

USGA Media Conference

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USA

Juli Inkster

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Welcome everyone. Thank you for joining us. For the first time saying it out loud, I'm pleased to announce that Juli Inkster will be the winner of the 2022 Bob Jones Award. I appreciate everyone keeping that confidential until we officially announce tomorrow.

As all of you know, the USGA's highest honor, and not just given to a great golfer, but a great person as well who sets an example in the game.

Juli, I believe it was someone you know quite well and who is newer to us, Mike Whan, who made the phone call. Talk about what it was like receiving that call.

JULI INKSTER: Usually when Mike Whan calls me it's not good news, so I was surprised. It's surreal. I mean, Bob Jones is a legend in the golf game, and for me to think that I'm going to be on that trophy with all those other great players and great ambassadors for golf, it's very humbling.

My dad is a huge fan of Bobby Jones and he's not doing well right now. For me to be able to tell him I won the award was just really special. So, you know, you go through this life and you have a lot of different ups and downs, and I know I did a lot with my career.

Looking back on it, I don't think I would've changed anything. I think the Solheim Cup and winning the Amateurs and the Open, it was a great path, and I'm really proud to be able to say I'm a Bobby Jones winner.

Q. When we think about your career, even outside of the course, there are so many things that come to mind. One is the fact that so many people look up to you as mentor. Is that something that consciously changed at some point in your career? Did it just sort of happen?

JULI INKSTER: You know, I've always been kind of a people person. You know, I never really was -- I was competitive on the golf course, but not really competitive with my peers. I always wanted to see, especially younger players, kind of succeed. Being an LPGA player and traveling on the road is not easy. Especially for a really good collegiate player coming out, sometimes they

struggle and lose confidence.

I just kind of just try to, if they want help, I help them. If they don't, I kind of stay away. But I think a lot of people starting out were kind of scared to talk to me because of my reputation as a winner and they wouldn't like come up to me, but I think once they figured out that I'm just a down-to-earth person, then I think more people started to come up to me.

Q. We hear a lot these days if you see it you can be it. One moment that comes to mind for me and it's iconic in Women's Open history is mamas bringing home the trophy. You were still the only one to win a Women's Open as a mother. Many have become a mother after winning the Women's Open. Luckily these days it's less far and few between that moms are winning on the tour, but really feels like you helped with others, like Nancy Lopez, really blaze a trail there. What has that impact been like and the experience been like for you?

JULI INKSTER: That's what I'm most proud of, is being able to raise two kids on the tour. They turned out to be two pretty good kids. You know, we're very close and they're my best friends. We started out traveling with Haley at six weeks. We didn't have daycare, we didn't have maternity leave, and so all these things have come to fruition because of myself and Cathy Marino, Cathy Gerring, Lopez. You should be able to follow your passion and also be a mom, but it's not easy.

You know, being a mom out there, it's two full time jobs. Sometimes you go to bed in the same clothes you woke up in. Being able to win the U.S Open at 39, so I tried a lot and I never did win.

It was one thing that was just itching in my craw. To be able to say I'm a U.S. Open winner and having -- let's see, Haley was nine and Cori was five at the time, it wasn't really -- it was the Open, but it was also the way I did it that made me really proud.

Q. This is the USGA's highest honor. Looking back on your career you played in the USGA Championship over five decades and played in more than 40 USGA championships. Just speak to what the USGA means to you and the memories that stick out.



JULI INKSTER: Well, you know, the USGA is the ultimate governing body of golf, and they always really test you, not only physically, but mentally on the golf course. I got my first case of that playing in the U.S. Amateur. Being able to win three of those, looking back on my career people ask me, What's your greatest accomplishment?

One would be the Solheim Cup captain, but the other one would be winning three U.S. Amateurs in a row. Winning 18 matches in a row at three different golf courses in three different years is really hard to do.

So that's really what I've been most proud of. And then be able to add a couple U.S. Opens off that. But I think really growing up, Pasatiempo really made me a golfer that played USGA golf courses well because it's so tough and pars are your friend.

Usually when you play USGA golf courses, you make a lot of pars you're going to do really well really. I think it really tested me for those events.

Q. I know you are receiving an award based on an icon. I would like to talk about an award that is named after you. We're a ways in now to the Juli Inkster Senior Award. What impact do you think that has had?

JULI INKSTER: Yeah, hopefully as we move forward it's going to have more of an impact. We're trying to keep these kids in, to stay in school for all four years and not leave their team hanging after three and a half years.

As a collegiate coach you go into a season thinking you're going to be able to vie for the national championship, and then in October, November, your two best players or one best player qualifies for the LPGA and they leave.

So we're trying to get the kids to stay in all four years. I get to do a two-day mentorship with them, and get two exemptions into tournaments. Workday gives them about \$35,000 to start their career, so it's definitely worth doing it, and we're trying to grow it a little bit more each time.

Andy Bush is helping me out with this and I think we're going to grow it.

Q. Congratulations.

JULI INKSTER: Thanks.

Q. You mentioned that your dad is a big Bob Jones fan. What do you remember him talking to you about Bobby Jones maybe in your younger years? What was your first knowledge of him?

JULI INKSTER: Well, from my dad. My dad is a hack. He's a horrible golfer, but he loves the game and he follows the game. When I first started playing at 15 I did interlock grip because of Jack Nicklaus and Tom Watson.

The more I got into the game the more he talked about the history of the game. He's a big reader. You know, especially being at Pasatiempo and the history they have there, you know, just started following Ben Crenshaw and the older names and how they enjoy the past history of the game.

I just kind of fell into it, so I'm kind of like just kind of following my dad around and whatever books he's reading I read with him. Especially with like Marian Holland getting into the World Golf Hall of Fame. I didn't know anything about Marian Holland. I knew I played the golf course but I didn't know who she was.

He made me realize who she was and what a bad ass she was. I don't know, I think it's important for a lot of these kids, especially younger kids, to really learn how the game started and who started the game, you know.

Q. One of my favorite stories that you tell is how you took home a few range balls from the U.S. Women's Open, which obviously didn't disqualify you. (Laughter.)

JULI INKSTER: Out of sight, out of mind.

Q. I love it.

JULI INKSTER: That was my first time I ever traveled out of California. I qualified at 18 for the U.S. Amateur at Indianapolis Country Club, and I used to play with the golf balls that I found in the canyons at Pasatiempo, and I get there and they're all brand new Titleist, and so I did take a few home with me.

Q. What's your schedule this year? When will we see you?

JULI INKSTER: I think I'm going to try to play Kia or whatever it is now, San Diego. I'm real close and my youngest daughter just moved there, so I have private housing. I'm going to probably play Kia, and I don't know after that.

It's up in the air.

Q. All right. Well, hopefully it's more than that.

JULI INKSTER: Yeah.

Q. You win those three Women's Amateurs and then you go 17 years until you win the next USGA event. Was there a point where you thought, This isn't going to happen?

JULI INKSTER: Yeah, I lost '92 to Patty Sheehan at Oakmont. She birdied the last two holes. Yeah, I mean, you get to a point where you think, You know, I'm 38, 39, and am I ever going to win a U.S. Open?

But I'll never forget driving into Old Waverly and I'm by myself and driving in, having a great year, playing really well, and I just told myself, I said, If you're ever going to win an Open, this is the time to do it.

On the first hole had like a five-footer -- no, the second hole, par-5, five-footer for birdie, and I told myself, If you're going to win the open you got to make these. I made that and I just kind of, I don't know, I was very calm, very confident in my game. Course set up well for me.

But then I think I had a four or five shot lead going into the last round and I'm thinking, How can I mess this up? Because it is just my tournament to win and my tournament to lose.

I know I didn't get any sleep that night. I kind of was leaking oil the first seven or eight holes, and then had a little talking to myself and played well really well coming in and ended up winning it.

It's funny. I can't remember what I had for lunch yesterday but little things like that I just will never forget the talk I had with myself just driving in the parking lot at Old Waverly.

Q. Talk about the last round at Prairie Dunes. That was one the great closing rounds in Women's U.S. Open history.

JULI INKSTER: That was one of the best grinding, up and down -- you know, I hit the ball horrible, but I got up and down from the garbage cans. I just kept myself in it. Those greens are so tough. I didn't have one three-putt all week.

Then Saturday night, of course, as you guys all know, I was the last one on the range just trying to find something. I remember Brian going, Can we go home now? Finally I found something, and I took it to the range the next day and it helped.

I got off to a really good start. Birdied 2 and I was starting to hit a lot of greens and I was still putting well. I just played an amazing round of golf, especially on that golf course. But I did get some up and downs. On 15 made a

great up and down from way right to the left and took about a 15-footer for par.

Yeah, that was one of my best grinding weeks of all-time.

Q. For three days you had nothing for those first three rounds.

JULI INKSTER: Nothing. But you know what? You guys all know, I just never give up. I just keep going. You never know when you're going to hit that one shot that gets you going or make that one putt that gets you going.

I just grinded. I had a lot of -- I had success there. I won the 1980 U.S. Amateur there, so I felt comfortable on the golf course. It was just trying to find a swing.

Finally found it on Sunday.

Q. One more and then I'll shut up. You won the two U.S. Women's Opens at the time when three other Hall of Famers were at the peak of their games, Sorenstam, Webb and Se Ri Pak. I think there was a stretch from '98 through '03 when the four of you won 18 of the 24 majors that were played. Seemed like you guys were going at each other the whole time. Did that make it even more special, you were going up against these other players who were Hall of Famers at the peak of their game?

JULI INKSTER: Yeah, and a lot younger. (Laughter.) Yeah, you know, you always want to -- Karrie and Annika and Se Ri, you know, they're Hall of Famers, great players, but I always felt like I could compete. Maybe not all year, but I felt like I could compete with them when I'm on my great game and playing well.

And it was a challenge for me. You know, I was traveling with two kids and trying to compete with the best. I felt like when I was playing well or when I went head-to-head with them that I held my own.

I think that's a little bit of my competitiveness and a little bit of wanting to win and wanting to show them that you can be a mom and play on the tour.

Q. Going back to something you said at the beginning, being a mom on tour, you said you were on the road six weeks after giving birth. Were you playing?

JULI INKSTER: Yeah. I played the Dinah Shore six weeks after I had Haley.

Q. The U.S. Ams are great, but that might be your greatest accomplishment.

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JULI INKSTER: I think I made the cut, yeah. We didn't have maternity leave. We didn't have daycare, so it was -- and I didn't have the greatest year in 1989, so I had to get out there and play. I don't know if it was good or bad, but I did it.

Haley was sleeping in closets and bathrooms and anywhere it was dark. I'm traveling with my parents and not sure I was playing good golf or being a good mom or being a good wife or whatever, but you know, I did it and I think it made me stronger.

I know it made me a better mom, so I think doing that, I think once you do that, I feel like you think you can do anything, you know. (Smiling.)

Q. How does it feel to see how the tour has progressed?

JULI INKSTER: It's great. Yeah, it's great. We have great daycare. Smuckers has been an amazing sponsor for daycare. They have maternity leave. I think get up to a year and a half now, or two years maternity leave.

You know, at that point, knowing me, I wouldn't have taken two years off. I probably would've taken three or four months off and got back into it.

But everybody is different. Everybody has to do what's best for them.

You know, I think the LPGA right now is in a good place. A lot of good young moms out there trying to do it. They all tell me, How did you do it? (Laughter.) They ask me, I don't believe you did this.

But it's hard. It's really hard. But at the end of the day, I would have been really disappointed if I didn't have kids. We've had so much fun and done so many great things together. They still love to travel, which is amazing.

So, yeah, it's pretty special how it all turned out.

Q. I wanted to speak for a second about the ProMedica sponsorship of the U.S. Women's Open and the elevation of purses. What do you think that means not just to U.S. Women's Open, but to the women's game overall?

JULI INKSTER: Well, I think it's great. You know, I never really realized why couldn't we have a title sponsor for the USGA, for U.S. Open? ProMedica is the perfect sponsor. They were there at the Solheim Cup and I've gotten to know a lot of them. They're very passionate about

women's golf and growing the game.

I mean, you look at Chevron stepping up now for the ANA. They're going to do an amazing job. Yeah I'm disappointed that we're leaving Palm Springs for Houston, but everything evolves. This is going to keep evolving the LPGA.

You know, look at the purses now these girls are playing for. That's where they should be. They work really hard. They work just as hard as the men or harder because they're traveling commercial, renting cars, staying in private housing. Nothing is easy for them.

I think ProMedica has set the bar to where we can go from here as far as just regular tournaments, not just majors. You know, I think Mollie is going to do a really good job with that. Elevate the lower purses to get them up a little bit so every week we're playing for some nice money.

Q. Who taught you how to grind?

JULI INKSTER: (Laughter.) I think my two older brothers when they beat the crap out of me every day. I don't know.

Q. Physically or in sport?

JULI INKSTER: No, physically and mentally and in sports. But I don't know. I just think it's just built in you.

No one ever taught me never give up. It was just in my blood that I never game up. You know, I was always a really pretty good at my short game. We didn't have video, we didn't have -- I just went out and played. Didn't take lessons or anything.

I had a kind of unique swing. You know, I hated to lose. I think that was kind of engrained in me in playing sports with my brothers. They were older than me, but I always kind of stayed with them, held my on with them.

I think it just kind of carried over to golf. I know it's not a contact sport, but it's still a sport where you know what, you got to be mentally tough to do. You're going to have a lot of downs. If you win once or twice a year you've had a great year, so you're losing a lot.

You just got to find a way to keep grinding and just keep -- it's just like winning an Open. I just kept grinding. I was fortunate to have a pretty good -- my body held up. I had a couple injuries, but nothing major. I had the passion for it still to play. It wasn't a grind for me to practice. I loved the competition, love competing, even when I was 39, even when I'm 60. I love the game.

I think a lot of people get burned out, and I just have never -- it's always been a pleasure for me to play.

Q. Can I ask one more thing. I expected an American flag to be behind you. What's that other thing?

JULI INKSTER: They're both --

Q. Is that an eagle in it or something?

JULI INKSTER: Yeah, it's kind of an American flag. I gave them away at the Solheim Cup in Des Moines. Lou Mara, the Maras owns the Giants, she's a huge painter and I'm good friends with them, so she painted these for me for the team.

Q. Very cool. Thank you.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you everyone and thank you Juli. We'll be honoring Juli at the ceremony at the U.S. Open in June at the country club. Really appreciate everyone jumping on. Juli, I know it was early there, so thank you.

JULI INKSTER: Thank you guys all for really covering the LPGA and myself and what you do for women's golf. I really appreciate it.

Q. Thank you for all you've given us. We appreciate you more than you know.

JULI INKSTER: Thank you.

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