

The Ascendant LPGA benefiting Volunteers of America

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The Colony, Texas, USA

Golf Clubs at The Tribute

Judy Rankin

Roberta Bowman

Press Conference

ROBERTA BOWMAN: Good afternoon. I'm Roberta Bowman with the LPGA. Earlier this morning the LPGA launched a very special DriveOn story featuring Judy Rankin.

We'll take just a moment to play the video.

(DriveOn video shown.)

ROBERTA BOWMAN: Let me just get started. A wise woman by the name of Judy Rankin once said that the older I get, the longer my story becomes.

Why did you want to tell your DriveOn story, Judy?

JUDY RANKIN: First of all, if you read the story that accompanies it, not everything when you're a little child and maybe playing golf or whatever the sport might be for a child out there, it's not in all just rosie. It's not always completely inspired by the child's desire.

I don't in any way want to say that I was an abused child. That's not what I'm trying to say. I'm trying to say that I believed some of the people around me, and my father certainly saw bigger things for me than I saw.

I certainly was pushed, but I was never told I had to play golf. But I was trusting in the people who loved me and tried to work hard, because we were very modest people financially, and it was either -- golf is too expensive to be our pastime. You need to take it somewhat seriously if we're going to pay for it and work at it.

So it's kind of that I see so many young kids now taking up the game and I see so many stories that we talk about on television with the LPGA Tour, and even some of the men on the PGA Tour that seem like such perfect stories and perfect families, this, that, and the other.



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I guess it struck me one day that people should know that it's not always perfect. Sometimes success does happen and sometimes listening to the wiser heads around you when you're young isn't such a bad idea.

And we didn't do everything right. I didn't do everything right. I divulged in in the written piece that I didn't finish high school. When I think about what I got to do in life and the places I've been and people I've worked with, I'm sort of stunned at that myself.

But I can say at least I was a good student. It was kind of a crazy thing to do, but it was a thing where golf started to provide an opportunity and I took it. I always thought I would finish at any given moment and I never did. And I'm not proud of that and not happy about it, but it's one of those things that we did wrong; yet it fortunately did not seriously hold me back.

I've never fibbed about it. When people ask me I say where I went to high school, but I never did say I graduated from high school. For the record, I didn't ever not tell the truth. I just didn't tell.

ROBERTA BOWMAN: I would say that I think you've got a Ph.D. in the ways of the world though, so that's neat. So the written piece that you talked about, it is just chock full of things I never knew about you. What's interesting is when somebody comes into your living room every week you almost feel like you know them.

JUDY RANKIN: Yeah.

ROBERTA BOWMAN: Yet I didn't. How long did you know your husband before you got married?

JUDY RANKIN: Not quite a month. (Laughter.) I think that's...

ROBERTA BOWMAN: That's like the most un-Judy thing I found from the piece.

JUDY RANKIN: It was, it was, but it's kind of like if you were ever going to do something crazy, this was the time do it. I think everybody knows how sometimes new love makes you a little crazy.

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ROBERTA BOWMAN: For sure.

JUDY RANKIN: Yeah.

ROBERTA BOWMAN: For sure. So the title of your DriveOn story was, with gratitude from an accidental trailblazer. You have been described as a trailblazer by a number of people. What do you mean by an accidental trailblazer?

JUDY RANKIN: Well, I meant what I think is the truth for most people who might be the first to do something or almost the first to do something or the first to be pretty successful, is you don't know you're doing that at the time.

You're plodding along day after day doing the very best you can, and it's some time way later in your life you look back and you say, gee, I'm so glad that worked out and that I had success and now I look at people like Kay Cockerill, Dottie Pepper, people all over the golf world, young women all over the golf world, who they're simply accepted as part of the scene.

And so that was very accidental. It is the one thing I look back on and I really can take some pleasure in, that these people have good jobs and they're good at what they do. And it's not just here. It's on the BBC and Sky Sports and places all around the world. It's in Japan, Korea. I really am pleased for that.

But the people I should really point out are the people at ABC Sports who gave me my first chance. Heaven only knows they took a risk with me, and I'm very grateful it worked out.

ROBERTA BOWMAN: I would say it worked out.

Q. We talk a lot about the 13 Founders, but there were a lot of women that helped the tour go after it began. Now it's here. How have you seen the game evolve and what have been some of your favorite moments throughout the years?

JUDY RANKIN: Well, it's one of the blessings of 38 years now in television, that I've had the ability to stay close to my tour for a long period of time, to the PGA Tour, and watch how golf in general has developed.

When I speak more specifically about the LPGA Tour, it's just every decade and sometimes two or three times in a decade there have been crossover moments. We were quite sure in my young years that the Colgate Palmolive and Dinah Shore event was giant crossover moment for us, and it was, because it gave us the first kind of -- would you call it a commercial stance on general television

promoting our tour and the tournament?

So that was one of those crossover moments. And there have been many, many of them along the way. I've watched the money grow, I've watched the number of talented people grow, and I've watched the talent grow. I think in the last decade the talent that women, the best women in the game show us every week is pretty astounding. I always really hope that people will come see them play in person because I think that sort of seals the deal.

Also, you know, you can't discount money. This year the LPGA Tour plays for well over \$91 million. I think way back, way, way, way back when I was very successful our entire tour was worth \$4 million, so it's come a long, long way.

Q. What have been some your favorites moments? I know that's a hard question -- both in the booth and out of the booth on the golf course, or any that stand out in particular? I know there are a lot of majors and interviews to choose from.

JUDY RANKIN: Well, I won the Dinah Shore in '76. That was one of the great moments of my life because I realized actually on the last hole and later that I had always gone there with the intent of trying to win the championship; I never really thought it would be for me.

And so it was particularly gratifying when it was for me. I also won at a place outside London. The club is Sunningdale, the European Open, which is one of the very special wins I've ever had. I won twice there, and I suppose -- I'm always asked what's your favorite golf course. That's my favorite golf course. It's hundred and some years old now and just a wonderful old place that's kind of formed by time.

So I love that. I have loved things I've seen. I saw a lot of Tiger golf up close and personal. I thank him for his access all those years.

I loved watching Lorena Ochoa play. I think the LPGA misses her every day, but she's got a great life.

I saw Annika shoot 59 and come run and hug me. Now, you say things that aren't a Judy thing. That wasn't an Annika thing. She was overwhelmed with what she had accomplished.

I was a great friend with JoAnne Carner. We were always going back and forth with each other playing.

And through televisions and through two Solheim Cup



experiences, I've been really lucky to stay close with a lot of pretty much today players.

Through all of that, Juli Inkster and I became very close.

And I think you all probably know that my real claim to fame television is I took Dottie Pepper to TV for the first time and I told them I thought they ought to try her, that I thought she could do it. That's going to be my enduring claim to fame.

ROBERTA BOWMAN: There is a long list of them for sure. There is an antidote that you shared in your story about a suitcase and \$400, and I know that's an important gift to you.

JUDY RANKIN: It was. I was allowed to play -- didn't have a membership, but I was allowed to play at this nine hole course in St. Louis called AAA. I had won St. Louis junior and won a couple little things around St. Louis, and I was eight years old and my father was going to take me to Orlando to the National Pee Wee.

We were of very modest means, so I don't know how he was putting that together, but we were going. Before we left, the members at that little nine hole course gave me new suitcase and it had \$400 in it, which in 1953 would let you make a driving trip and so on.

So I never forgot that. It was very impactful in my life. They didn't give it to my father, they gave to me. So when I was speaking with friends about what I might do to sort of give back a little bit, I didn't have the wherewithal or the time to teach or any of those things. We had this idea.

I live out in West Texas and I have ever since I've been married. It's a little bit of an isolated part of the state and we don't see the nest of professional golf ever if maybe once in a great, great while.

So I started this program that would help juniors travel their game in the summer, and that's where the name came from, was the JTR Suitcase Fund. We do that and we try to give kids the funds to travel in the summer around the state or wherever that would be, but we also started a great program right here to the VOA tournament. Mike King, the CEO of VOA, he helped me by giving my five pro-am spots so I could bring five kids from West Texas to play in the pro-am, which this year grew a little bit.

We brought six kids. And I shouldn't really say kids. They're young people. All high schoolers. To play in the pro-am. We had four girls and two boys and it was very successful. Earlier today.

And they're really lovely kids who work hard at golf and make good grades and all these things. But they got an exposure here to professional golf, to getting to know some of the players playing with them, and then I give them the best little tour I can of how television works.

Q. Judy, I was wondering if you think that there is the potential for a player like we saw with Lorena or Annika, some of your favorite memories were of these super dominant players, and right now the talent is so deep on tour. Curious, do you think that's even possible in the modern era?

JUDY RANKIN: I don't know. We didn't think it was possible in their era, but they did it. I think there is a possibility. I am fascinated with -- it has to do with desire. That's one thing I can't tell you. But I'm fascinated with the impeccable talent of Nelly Korda. I think that's a possibility.

I think Jin Young Ko has already shown us in the last couple years that it is possible for her to be quite the dominant player. Now she has a wrist injury and whether that affects her in the long-term, we don't know.

But there keep being players popping up from all around the world with the ability. We also every year have greater depth. So I can't tell you if it's actually possible, but I don't think it's probable, but I think it's possible.

Q. When you look back at your life was there a moment, maybe it was that Dinah Shore win, that you realized that you made it? Was there a time where you look back at your childhood and where you've come and how far you've come and you go, you know what, I've made it?

JUDY RANKIN: That was a defining moment for me, because like I said, I realized that I had been trying to do that for any number of years but never really believed it.

So that was a very defining moment for me. I think you have to forgive me if my numbers are wrong, but I did win the next week, which shows you what something like that does for you.

My recollection is -- hope it's not a fib -- that I won by eight shots. So that's how confidence builds with a golfer, and so on.

And I did, I felt more accomplished at that point. I had done other things well in the game prior to that, but that was such an important win. So, yeah, that was a defining moment.

And to tell you the truth, almost every year after the first

couple has been a defining moment for me in television, because I felt -- first, I didn't know if I could stand up in front of people and talk, and secondly, I started to feel capable. The last thing that happened to me in television was I know longer memorized things. I was able to think.

When you're working in live television, that ability to think is -- I can't tell you how helpful that is. Memory in broadcast television isn't that good.

Q. You had a lot of dreams and goals in your career, and at this point in your life now I'm sure you still have dreams. If you do, what are some of those dreams?

JUDY RANKIN: Well, the kind of dreams you dream is I wouldn't be quite this old. (Laughter.)

And this could go on a little longer, because this tour and my television friends are an awful important part of things to me. I guess it's no longer dreams, it's what I hope for. You hope you keep reasonable health.

I don't know. I will not work again this year and I don't know what next year holds. If it holds anything, it would be minimal, because Morgan has done a nice job taking over my position.

Then for that to work out you have to hope as you age that you keep sharp. It's now more hopes. Dreams take some years to happen. Now I just hope for the next best year.

ROBERTA BOWMAN: When we were producing this piece, it was just so much fun to work with you on it. You made an ad lib in the script at the very end.

JUDY RANKIN: I did.

ROBERTA BOWMAN: We'll save that for your last moment and last words here today.

JUDY RANKIN: Okay. So she is very precise, even with time, and I was trying to be as precise, but she told me when she was scripting things that if I needed to do a little bit of my own words to make it comfortable that I could.

So as we finally had one of my voice talking about my story, I finished it by saying, I'm Judy Rankin, and I still DriveOn.

So she let me leave "still" in there, which I thought was appropriate, since everybody else that's been doing these is about 30 years old.

ROBERTA BOWMAN: Well, it was a wonderful addition. It's been a remarkable career and life journey. Telling your

story, Judy, as we've talked about, is a real gift of trust.

So on behalf of all your fans, on behalf of all of your friends, thank you for your gift of trust and for still driving on. Thank you. Warm wishes to you.

JUDY RANKIN: And thank Roberta Bowman for all your effort. You are the ultimate professional. Thank you. Thanks, Sarah.

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