

FIR HILLS SERI PAK Championship

Tuesday, March 19, 2024

Palos Verdes Estates, California, USA

Palos Verdes Golf Club

Seri Pak

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: Welcome, everyone, inside of the media center here at the Fir Hills Seri Pak Championship.

Seri, welcome to your event on the LPGA Tour. Now that it is real and you're here, what are the feelings that you have currently?

SERI PAK: Well, actually it's been a really long time sitting at the week of the tournament, and then at the same time it has been a long time I speak English, so it's really not comfortable.

This is my first time under my name at an LPGA tournament, so it's really a dream come true.

Many years I was playing the LPGA Tour, I was actually one of the playing dreams about it, if any chance one day, if possible, to have a tournament on my name on the Tour, to be really grateful and an honor.

As you guys know, it's not easy to do that, but after I retired -- this is my eighth year being retired, but however, another one of my dreams come true. So it's really exciting.

At the same time, I don't know why I get nervous because, as I said, it's a really long time. Eight years since I've come back to the Tour, seeing players at the golf course. It's during the season, so it's not really changing anything, but still, my heart is beating, so that's really fun.

It's great to come back to the U.S. and have my own tournament, there's no doubt.

Q. Planning for this week, what have you been most excited for, now that the tournament is here?

SERI PAK: Most exciting is I'm seeing a lot of players, and at the same time, a lot of Tour players passed, but my tournament is giving players great opportunities. What's most exciting is it's another dream, giving to the players, or hope to be creating many opportunities for players or many



different countries' players that dreamed about playing the LPGA. So this is one first step for me, for myself, but at the same time to the players. That's probably it.

What's exciting is this is first step giving a great opportunity to open for other tours.

Q. We know you're teeing it up in the pro-am tomorrow; are there some nerves about that?

SERI PAK: To tell you the truth, yes, because I never nervous about when during the playing, but I said this is my first time playing a pro-am as an amateur actually, not as a pro. I used to be a pro, but this is my first time as not a player. It's going to be fun, but at the same time, I wasn't playing golf much at all.

I don't know what's going to be -- either my game is going to be okay or it's going to be really worse. Hopefully not going to be too crazy about the golf.

But I'm really excited to play with a lot of my good friends. It'll be great.

Q. What has it meant to you to see the Korean success on the LPGA since you've retired? We've had players from Jin Young to Hae Ran winning last year, but how cool is it to see your country really performing super well on the LPGA?

SERI PAK: Well, it's very proud to see. It's been 27 years. 1998 is my first winning. Since then actually for my country many players come to the LPGA and play the Tour. But ever single year actually the players get to more -- more players comes from my country, and they play really well. They're really successful on the Tour.

But as far as I know, I'm really proud of to see happen. Not only Korean but many Asians come from Asia to the U.S.

It is really great to see that. I don't know it's got to be happening before. 27 years ago I was starting it. Not many Asians was before Japan, Korea, Thailand, Malaysia, maybe four or five players in Asia, but as you know, now there's so many of them.



Overall the past and future here is more coming players from Asia, but it's really great to see that happening from all of the countries to the LPGA Tour to playing, so it's really grateful to have that happening.

Q. Have you bumped into any of those younger players this week and they just kind of freak out because of who you are and what you've done for Korean golf, or has that happened yet?

SERI PAK: I don't see yet. I go straight from car to clubhouse to the restaurant. I don't see any players yet. I don't know what's happening next.

Q. What does it mean to you that eight years after you retired, you still have such a legacy on South Korean women's golf?

SERI PAK: Well, personally I'm still not -- feels like weird things happening, because as I said, after I retired eight years ago -- this is my eighth year being retired. I worked really hard for my own company and do a lot of things with my foundation, do a lot of sponsoring at certain events, but as you know, I don't know -- before I say I'm starting 1998, actually my first season of the rookie, and back then I was -- it's my own dreams actually to make my uncle's dreams about playing on the LPGA Tour.

After that I realized that my dreams -- I thought it's my own dreams, but I realized that my dream is giving someone else's dreams to make it happen. That's what makes it a lot to mean to me, so after that I retire, do many things to helping some golf for the junior events, and at the same time, this is an LPGA event, the Tour. That's just the way I always dreamed about, when I retired to do something else as a player, but after I finished my Tour, my success, it's going to be finishing my career, or after that I'm kind of -- it's not person, it's not player, but I'm trying to help more at the golf as a player, giving some more opportunities for young kids. They are trying to make their own dreams. This is my first biggest goal for myself after I retire.

I'm really thankful, grateful. I'm really lucky person the way I'm doing it. At the same time I'm really happy to be starting step by step and my dreams actually making step by step. I'm really happy, and at the same time really honored to have everything happening in my life and my life after I retire. I'm really happy to myself that it's been able to work.

Q. You talked a little bit earlier about the success of South Korean players, but there's been a very small dropoff in the dominance of South Koreans on the LPGA. There's only three qualified for the Olympics at

the moment, two in the Rolex rankings top 10. What factors do you think have contributed to the slight pull-back?

SERI PAK: It's natural, actually. Some up and downs anyway. It has a lot of pressure for a long time, actually many years, because the Korean players, they always -- as you know, always -- actually KLPGA history is really short, not long, but after 1998 it's going to be changing really fastly, but at the same time many players come to U.S., the LPGA, they learn a lot, they really grow up fastly, they win a lot. Now actually in world golf things are going to be tough ranking.

The last couple years I know Korean players a lot of pressure on it, but after that, as I said, I'm still really not -- hasn't any problem with that. They're still the same, they still work hard, they're still the same ranking, but at the same time, not only career players but another country, another players, they are still playing good anyway. It's going to be even. Sometimes up and down, sometimes good, sometimes bad, but it's right now still we don't know yet whether it's three players or two players. Still we don't know. We have time.

But it pretty much naturally is happening. I know they're going to go back to the way we was, I guess, hopefully, but if not, still I know many years agony way, they are such young players. So many talented players keep playing, growing it. We're not actually worried about it at all.

Q. What is the secret that has made girls from south Korea to successful for so many years? Tell us the secret to we can copy it in other countries.

SERI PAK: Well, so many ask the same question. The answer is I don't know why they're so good. I think first of all we have such a good talent mental. They are so strong mentally. That's the biggest have it. Second thing of course everybody works hard, but probably no Korean players have really worked hard-hard. First comes, last go. That's the way that -- I don't know still they're doing it, but it used to be that way we practiced, but same thing many players are the same way.

But it mostly is -- I think the condition of the LPGA, the tournaments. It used to be KLPGA, we are a tournament in Korea, it's not same as an LPGA event. The way they come to the U.S., when they practice or the equipment, they are giving a lot of time for the players. That all the condition helps a lot more players grow up quickly.

Depends on condition players most probably the biggest spots of when they play they're good. But I said, first of all, Korean players got to be mentally naturally strong. That's

why that used to get to be more standard that way.

Q. How do you personally and your foundation help girls get into golf, whether competitive or just for fun? Are you promoting women specifically in golf, and how do you do that?

SERI PAK: Actually I'm not actually doing just for the women. I do some sponsoring for the junior event, and me and Annika does, since last year, too, Asian junior events in Korea. It's the first year. It's really successful. Of course I'm sponsoring an AJGA event in the U.S. and in Korea.

As I said, we need some more players. So many players, actually they are -- we have to create opportunity. That's the way we have to do that.

Most things in my foundation was I'm trying to give more opportunities for the young kids. They grow up, they have dreams. We're trying to help them do their father's dream. That's the big goal of my foundation. That's why we're starting to work hard that way. So we have a lot of tournament sponsoring. At the same time, we help them a lot. I'm trying to make a great program for them in the future.

Q. You've played all over the world. What can golf courses and golf facilities do to encourage more girls and women of all ages get into golf? What would you suggest they should do?

SERI PAK: I think best condition I said was in U.S., I think. The LPGA the most great for the players because of the condition-wise, I said. Talk about a lot of time play the condition of players -- of sports. Not only golf, all sports need great conditions. They need some practice facility and great program, better players to competing each other and with bigger fields.

Golf is the same way. I play all over the world, but I think my best place in the U.S. because more for giving to the athlete, more understanding, helping, opening and listen.

That's why everywhere we go, we really just open the door for the athlete. That's the most biggest thing, I think, for all the athletes.

That's why I think great players grow up best in probably in LPGA Tour.

Q. I wanted to ask you, we've talked so much about the U.S. Women's Open in 1998, but you actually obviously won a major before that a few months earlier at the McDonald's LPGA Championship. Why is it that

so much more attention was placed in terms of in South Korea for young players and their fathers watching the U.S. Women's Open? Was the McDonald's not televised? Why did it catch on because you won the U.S. Women's Open?

SERI PAK: I think because back then, still televised first major event when I win, but more watching U.S. Women's Open like the playoff because of the hot, 18 holes, I was in hazards and it's really impossible shot and still continue -- it's not finished yet. Everybody think that shot after I went into the water, and they think it's already set, already knew that the result-wise I'm done. But still continued to have a chance and it's still not finished until 18, and we're going to 19 and finish in 20 holes.

That's probably why more memories about that event because back then our country has, as you know, internationally our country has a hard time being -- what is it?

Q. Economic?

SERI PAK: Economic-wise, yes, is happening. But it's really hard time for my country. But my shot from the water, the hazard, that giving it hope. So everybody thinking it's like -- that means a lot to my country.

I know we have a hard time, but we can still finish. We raise up. We stand up strongly. So that shot caused a lot of mean to our country economy problem, so that's why it's more memories and people think about the U.S. Women's Open more than McDonald's.

Q. So it was the emotion that came from that shot?

SERI PAK: Yes, yes.

Q. When you go back in time to when you were first getting out on the LPGA, the difficulty of sort of blazing that trail, being so far from home, what advice do you give players now when there's obviously a lot of South Korean players on Tour so it's different, but you're still leaving home and leaving everything that you know and it's a difficult transition. What do you tell young players about that?

SERI PAK: Back then actually I'm really -- that was when I was age of 20 and I still don't know anything about it because it's totally different language. Culture is different, language is different, food, travel. Everything is so new and I had never done it before, and of course it's really not easy to get used to it because first week of the tournament to end of the season -- actually I can't remember how I finished. That much I was so busy, studying from -- my

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

experience was studying -- starting the week of January, starting from that moment, most hard thing is packing, as you know. Pack, unpack, pack, unpack, and traveling to hotel, airport, golf course. This is all my life. I was told 18 years, all I'm thinking about -- of course I'm doing the tournament and excited about winning, but the hardest thing is at the end packing.

All the players are the same way, but most important thing is you have to enjoy it. Of course it's not -- it's very easy but hard to do that, but I realized that the life had to find right balance, which is find -- sometimes balance-wise one side is a lot heavier, which for me was golf. My life was only golf. Golf, golf, golf. Starting is golf, ending is golf. But at the same time, that's why I had a hard time, because I got slump, because I don't really smart to leave my life right way. I thought I'm pretty smart to have myself really great control, I have a great program and I have a great balance players. I thought it's going to be the kind of person I am.

But I find I just got a slump and then I realize how stupid I am for my life. I don't think I never take care of myself at all, only golf, golf, thinking about it, and there was never a break, and that's why I have a burnout.

That's why right now I have a great experience for the slump and at the same time come back, and now I play to another player -- to otherwise giving the most important thing is just find a great balance. Golf at the golf course and ending at the golf course, and then you leave from the golf course and you have to find the right and happy life balance, find yourself. That's the most important thing. Then you can play longer, you can play happier, you can play really excited.

I never done it before. This is my most mistake my life. But I don't want to have another or young kids have that mistake themselves.

I know they are smart enough, but hopefully they find the right balance for themselves. They're probably great for the future of Tour.

Q. Could you tell us how gratifying it's been to host a tournament here in the Los Angeles area, and can you give us an insight into how that developed, that you became the host of this tournament?

SERI PAK: Well, actually everybody involves it in California, especially weather and travel, and a lot of fans here, no doubt.

I always talk about long time -- I was doing the Tour, which is many years. I always dreamed about one day if I

possibly have a chance, can I have my own tournament with my name, but of course it's not going to be really possible.

But here I am. But we talked about this event two years ago. It takes a long time. But I have such a lucky person but I have such great sponsoring behind me, and my own company, we got together, which is great communicate each other. As you know, I'm a Korean player, more than in Korea, so K-pop really worldwide is a hit, and we're trying to have K-culture, K-food, K-sports. We're trying to get all together as a sport.

That's why as a sponsor we talk about this about a year ago, and we're trying to bring everything in U.S. because I'm playing LPGA Tour so many years and Hall of Famer. Is it going to happen? Yes, we have a chance to do that.

At the same time, California has a lot of fans out here, so you know the Korean fans a lot and we have a lot of Korean players in the Tour.

It's a perfect match for this week. I'm really grateful to be having here in LA in California the event, and at the same time, I'm so honored to have my own named tournament. I don't know how to tell to my field how grateful I am and how lucky I am person, but most important thing is this week and my tournament -- I said this earlier. My tournament I'm trying to give all the competing players to giving great opportunity to keeping their own dreams in many players, and hopefully all season, all players, we can try to help them as much as we could and have a great event this week.

Q. It's well-documented that your and Tiger Woods' careers in terms of accomplishment and the impact you've had internationally in golf. Can you comment on that and the fact that Tiger has established his tournament here in Los Angeles, and now you are beginning yours?

SERI PAK: Well, I don't know. I just started, so it's going to be -- I'm going to be better than Tiger in the future, I say. I say that. (Laughing).

Yes, of course it's not as high as what Tiger does because Tiger is such a great player, but at the same time, it's women's side and especially I'm Asian. I'm trying to do my best way that career and in the future I'm trying to get most better person to make this huge happening more. I'm trying to work hard.

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