

USGA Media Conference

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USA

Paula Creamer

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We are officially one month from balls in the air at the Olympic Club for the 76th U.S. Women's Open, and we are pleased to be joined by 2010 champion Paula Creamer, who has accepted a special exemption into the championship.

Paula, I'm going to turn it over to you. What does the Women's Open mean to you, and how excited are you to tee it up in San Francisco especially?

PAULA CREAMER: Well, first off, I really want to give a huge thank you to the USGA for allowing me to play this year. You know, it was very difficult not being able to go and play last year in the Open, and I was pretty bummed about it, so to be able to have this exemption for me and to come in and play, it means the world, especially in the Bay Area.

The U.S. Open and any event that I've ever played has always been so high on my list of accomplishments or wanting to -- when you're an amateur, you want to win the U.S. Am, you want to win the U.S. Girls, you want to always win the biggest events in that category of where you're at, and to have won the U.S. Open in 2010 was definitely on the top part of my career list for sure of memorable moments and memorable wins.

I can't wait to get to San Fran and tee it up there.

THE MODERATOR: Paula, you're from the Bay Area; it's extra special to have a Women's U.S. Open there. Talk about what I think was your first trip to the Olympic Club as a kid.

PAULA CREAMER: It was. I went on Saturday in 1998, so I got to be there for the weekend and I was 11 going on 12, and it was kind of when I was really starting to get serious into golf. I went with my mom and my dad, and it was awesome. It was one of the coolest things, just all of the grandstands. I've never seen anything like it before and it was like, wow, this is what I want to do. It being obviously played in my backyard as well, just made it even more special, the fact that so many great golfers were there and all the stories, and it's kind of like its own Oakmont in my eyes with just the history that's behind it.

I remember I got -- my dad took me to where you could get anything you want, whether it was a tee shirt, a hat, whatever, and I got an umbrella, and this umbrella was like bigger than I was, but I think we actually ended up just giving it -- having to throw it away a couple years ago because it was not looking so good anymore.

But it was something that stuck with me, and it was a big American flag with the Olympic Club on it and stars and all of that, and it was just one of my favorite moments with my parents was getting my umbrella at the Olympic Club.

THE MODERATOR: Hopefully you don't have to use any umbrellas this year at the championship. 17 career appearances for you in the championship, 11 top 20s; you obviously play extremely well. The Women's Open is known as the toughest test. You won at Oakmont, which is an even tougher test. Why do you think it suits your game?

PAULA CREAMER: Well, I think just the mentality of going in and knowing that you're going to make mistakes. It's never really a birdie-fest, it's always trying to make as many pars as you can.

I like that. I like being able to grind it out. I like tougher conditions.

We get to play some of the greatest golf courses, as well, and I definitely study up on the courses and kind of where you need to be, where you don't need to be, the X's and then the green lights.

I feel like for me, the U.S. Open is such a mental challenge that not a lot of people can last that long. You know, it's a challenge starting Monday. You want to be able to learn how to do your practice rounds. You want to be able to not be tired come Wednesday afternoon; the tournament hasn't even started.

So I think it's just a learning experience each time, and I like that. I like how it is. It's a struggle. It's hard. But it's rewarding, too, at the end.

THE MODERATOR: It's hard to believe, but last year it was 10 years since your win, which certainly served for a trip down memory lane. When you think about that



moment walking up the 18th fairway after hitting that shot, tell us a little bit about what that feeling still is like for you.

PAULA CREAMER: Yeah, last year when we were able to sit down and talk about it and I watched some of the tapes before I did that just to kind of remember every shot that I hit, when I saw myself walking up the 18th fairway, I was like zooming down that -- ready to get up to that green. I think I should have just done like a catwalk down the fairway, take it a little bit easier. But it was one of the greatest moments looking over my shoulder and seeing only one red number on the board and looking at my caddie and just feeling so accomplished and feeling like all those tough times with the surgery, with just previous U.S. Opens, not being able to finish and not being able to close the deal, to finally have gotten it there, it was surreal. It felt like it was yesterday, honestly.

With that, when that happened, I just had this confidence in me that if I could win there, I could win anywhere.

Q. Hopefully you can go back to last year and tell us what went into the decision of not playing last year, all of the tournaments but specifically the U.S. Women's Open, and then your decision to come back now. Why now?

PAULA CREAMER: Sure. I was trying to rest my body as much as I could and talking over with all of my doctors and my physio and my trainers and everybody. We definitely made a decision on, okay, let's start off in April last year, and that was going to be when I was going to come back out on Tour. I was going to take those couple months off and just kind of figure out where I was at.

And then obviously the pandemic hit, and it was almost a -- I hate to say it, but for me it was almost a blessing in disguise where we all looked at each other and we're like, okay, we're going to use this time to really work on what we need to work on, work on where I need to get stronger, be a little bit more flexible in certain areas, and not playing in the U.S. Open and not playing in tournaments last year was not the easiest of decisions, but right now sitting here I have practiced a lot, more than I think I have in a very, very long time, and I don't feel any pain, which to me, it's worth it right now.

So the timing is great. I like the Kingsmill golf course, so that was another reason why I chose that to be my first event back out, and I'm really looking forward to it.

Knock on wood I stay pain-free and I can go out there and do what I want to do.

Q. When is the last time you felt this good?

PAULA CREAMER: Oh, gosh. It's been a long time. You know, you always think you feel good because you're mentally telling yourself that. But truly, it's been years. It has definitely been years.

You know, in 2017 after that surgery, I just came back too soon, and I felt okay, but I just -- I pushed it too hard, and that was a mistake that I will have to live with for the rest of my life, and looking at it on my career, it wasn't the best of moves that I did. But I'm a fighter, I'm a grinder, and I didn't want to sit out.

When this happened, I just really had to sit there and kind of sit on my hands and tell me, okay, we're not going, we're not doing this this time.

Q. Paula, what's your schedule look like heading into the U.S. Women's Open, and what's the biggest question you're hoping to answer with your game in this return?

PAULA CREAMER: The biggest question? Meaning --

Q. Yeah, just biggest question you're hoping to answer with your game in this return, maybe something you're trying to prove to yourself.

PAULA CREAMER: Well, I am playing Kingsmill, and then U.S. Open will be my next one after that. You know, for me, consistency is something that I am really, really working on. I'm back with my coach David Whelan, who I spent 12 years with on Tour. Geez, I started with him when I was 15, 16 years old, and it was great to be back. We've been working really hard. We see each other two, three times a week, going to Bradenton, Orlando, Bradenton, Orlando, so we're definitely putting in the time, and we sat down and he asked me, what are your goals, what do you want to do, and I was honest with him and told him I obviously want to get back in the winner's circle, but I want to be consistent.

That was always my strength was fairways and greens, fairways and greens, and then I kind of lost that for a while, and that's something we've really worked on. I've changed a bunch of equipment in my bag with TaylorMade, new irons, new woods, new wedges, and just trying to do what can help me the most when I'm in certain situations out there when I'm nervous or not and knowing that I can rely on what we've worked hard on.

Q. Is there one club that you kind of put in your bag that you may have not had in your bag five years ago?

PAULA CREAMER: Yeah, actually I have right now, I'm

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

going back and forth with a 9-wood, believe it or not. I never in a million years thought I would ever say that. The TaylorMade 9-wood is just a thing of beauty. I used a 7-wood with TaylorMade, an R7 for years and years, probably 14 years out on Tour, and I finally took that one out a couple years ago. But I'm in between the 5-iron and that right now. A lot of it'll depend on the golf course and the setup with my wedges, but it's a pretty -- it's nice. It's high. It goes far and lands soft. But I never thought I'd have a 9-wood in my bag.

Q. You talked a little bit about the Bay Area, but can you elaborate on the sentimental significance of coming back here, and along with that, how much history you have at Olympic Club? Have you played there often? Obviously you grew up in the East Bay. What's kind of your history and affinity for that course?

PAULA CREAMER: I went to the U.S. Open in '98 when Lee won, and then I honestly didn't go back for I think it was in 2017 when Cristie Kerr had her wine event for her foundation, for her Birdies For Breast Cancer, and I actually went and played it then, and that was the last time that I've been there.

It was in great shape. It's one of those golf courses that I think is always in good shape. They do such a good job maintaining it, that prestige of going there, and the rough was thick. This is probably the first time, actually I know it is, the first time I won't go and play the U.S. Open before like I normally do. About a month and a half before I always go out and play the U.S. Open course just for practice, and this will be the first time I haven't done that. But I feel like I've watched enough videos and things that I can kind of work my way around the golf course.

I'll try to get out there a little sooner than I normally would, maybe Saturday or Sunday, to see if I can get out there and practice at least, putt.

Q. So you've only played it at that Cristie Kerr event?

PAULA CREAMER: Mm-hmm.

Q. Is there any advantage? It's home, obviously, for you, but it sounds like you don't have that much familiarity with the course.

PAULA CREAMER: I just have been there. When we would play Lake Merced I would go over and practice. I have done that. Like I said, I haven't played.

I'd love to play the par-3 course. That would be something I would just do on a day off in the afternoon, I'd love to go

and play that.

But I honestly, as in having an upper hand or that, no. Maybe the weather. Other than knowing the ball doesn't fly as far, things like that. That's stuff everybody learns in a practice round anyways.

Q. I know you obviously lived here for 14 years, but you've been gone for much longer now. What does the Bay Area still mean to you, the fact that this Open is here where you started your life, how significant is that, I guess?

PAULA CREAMER: I mean, it's home. It'll always be home. No matter where I've lived longer or not, whenever I'm announced on the first tee, it's always Pleasanton, California. Anytime I represent the United States, my flag is always California. I'm a Cali girl, and you can't take that away from me just because I live here in Orlando now. But I'm excited.

I know that I won't be able to see as many families, all of the protocols and things that we have to do, but hopefully we'll be able to have quite a bit of fans out there because that always makes it special, and then the next week after I'm playing Lake Merced, so I'll be there for a couple weeks, and I'm just looking forward to actually packing a suitcase and getting out and playing some golf and being able to go into my hometown makes it even sweeter.

Q. So you will play Lake Merced the week after?

PAULA CREAMER: Yes.

Q. What's the biggest difference you see in your game now that you're pain-free for the first time in a long time?

PAULA CREAMER: I would say I have a little more club head speed for sure. I'm not as afraid of going after a ball.

We had to work a lot on my grip. I've always had a tough time with my right hand being more on top because my left hand doesn't sit as well on the club because of my thumb surgery. It's so stiff. I have so much scar tissue that it's tough to be able to put my right hand on top. Once that happens, then bad things happen with your plane and all of that, and right now being able to -- I've really loosened up all the scar tissue in my left thumb and am able to get my right hand on top, and I have a more on-plane golf swing which I can repeat more and more, time after time, which is something that, like I said, David Whelan and I were really trying to work on, something that I can just repeat. It all starts before the ball even moves and with my posture and my grip.

That was a huge thing, and now being able to do that, I can actually practice more, hit more shots and be able to kind of groove this before I get out there in tournaments, which before I wasn't able to do that.

Q. You mentioned you've been practicing more than ever recently. How much time are you putting into practice right now?

PAULA CREAMER: You know, I do a lot. Time-wise, I'm not 15 anymore, so it's not quite like that, but I put quite a bit in in the mornings and then take my little lunch break and then I get back out there and I get back out on the course and play.

I'm just enjoying it, so whatever my heart, my mind, my body tells me is kind of what I'm doing. If I'm a little tired, then fine, I won't quite put in as much time into it, but it'll be efficient, and there's days where I've been out there literally from 7:30 to 7:00 p.m. at night because I'm just enjoying it and having fun. It's nice that I live 10 yards from the driving range, too, so I can use the range there and hit balls.

Q. Before this break when you were able to give your wrist the time off it needed, how much were you able to practice through that pain?

PAULA CREAMER: You know, I honestly didn't touch a club for months and months and months. You know, it was quite a long time until the end of last year where I actually picked up the first club.

I did a lot of swings and things in my simulator, but to actually go out on the driving range and hit balls, I didn't do until maybe November last year.

It was quite the sight. I can tell you I hit some golf shots that I just never thought I could do. It was a surprise. I was very upset with myself for taking that much time off, as we always say. Two weeks is something, but when you take off seven, eight months that's a whole 'nother ballgame right there, but it was nice to be able to get the club in my hands.

My grips were -- they were struggling. They were a little slick you could say. But my dad, my fiance were in there cleaning them up for me getting them ready to go.

Q. What about Olympic makes it unique as a U.S. Open venue to you?

PAULA CREAMER: Well, I would say you play the first hole as a par-5 and then you don't see another par-5 until

No. 15 or 16 -- 16 and 17, the two par-5s. That setup right there is unusual in itself.

But I think the fact that the men have been there, they've hosted so many big tournaments and they're going to continue hosting so many big tournaments, a Ryder Cup and all of that, it just shows that it's a great track and it's timeless. It doesn't matter how the game changes, they can keep it there and keep bringing the big-time events there.

I do believe that the fact that I think there's only like one fairway bunker, it's the big trees, it's tough to actually lose balls unless you hit them up into those trees, but it's just a different layout, and the prestige and the names that have been on that trophy that have come from the Olympic Club are some of the greatest, and the stories that you hear, they're amazing. Of course; how could you not want the Burgerdog, too? I mean, that I am looking forward to. Hopefully it's open, Hot Dog Bill's is open during the U.S. Open. But it'll be fun I think to see, to challenge us in so many different ways because they could put tee boxes wherever they want there. There's just so many options.

Q. Was there ever a time during this long break that you thought, I'm enjoying this part of life so much that I might not go back?

PAULA CREAMER: No, uh-uh. It was more of when, not necessarily I'm not going back. I miss it. I love playing golf. Playing golf when you're playing bad is very hard to do, but it's still -- I love the game. Right now this is just a challenge for me to overcome everything that I've had to go through, and it challenged my mental game, too.

I have to realize that my expectations are not going to be as high as they used to be, not right now. I haven't played in tournaments. I have to be a little bit more easier on myself, which I've never been able to do before, so it's all kind of a new beginning.

But honestly even when I wasn't playing I was always thinking about it. I was always, should I go hit balls tomorrow, should I do this, constantly doing that.

But I'm thankful for it because every time I step out the door and put my golf shoes on, I enjoy it. I really am loving what I do right now.

Q. Is the garden still alive?

PAULA CREAMER: We actually moved and we couldn't take the garden with us, and I drove by the garden and the garden is no longer alive. My heart hurts really bad, honestly.

THE MODERATOR: Paula, we really appreciate your time today, and I know on behalf of everyone at the USGA hearing you say you're swinging pain-free, we could not be more excited, so we will see you in just a few short weeks at the Olympic Club.

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