yeah, it gives me a lot of pride and it's cool to see.

Q. Good afternoon. Thank you so much. We admire your game. We are with Division Press and the California Blind and Disabled Golf. We have two quick questions from our PGA junior league girls. They want to know over the course of your career, have you considered yourself old school or new school as the core of your game, new school being the tech and

numbers and old school being feel and timing.

And the second part of the questions is will the girls, whatever they choose to do career path, whether it be golf or otherwise, three keys to being successful.

ANNIKA SORENSTAM: Yeah, thank you very much for the questions. The first one, I think I'm actually a little bit of a mix. I was very -- I mean, I have an analytic mind and I have always analyzed my game, but when it came to technology I really wasn't so much into numbers. I was a little bit more a feel player there. So I would say it's the combination I think. It's good to have a little bit of both, especially around the greens. It takes a lot of feel to be able to read putts and be able to understand the undulations and so forth.

So I think the biggest thing I think now, if somebody asked me 13 years ago what do you see, one of the things I see here is these players on the driving range especially, they have all the technology analyzing every swing, writing down ball speed, club speed, spin rate, you name it.

I hardly know what everything means. Just to maximize everything. I mean, that's what it takes. The competition is so tough today. I think that's very -- the biggest thing I see. So very much into the numbers, and before we would look at the divot and we can tell if it's a draw or a fade. You look to the ball flight and, Oh, that's climbing too much. You've got to get the spin down.

It was a little bit more feel and a little bit more classic or old fashioned. I think technology has been a good thing for the game.

The second question, actually if you wouldn't mind repeating it, I'm just talking away.

Q. Yes. For the girls, whatever they choose to do, whatever their career path is, whether it be golf or life in general, three keys to being successful in their lives.

ANNIKA SORENSTAM: Yes, thank you. Sorry about that. I think golf has really taught me a lot about life. You know, the things I've learned in golf has helped me to further my career outside of the golf course. One of the things I think you need is patience. In golf we always talk about patience, but I've learned that patience in life is really important.

Obviously the work ethic. You got to work hard. My dad told me a long time ago there is no short cuts to success. You really got to put in the work. Sunny days, rainy days, days you're tired, you got to do that.

You know, I think another one, especially in these times,
it's just having integrity in who you are and what you do.
You got to be true to yourself. I think that will take you a
long way.

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