

# U.S. Women's Open

Tuesday, May 31, 2022

Southern Pines, North Carolina, USA

Pine Needles Lodge and Golf Club

## Annika Sorenstam

### Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Welcome back to the interview area for the Women's Open presented by ProMedica. We are joined by 1995, 1996, and 2006 U.S. Women's Open champion Annika Sorenstam, who also won last year's Senior Women's open to earn her place in the field. How does it feel to be back at a U.S. Women's Open?

ANNIKA SORENSTAM: It feels awesome. It's great to be here, of course. Mike and I, we were here for the media day not too long ago, but still, we didn't play the golf course and didn't get a chance to go out on the golf course, but did today.

Arrived yesterday with the family, and it's just such a nice vibe around here. Just love this area. Renting a house just around the corner, walking around seeing all the players, seeing a lot of Annika alumna. It's great to be here.

THE MODERATOR: I know you did a little walk-and-talk with us on 18 a couple of weeks back, but what are the memories you have there from that week, the win in '96?

ANNIKA SORENSTAM: There's certain memories I have. I have walking down 18, it's just such a special hole. It's iconic, kind of the finish.

You know, Peggy was here then. Peggy Kirk Bell, and she screamed, "Heineken" when I finished. We talked about that story, not knowing my name or remembering or being able to say my name, so I became Heineken.

But it was a great week. I came in as a defending champion. I really didn't know what to expect, and just played really, really well. I was in the zone that week. It's great to be in the zone, but then I don't really remember -- I was in a different zone, so now it's like, okay, what was I really thinking? I have to kind of create that again.

Walking the fairways today with Mike, it's just really nice to be here.

THE MODERATOR: What did your preparation look like?

Lydia Ko said she sees you out there a lot.

ANNIKA SORENSTAM: I can't hide. And I've seen her too; let's put it that way. No, I've seen a few of them out there. Leona has been there. You know, I have been practicing.

My coach, Henry, came to town last week and wanted to fine-tune it a little bit. I know to play well here I have to really max out my game. He came; I haven't seen him in a long time, so that was good.

It was just -- I've been trying. I really have. The last month or so as much as I can with the schedule that I have with the kids. The kids finish school now. There's summer, lots of activities, and some other things I do with the foundation.

Yeah, I've been trying to squeeze in as much of that time, trying to find a balance of working on my swing and then also playing. It's one thing as I keep telling the girls that I work with, you know, you practice golf, and then you play golf.

For me, I have to transition from practicing to really playing, hitting one shot and scoring, so I've been doing that quite a bit as well.

**Q. I know that you're here for your family and for all the girls who have played in all your tournaments as a source of inspiration, but the competitor in you, I'm sure, has some expectations. What are those? What would you consider to be a great week here?**

ANNIKA SORENSTAM: Yeah, it's a good question. My goal is obviously to play the best I can. I know what I'm capable of. I can hit fairways and greens. I can make putts. That's my goal this week.

Obviously, I'm a different position now than in '96 where I was probably one of the longest off the tees and would hit last into the greens. Now it's the reverse.

So kind of the feeling that I had when I played at The Colonial, you know, just get out there first on the greens. I



think this course is quite generous off the tee, and it's more around the greens being precise with your irons.

I'm not really going to have a score in mind, but I feel good about my game. I really do.

If you think about the time I've put in and the time that I have, you know, I'm there where I can be. We'll just see where that takes me. This is really everything I have. I'm going to make the most out of it. We're excited to be here. We're going to enjoy it. We're going to hit some shots, and just soak up the atmosphere.

I want the kids to see what it's like to play in an Open, and I've been here. It's more to maximize on a lot of different levels than just my game.

**Q. What's it like? You mentioned seeing your graduates of your camps, your clinics, your tournaments out here. There's a lot of younger players; 22 players are under the age of 19, under the age of 20. You are seeing the future of golf out here right before you.**

ANNIKA SORENSTAM: I think that says it right there. We have 68 Annika alumna, and I would like to say we're 69 if I count. I'm not young, but I go to every event, every place, so I really should count.

Yeah, I think that says a lot about women's golf. I think I know as you know we spend a lot of time with the foundation of the girls between 12 and 18. I'm not surprised because we see that level of golf at an earlier age than we ever have.

So nice to see them here. The future is strong, and hopefully that will inspire other young girls to continue to play or pick up the game.

**Q. You said in the past that your kids have only seen you play some of your tournaments on YouTube. What's this week going to be like to let them see you play out here in person?**

ANNIKA SORENSTAM: Yeah, it will be nice. Now they've seen me a few more times, but, yeah, you should ask them what they think.

But obviously it's nice to have them out here. They know the time I've put in. Will has been with me a lot of the times. Ava has been supportive. And, of course, Mike, who does a lot.

He wears as many hats as I do, daddy hat, business hat, and then, obviously, caddie hat this week. It's a team

effort. We've said that all along, and so we'll see. Will just gave me good advice. He said, I love you so much, mommy. I believe in you. That's what I'm going to keep the rest of the week.

**Q. You mentioned it earlier. Your relationship with Peggy Kirk Bell. I think everybody kind of knew that maybe you were going to come back this week, but was that kind of a driving force to come back here to Pine Needles?**

ANNIKA SORENSTAM: Yeah, absolutely. There were a few factors. Getting the exemption is number one. Coming here with Peggy is maybe two -- I mean, three, and then my family is probably two, wanting me to be part of this again.

And with the girls that we play -- that have played in our tournaments, just to inspire them and continue to inspire golfers around the world.

I think there's four or five factors, and it certainly would have been different if this were somewhere else. I have a nice friendship with her family, too. Her kids and grandkids and just kind of being here and coming back. That means the world to me.

**Q. As you've walked around this property today besides the obvious and the Heineken thing, have there been any kind of flashes of memories that you have gotten from that win in '96 and all the time you've spent here?**

ANNIKA SORENSTAM: Yeah, it's flashing memories, but Peggy would always come out in the golf cart and we would hit balls at the back of the range. I think when we played in '96 we hit from this side of the range, behind the putting green there, and we hit that direction.

If you wanted a little privacy you went to the other side, and you can hit and grind a little bit more. She would come up with the golf cart and kind of park it there and watch, not say too much.

Then she would say something and then she would leave, and then I would always meet her in the clubhouse. She showed me her office a few times and just kind of listened to the stories. She was a great storyteller.

I wish I could remember more stories. I have a lot of stories throughout my career, but she was just a great person and fun to be around. She had humor, and she was tough. She flew her own plane. Who would fly his own plane today, just to play a tournament and say let's go next destination? She was a trailblazer and a cool lady in



so many ways.

**Q. Annika, Michelle Wie is stepping away from the game after this week. I wanted to ask you, when she first came out on tour, what sort of a career did you think she would have?**

ANNIKA SORENSTAM: She's had a great career to start with. I think I played with her quite a few times when she was, what, 13, 14, maybe 15. I played with her in the last group at, what's it called now, The Chevron Championship. It was Dinah Shore at the time. I played with her in the last group. To have an amateur, a teenager at that time, that was really impressive. She hit the ball a long ways.

I remember her swing was really very powerful, especially her wedge game. She put a lot of spin on the ball, and being 6-foot something like that, I was, like, wow, this girl has got it.

Like I said, she still had a great career in many ways. Maybe other people thought she would do more, but it's hard to win out here. She won a U.S. Open, as you know, and other events. She's been great for the game.

**Q. Do you think injuries maybe had a role or is there more to do with it?**

ANNIKA SORENSTAM: I really don't know. She has a lot of great things going for her, being a mother and a wife and all the other businesses. I think there's a lot on the plate, which I can kind of relate to. I know what it's like with other interests. It's a fun time for her.

**Q. One of the volunteers told me that you went out to the maintenance shed last night after playing and hung out with some of the workers over there. What was that like? How did that come about?**

ANNIKA SORENSTAM: Well, first of all, as you know, there's a big women crew this week. They brought in women, I wouldn't say superintendents, but crew workers from different parts of the country. I think that's a really cool initiative to have women a part of that.

The lady that is kind of spearheading it, she works out of Minnesota with the course that is one of the nearby courses that I designed with Arnold Palmer. So I would see her out there. She's done a few things for the foundation.

She contacted Mike, and I just thought it was a great neat thing for the women to be here. When we look at the golf industry, there's a few things where you don't see a lot of women. That's in design and the maintenance. To have a

lot of women there, and it was just a neat thing to see, and to say thank you.

**Q. You have remained a resonant force in the game of golf. What lessons can the LPGA and its players take away from how you have built your brand up as they look to promote their next stars?**

ANNIKA SORENSTAM: That's a big question. I think the LPGA does a really good job. I think they've done an amazing job together with the USGA. Just look at this tournament. I think maybe I have learned some things from them, you know, how to build a brand and being consistent with what you do and what you deliver.

I feel very fortunate to have the game of golf as kind of my vehicle, my platform, to be able to share the passion I have, whether it's through the foundation or my partners.

I think it's a partnership that goes back hand in hand. I mean, especially when you think of the Rolex ANNIKA Major Award. It's one of my main partners, LPGA, and then we're here at the U.S. Open.

So I never really thought I would play to get some points, so I'm trying to get some RAMA points.

**Q. You've played in all four U.S. Opens here. How can you compare and contrast the course '96, 2001, 2007, and now, especially post-restoration?**

ANNIKA SORENSTAM: Yeah, it's longer. I don't remember No. 1 teeing off close to 18 green, back here almost by the 18th green there. It's longer for me. I don't know what the yardage was. I would be curious to know what it played in '96. It's roughly 66, 67 today, so I'm hitting longer clubs into the greens.

Most of all, it's the green areas. There's a lot of run-outs. There's a lot of you undulation to the greens. Knowing the course, I mean, at that time I think I knew a lot of it, but I also hit it where I wanted it. I think that's the key, is hitting it where you plan to hit it.

Today I'm standing there with like I said hybrids, so maybe 5-iron and maybe 6 or 7, so you have to be a little more precise. I think as far as an approach, I'm going to be aggressive with what I have, but then conservative just hitting greens.

I'm not in a spot right now in my career where I can attack these hole locations. I would be foolish if I did, so I have to be smarter than I was then. But I love what they've done to the course. Especially No. 10, the way they kind of put some bunkers in front.

I remember going for the green in two there, but not today. And probably won't all week. It's okay. It's fun to -- I think that's a good golf course. You can play it many different ways, and I'll play differently this year than I did then.

**Q. When you won here, the total purse was \$1.2 million. This year the winner is going to get \$1.8 million. What's that say about the growth of the women's game?**

ANNIKA SORENSTAM: I think it's fantastic. I think it's great. I want to thank the USGA for doing that and giving the women that opportunity. That is a massive change. I think it's a massive boost. I think it gives the women a lot more credibility and respect for doing that.

I really didn't come here for that reason, but I think it's nice to see the women really -- that this is really paying off. So keep on going. Hope other tournaments will follow suit, and let's keep working this direction for other women.

**Q. I was just curious how your preparation for this week compared to the run-up to the Senior Women's Open? Did you do anything different?**

ANNIKA SORENSTAM: This time I played from -- I think Lydia saw that. I play from the blue tees at home. I've been playing from similar distance. When I played for the senior I move up a little bit, but I knew this is what I had to do. I have to do that.

I've been working on some bump-and-runs more with the hybrid. We played NCR a few weeks ago, and I don't see that shot being as handy as here, so I think you have to adjust a little bit.

But really right now the focus is if I can just hit fairways and greens and just kind of stay sharp. I was out there on the -- which hole was it? I played with Megan Khang today. We were on 15. I hit a shot, and it was good. I turned to Mike and said, my body is starting to stiff up. I kind of whispered that to him.

Then Megan hit a shot, and she ripped it. She goes, finally I'm getting loose. I'm, like, hmm. (Laughing) I just told Mike I'm stiffening up and you're getting loose. Here we go.

**Q. Michelle said earlier today that a player came up to her at player dining and said she was named after her.**

ANNIKA SORENSTAM: That's nice.

**Q. I'm wondering how often you have heard that over**

**the years?**

ANNIKA SORENSTAM: It's been a few times. "Becoming Annika," they had that on one of the slides, or not slides, but in the showing. There's actually a young lady walking here today and her name is Annika, and she was born in 1996, so I thought that was pretty cool.

Yeah, I mean, what a great honor that is to name your child after you. That's pretty special.

**Q. I wanted to ask, during your preparation when you haven't had as much time to practice as you used to do when you were playing on tour with your other duties, what have been the main things that you have focused on when you have a restricted amount of time to practice and prepare?**

ANNIKA SORENSTAM: You need to make it more quality than quantity. I only have so much, so now it's taking the time to do most of it. So for me it's a lot of -- first, it was more specific technique. Okay, focus on technique.

Then I figure out technique and it's more tempo and finding the rhythm.

Then number three is scoring. I kind of have a sequence that I do. Before I could kind of mix and mingle the way it was. I could be on the course. I can work on my technique. But now it's like, okay, I only have so much time.

I don't have as much time to work on specialty shots, which says probably what you need around here, but I've spent a lot of time working my chipping. Will loves to chip, and we have a lot of chipping competitions in Orlando.

He only chips with a 60-degree, so so do I. I'm coming here, and I'm, like, wow, this is really working. Thanks to that I feel like my chipping is probably as good as it's ever been. You never know where your skills are going to tune up because of different reasons.

Thank you, everybody.

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