

U.S. Women's Open

Tuesday, June 2, 2026

Pacific Palisades, California, USA

The Riviera Country Club

Maja Stark

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Please welcome to the interview area our defending champion Maja Stark. I know we talked about this on media day, but it's been almost a year since the win. Just reflecting back on it, what sort of memories pop out?

MAJA STARK: U.S. Opens are always so special, I feel like everything around it is so much fun. It feels like we get treated so nice. I just love hanging out during the practice days. We're always at really good courses. I just love the time before the tournament actually starts.

So yeah, I just love that.

Q. You got to see the course a few weeks back. What were your first impressions?

MAJA STARK: Really fun. To make it so tricky. I love that there's a lot of variety on the course. You can make it really long, really short. You can firm it up and make it really hard. Yeah, it's just a good test.

Q. Are the conditions different even this week than what you saw a few weeks back?

MAJA STARK: It's been exactly the same. So it's good.

Q. I know it's only Tuesday afternoon, but what does it feel like to return to a major as the defending champion?

MAJA STARK: It's fun. I feel a little bit more pressure than I usually do, I guess. Then I just think what are the odds of winning it again? So the pressure, that just kind of takes the pressure away.

It's definitely fun, and like people recognizing you more, that's exciting. I'm just having so much fun here.

Q. What's the coolest thing about Riviera, whether it's anything here or a certain hole? And then what's the biggest challenge of the course?

MAJA STARK: Well, No. 6 is pretty fun with the bunker in the middle of the green. That's really special. I think also the area around here is so nice. I'm staying down right by the beach this week. Just a very nice week overall.

Q. Having played 10, what is your game plan there? Had you watched the guys play it on TV?

MAJA STARK: No, I haven't really watched the guys play. We've been hitting into the wind every day, and I think it's going to continue to be like that for the rest of the week. So we can't really get to it if the tee box is where it is now, so it looks like it's just going to be a two-shotter unless they move it up.

Then we'll see what happens. I don't know, we'll see. I'm not going to give away too many secrets.

Q. I know this was such a dream come true for you last year. I know you had to give the trophy back this year. Did you want to let it go? Just what has this experience been like being a U.S. Women's Open winner?

MAJA STARK: I did kind of want to let it go because it's weird. It's like I had it sitting in my room and I just saw it every day, and I'm like, oh, this is cool, but I just want to move on -- like I want the challenge again. It's kind of weird, you know.

It was fun to have it, but it's more fun to play for it than to have it, I guess.

Q. That's a great quote. I know you talked a little bit in Korea last year that it got a little bit difficult for you after winning this tournament. You kind of came off the high and were kind of like, what's next? How have you managed that? How have you refound or rediscovered, I guess I should say, your joy and your hunger to keep going after it?

MAJA STARK: I don't know how much was just waiting to get it back, but I also have a really good team around me. I started working with a therapist, so I had like just getting everything in my life back to normal was probably a big



part of it.

And then I have my sports psychologist, my mental coach, I have my coach who's been working with Stacy Lewis and Inbee Park, so he's seen it before.

It was just really nice because I didn't feel like I was crazy because I have so many people around me saying this is okay. You're going to get through this even if you don't feel like it, and you're going to get back to normal. All of a sudden it happened.

Q. Obviously it was a completely different course last year when you won, but is there anything that you can bring from last year to this year as far as your game goes or just mentality or just the experience?

MAJA STARK: Yeah, I think it's kind of similar where there are some greens out here where you know I can't be in this -- I can't miss it on this side, so I will just go 15 yards right of here.

I feel like that's normal for U.S. Opens to have to think like that. You just want it to be on the green. You don't really care sometimes how far away you are. You can have like a 100-foot putt and, yes, I'm on the green.

So I think having that mindset like I had last year will probably help me.

Obviously a very different course, but I still think that it feels pretty open when you hit the shots. There's not a bunch of water or trees everywhere, so that also helps me because then I feel like I can really go for it.

Yeah, I think it's more just mental than anything.

Q. How would you assess your game right now, and what clubs are working for you?

MAJA STARK: It's been trending. I feel like I've had a couple of solid weeks leading up to this. I played okay at Chevron, and then I felt like it's just been a lot more solid, more stress free.

No crazy good results yet, but I feel confident that I'm working on the right stuff, and the results are going to come.

I did switch putter pretty recently, and I think that that's really helped me with just feeling comfortable on these greens. It's so fast out here that I feel like I really need something that I'm comfortable with, and I'm really happy that I have that.

We'll see if it works on Thursday or not.

Q. I know you've been living in Nashville for just a little bit over a year now and you've got two very special members of your team at home as well in Dolly and Kenny, your cats. How crucial is it to have that escape when you are home to think about something else, and how crucial has that been as you try to get yourself back on the mental side in chasing championships?

MAJA STARK: It was so nice. When I got my first cat Dolly, I was just supposed to foster her because I felt like I am not having a good time, but I need to focus on something other than myself. That's when I thought I should just get a cat and I can feel like I'm doing something good for someone at least.

That just really took me out of my own head at the time, and then I ended up keeping her. And then I got Kenny. I'm actually fostering a third one right now. His name is Earl. But it just makes me really miss being at home, and then when I'm at home, I miss being on Tour.

It kind of sucks leaving them, but it's nice to look forward to things all the time, whereas before it was kind of boring. You come off of such a high when you're at tournaments and you're having so much fun and you're around all your friends, and then you come home and you don't really -- I don't know.

It's hard to commit to a place, I guess, when you're away for more than half of the year. So it's really nice to just feel like this is my home. This is where I have my cats, my people. Like I have a roommate, I have friends now in Nashville, and I really love it, and that's a really good feeling to, yeah, miss people and places.

Q. Can you explain the names? I know the story, but I think it's pretty cute why they're Dolly and Kenny.

MAJA STARK: Both Dolly and Kenny were named Dolly by the shelters, and I thought I can't be the girl with two cats named Dolly. Dolly number one knew her name and I didn't want to change it, whereas Kenny didn't know her name at all. They called her mom because she responded to mom because she had kittens when they got her.

I'm not calling my cat mom, which is like Phoebe from friends. So I changed it to Kenny because I thought it was kind of funny, call a cat named Kenny for Kenny Rogers.

We'll see what Earl -- if I keep Earl, we'll see what he gets renamed.

