

AIG Women's Open

Press Conference

Tuesday, 28 April 2026

Catriona Matthew

Mimi Rhodes



—ROYAL LYTHAM &—
ST ANNES 2026

OLIVIA McMILLAN: Ladies and gentlemen, I am now delighted to be joined by Catriona Matthew, who of course won this championship here at Royal Lytham & St Annes in 2009, and one of England's brightest young stars, Mimi Rhodes. Thank you so much for joining us.

I know this morning that you played the final three holes here at Royal Lytham. Catriona, did it bring the memories back? And Mimi, did you pick up any tips from a champion?

CATRIONA MATTHEW: Yeah, it did bring some memories back. I'd only been back maybe a couple of times since I won in 2009, and obviously playing the last three holes there, definitely coming up 18, you remember that walk up 18. I had a three-shot lead, so it was great. Walking up 18 still never gets old, looking, seeing the clubhouse in the background.

And then playing with Mimi, who will be hopefully vying for the title this year, was great to go. Your first time here, so nice to see a few holes.

MIMI RHODES: No, it was good, especially to see the last three closing holes, which are going to be important obviously, and getting some tips and lines off the tee. Yeah, had some good chats about Catriona's time here, and just nice to learn from a champion.

OLIVIA McMILLAN: We have had a fantastic announcement that this AIG Women's Open will be going to Sunningdale in 2028. It's a special place for both of you, having won the Curtis Cup there. Was that exciting when you learned that news?

CATRIONA MATTHEW: Yeah, very exciting. I was lucky enough to play in the three Opens we've had at Sunningdale in the past, but to go back there, one of my favourite golf courses probably -- well, certainly in England. Love going there, love playing there, and obviously for the pair of us, having the Curtis Cup in 2024 where Mimi and the rest of the team managed to get a nice little victory there over America. So yeah, fantastic venue to go back

to.

MIMI RHODES: Yeah, it was all around a very special week. I actually hadn't played the course until then, so it's nice to go back to somewhere I'm familiar with. Yeah, have played there under a bit of pressure, so it'll be nice to go back to the clubhouse, and they treated us so nicely there.

Yeah, really special place.

Q. Catriona, speaking of tips, what would be your kind of biggest piece of advice for playing Royal Lytham & St Annes because it's quite an unusual test.

CATRIONA MATTHEW: Yeah, I would say the main thing here, I think they've taken some bunkers out since 2009, but it's definitely -- it's probably one of the best bunkered links courses that they play in the rota. I think it's just keeping it out of the bunkers.

I know everyone says that about links golf, but definitely here. It's very well bunkered off the tees especially. I remember laying up, especially on those first probably five or six holes, giving myself longer shots into the greens just to avoid the fairway bunkers. Like any links course, it will depend on the weather a little bit, but definitely staying out of the fairway bunkers.

Q. Mimi, as you know, it's the 50th anniversary here of the championship. When you look back when you were younger, which players did you look up to? I'm sure you would have watched this event over the years. Who were your idols, and who would you like to emulate?

MIMI RHODES: I've got to say Catriona since she's sitting right here (laughter). Obviously when Georgia Hall won here, as well, she was also a player who's just a bit older than me, so I look up to her, as well, and I've watched her play in a lot of Solheim Cups, and Charley Hull, as well.

Yeah, it's just nice to see a few English players just doing well, and you want to do as well as they do because you kind of look up to them and they kind of have inspired my generation. I just hope I can do that for the next generation. Yeah, those are the players I've kind of looked up to.



Q. I just wonder from both of you if I could get some kind of appreciation or comment on the performance of Nelly Korda at the weekend in the Chevron Championship and just the way she has the potential to be such a figurehead for the women's game at a time when it's attracting so much extra revenue to championships such as this.

CATRIONA MATTHEW: You were at Chevron, but for me, I just watched a little bit on the TV. What was it, two years ago she had that really dominant year where she won seven times, and last year she played well but never quite got the victory, and looks like she's coming out this year and could well be pretty dominant.

If she can get her putting -- I think the putting is probably the weakest part of her game, but if she can roll in the putts like she did at Chevron, she is very tough to beat.

For the women's game, if they can get that rivalry perhaps between Nelly Korda, Jeeno Thitikul, Charley, that would be great for the game if they're all vying for titles at the same time. But Nelly certainly has the game, and she has everything to be dominant.

Q. Mimi, obviously you were there, so you know what the conditions were like. When you see a performance, winning by five shots, finishing at 18-under, what were your thoughts on that?

MIMI RHODES: Yeah, obviously she played exceptionally well. Having been there, it was not an easy course, and I did not see that being the total score over four days.

But yeah, she took some time off before that, I think, and clearly she worked on all areas of her game, and they all came together. The course was in really good shape. Yeah, having hit as many greens as she did, she must have played really well.

I also watched a bit on the weekend, and she just was really solid all week, didn't seem to make many mistakes. And that was one of the courses that there was not a hole where you could just relax, you had to be focused all the way, and she did that really well.

Q. We've had three British winners of this championship since it was a major, and obviously yourself and Georgia both succeeded here at this course. Is there any sense in which this course helps home golfers in any way?

CATRIONA MATTHEW: Good question. I don't know, actually. Obviously with myself and Georgia winning here,

I don't know whether -- whether that was just luck that we both happened to win here, I'm not sure. Maybe there's a little bit more strategy.

As I said, you've got to appreciate how difficult the bunkers are to get out of, the fairway ones, you lose basically stroke and distance. So is there a strategy you've got to lay up to them? I don't know. I think we're going to have a few good players vying for it. Obviously you'll have Mimi, Charley, Lottie Woad, so hopefully we'll see some British players up there.

Q. Mimi, after your hole-in-one at last year's championship, I notice there's a billiards room opposite. Have you taken up the cue and knocked balls in off the hole like that?

MIMI RHODES: What?

Q. You know your hole-in-one was rather like a billiards match. I know there's a billiards table opposite. Have you taken that up?

MIMI RHODES: No, it was really cool. It went kind of viral then, which was cool. It was probably the highlight of the week. For it to happen at the first AIG was --

Q. When you're saying it's viral, when you've been on the LPGA this year, have people referenced it, or as you've travelled around the world have people spoke about it?

MIMI RHODES: Yeah, a couple friends sent me a video on FOX News or the news out there, which was, yeah, cool to see. It hit off of Steph Kyriacou's ball, and I've played with her a bit. Yeah, I joked about sending her a gift to say thanks.

Yeah, it got a lot of talk about it, so I think it's kind of died down now.

Q. Your comfort levels on the LPGA this year, are you enjoying the season? Did you speak to anybody ahead of the season to sort of get advice on how to travel and how to experience it?

MIMI RHODES: Yeah, I mean, Carlota Ciganda, she's been a really good help because she's still playing out there and I've got the connection to Spain. I've talked to her a bit, and she's kind of given me some guidance, but it's just been nice to go out there with a few of the LET girls who I already knew, so not everything was new.

I've got a caddie who knows all the courses out there, so it's just nice, me getting to know everything and just settling

in and not putting too much expectation on myself, which is important out there on your first year.

Q. Mimi, we've seen a trend on the PGA TOUR for the last few years where college players and amateurs come over and are winning pretty much straight away. It seems like performances like yours and Lottie's show that you're not overawed at all. Do you think the women's game is going that way, where you come out better prepared for the challenge?

MIMI RHODES: Yeah, I would say college golf definitely pushes you and gives you that big step up from amateur golf back here. I would totally recommend it to golfers who are wanting to turn professional because there are so many American girls who go out there and European girls who are out there who are the best in the world. When you go and turn pro, it's such a big step up, and it's just nice to kind of go up in that kind of way.

The courses, as well, they prepare you out there, and the setup, the gym. They kind of give you that mentality and give you the independence. So when you're out on Tour by yourself, you know what to do. You know your nutrition and what's important. It's changed so much over the years, and everyone is really into their gym now.

Yeah, I would say the college system is such a help to just spend four years out there with so much help from coaches and players and being able to play at such a high level and study, as well, out there. You can always fall back on that if it doesn't work out.

Q. The focus of this event in recent years has been threefold: It's been venues, prize fund and the player experience on-site. Which of those three is most important to you?

CATRIONA MATTHEW: For me, for this event, I think it would be venue. I think when they first started, what, 10, 12 years ago going to the Open rota venues, I think that elevated the event to another level, especially for the international players coming. So I think venue for me.

MIMI RHODES: I would say player services. It's very important on Tour to have physios around you and good nutrition and gym setup. Yeah, week to week, you're travelling a lot, so you want those things around you and want them to be at the top level so we can perform at our best.

Q. It's interesting neither of you said prize money given that Mark has just announced a 10 million prize fund this year. How impressive has that growth been under AIG's title sponsorship?

CATRIONA MATTHEW: Yeah, I think that's fantastic. I think it probably comes down to a mixture of everything. It's coming to the more recognised venues, there's going to be enhanced television, better television, so all just -- and AIG's investment into the event, along with the R&A, into the player services, increasing the prize fund. It all just gets the event bigger and bigger, which is what all the players want.

Q. Do you remember how much you won?

CATRIONA MATTHEW: I cannot. I'm sure Graeme could, though.

(Laughter.)

Q. The women's major season got off to a low-key start this year with the Chevron, by all accounts. Would this event with more than 50,000 fans at Lytham be the perfect end to the women's major season, bringing a bit more excitement than that one did?

CATRIONA MATTHEW: I wasn't at Chevron. I watched a little bit on the television. I think here they'll have some great crowds. They always do in this kind of area. It's such a huge pool with Manchester and Liverpool, everywhere. I think here when we go down to London, I think it's promoted really well here in the area. The R&A do a great job, IMG promoting the event to get the fans out to watch it.

Obviously it's been shown more and more on TV over the years, which gets the interest, and I think hopefully they will get some good crowds out here.

And the players love playing in front of crowds. It's much more fun playing in front of an audience and playing in front of a crowd than going out and there's not that many people there. You definitely get more excitement, more adrenaline when there are more people watching.

Q. Did last week feel a little bit low key?

MIMI RHODES: Yeah, but Houston, it's just a bit of a remote area and random location, so I don't think a lot of crowd were going to go out to that golf course.

Yeah, they didn't do a great job of promoting it. Like Catriona said, they do a really good job of promotion here, and it just gets around a lot better. Yeah, it was just a shame for last week because it was such a good golf course.

Q. The \$10 million is a large number, obviously. How



important was purses to you back in the day when you were chasing your dream? And Mimi, now does the purse matter to you? If so, do you think the winner's side of the purse should be much bigger because it's so much harder to win out on the LPGA Tour?

CATRIONA MATTHEW: I think for me, obviously for the majors, no. They were always and still are the events you want to come play in, the events you want to win. I was just saying earlier when you're first starting and you're out there practising as a youngster, it's always the putt to win a major, and for me being British, it was to win the AIG Women's Open. That was always the one you wanted to win.

When I was playing, you'd be looking at your schedule and the first ones you look at are the majors. You're obviously definitely going to go and play in them. Then perhaps you look at -- the more years you play, you get to know the courses you like. Obviously, yes, you're looking at purse sizes. You're going to go to the ones with the bigger purses over ones with lesser purses.

But the majors definitely stand out alone regardless of the purse because they're the ones that you want to win and the prestige of winning a major.

But after that, the next events I would say you'd definitely be looking at purses and venues you liked.

MIMI RHODES: Yeah, honestly you can't complain about the purses. It's doing really well. Women's golf is doing really well with purses amount, coming from the LET especially. Yeah, I can't complain about it.

Honestly, it doesn't really change with how I play. I remember the first check I got when I played in the LET Access, it was my first top 5 or something and I was so excited for 7 grand to come into my bank account. I kept checking my bank.

Honestly, now I'm just used to playing in that kind of environment, and I mean, going out there and playing golf, you can't really think about, if I come top 10, this is how much I'm going to win. You're never going to play with freedom with that kind of mindset. So I've just learnt to deal with it and look at the purse when I finish on Sunday.

OLIVIA McMILLAN: Ladies, thank you so much for joining us, and we look forward to seeing you back here at Royal Lytham & St Annes in July.

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