

KPMG Women's PGA Championship

Tuesday, June 18, 2024
Sammamish, Washington, USA
Sahalee Country Club



Wendy Ward

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: Good afternoon, everyone. Joined now by LPGA professional Wendy Ward. Wendy, welcome to your 19th KPMG Women's PGA Championship KPMG.

First of all, how do you feel about your game coming into this one, and how special is it to be competing in this major in your home state?

WENDY WARD: Yes, it's exciting to be here. I saw when our national championship for the professionals was going to enable me to have the opportunity to be here and play Sahalee. I've never been here before. So that was a lot of my incentive to play the regular division of that.

I had some peers in the senior division that were thinking, oh, shoot Wendy is here. There is another one we got to try and beat. I said, no, no, don't worry, I'm going to try and play with the big girls next year.

To sneak into that eighth spot was very exciting.

As far as my game, I teach. That's pretty much my gig now. I've been playing a little bit on some of the senior events and getting some reps under my belt, and it's not probably as consistent and strong as it used to be, but I'm excited to be back in the ropes and see a bunch of my old friends that are now carrying the torch out here.

Q. Have you had a chance to experience the golf course yet?

WENDY WARD: Yes. I played 18. Played about four holes on Sunday when we drove in, and then played the other 14 yesterday. I don't know if I'm the oldest player in the field. I'm thinking I might be. I need Juli Inkster to maybe get out there ahead of me. I have to pace myself. I'll get out there tomorrow for a second time.

Yes, it's everything and more that everybody explained it

would be.

Q. I would say by now you're an expert on golf in the Northwest, no? So you if had to define what's the difference between golf in this part of the country and the world compared to the rest of the country, the golf courses, how you have to play, what would you say?

WENDY WARD: I'm going to tell you right now, there is a big difference in the Pacific Northwest from the west side of the state and the east side of the state. So they grow the trees a lot bigger over here, which I already knew. And I hit it a lot straighter than I used to, so I am hoping that isn't an issue.

It's also very green over here and sea level, so those are some adjustments I think everybody is getting used to. The ball doesn't go as far. I don't know if they'll speed up the course a little bit; they probably will with the weather.

Yeah, it's as prime and pure as it gets.

Q. You mentioned seeing some old friends out here, but the LPGA has changed quite a bit since you were out here full time. How much has it changed and how cool is it for you to witness that change as a former player?

WENDY WARD: Oh, it's incredible. I mean, you're taking it in and yet still trying to stay in your own bubble. The girls, I'm just hearing all the pure contact on the range and everybody has a TrackMan and I'm asking my husband to video a swing on my cell phone.

That's about as technically advanced as I've gotten. All the players have their own teams and they're serious. You know, this is business.

And we were that way, too, but, yeah, it's been fun seeing even like Brittany -- I just saw Bam, Brittany Lincicome and Stanford in the locker room. They're the ones that are now thriving and kind of the veterans on tour.

So the old faces are good to see and the new faces. There are so much talent out here. Every one of these girls this



week could win this tournament.

Q. A lot of younger players probably watched you growing up. A lot of people did watch you growing up. Has anybody said hi to you that you didn't expect or anybody you reconnected with that you didn't expect?

WENDY WARD: I think it's funny. I think a lot of people don't know who the heck I am. And that's fine. That's fine. I started thinking about that on the drive over here. This was the major championship that I came the closest to winning a couple times, so it's kind of exciting now to come back.

I can't even remember the last major that I played in as far as LPGA event. Played Senior Open last year. I'm taking it in. I know it's a big week. I know this is a big course for me. It just feels good to be back.

Q. For you, I know that transition is probably one that's a little bit different to be on the other side of it and giving the instruction now. What's that been like and how have you adjusted and what has maybe surprised you about going from player to instructor?

WENDY WARD: You know, I didn't know -- I come from a family of teachers. I have said that before. Mom, dad, sister, all teachers. I thought, I'll never be a teacher. And then I find myself -- it's very natural for me to share and give back and spread all the instruction that I've learned over the years. Comes naturally.

I just ran into a player on the putting green and she said, do you like it and who do you teach? Do you teach kids? I teach all levels. I don't exclude anyone. It's rewarding for me to see somebody get the ball in the air for the first time and watch a tour player come back to me and say, hey, can take a look at me.

I've enjoyed it. It has been a different transition, and I personally needed to step away from the game a little bit. I wasn't enjoying some of the travel. It was -- took a toll on my body.

For now it's good that I've been able to step away and appreciate that time away and slowly get back into it.

Q. Who was that player that asked you that?

WENDY WARD: Give me a field list. I should have studied the list before I...

Q. All good.

WENDY WARD: Let me get back to you on that.

Q. Where do you do most of your teaching?

WENDY WARD: I primarily teach at a private club in Spokane called Manito Golf & Country Club, and also essentially, out in Coeur d'Alene at a very nice club at Black Rock. It's great.

Like I said, I teach all levels. Help out with the juniors some and it's very rewarding. I enjoy it a lot.

Q. And you talk about having a couple close calls in this championship. Where was your best shot?

WENDY WARD: Dupont Country Club in Wilmington, Delaware. It was the McDonalds LPGA Championship. I finished third there twice.

Q. Right in the middle of it?

WENDY WARD: Well, no. One was an unfortunate thing. There has been a rules change since then. I'm not bitter about it, but I wish the change had happened back then. I had a ball move on Sunday in the final group. I was playing with Inkster and my ball moved on the putting green after I had sold it, and it was just because the greens had gotten crusty. They were poana, whatnot, and I had to call a penalty shot on myself and I missed the playoff by one shot.

So there is a lot of people -- a lot of good things that came from that. Just the integrity side of that was a great lesson for a lot of kids growing up. I had a lot of parents commend me on that. I was just going by the rules. You're on TV in the final group. I thought the whole world saw the ball move. It wasn't a matter of trying to get by with anything.

Plus, I was very anal at that point and I had to have to the line going right down my target line and the line had moved. So I was like, well, I've at least got to remark it.

I still had a great week. It's just disappointing that I didn't get that major taken care of. It would be a big ask for this week, but it's great to be back and playing the championship that I got the closest to winning.

Q. And you mentioned Juli a couple times. Kind of neat how she stayed involved with the game. The Inkster Award, things like that. When you think of her and being out here, what are your thoughts?

WENDY WARD: Well, Juli would never describe herself as a mentor. She's a goofball most the time actually. She has stayed connected to the game. She's a kid at heart.

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

You should see the way she grinds at the Legends events of the LPGA. She shows up every time ready to play and kick your butt. I love that about her.

She was always a great friend to me. I lived up here and sometimes weather isn't great and she would say, come on down. Let's go practice. And then to take me on as one of her assistant captains three times for Solheim Cup, we have some good memories, and she has the biggest heart you can believe.

I think a lot of people feel that about her, that she's one of the best.

Q. Now that you returned to the major stage with a new title, how does it feel coming back playing in your first KPMG but representing the LPGA professionals this time?

WENDY WARD: You know, it's neat. The group of eight of us, we don't know each other really well. It's neat to see the familiar face. I got to meet most of them besides Sandra that I played with on tour at the national championship in Kingsmill last year.

So you do feel like that's a little bit of a family within the tournament. You know, we're all out here to do the same thing, so we're all competitors. To represent the professional side, it's a privilege. It really is. Because like I said, we teach for a living. We don't play.

I watch the girls and they're pacing themselves and talking to each other and I'm like, I got to take advantage of my two-hour practice window right now.

Yeah, but it's neat to be a part of both sides of the LPGA, because everybody grows the game, but we all know it's that one-on-one instruction that probably takes you to the next level of enjoyment.

Q. You've seen a lot of great players come through this game. Nelly has been making her hay over the last couple years. What stands out about her?

WENDY WARD: You know, I watched Nelly when we were -- she was one of our prospects for the 2015 -- I believe -- yeah, 2015 Solheim Cup team. Juli ended up passing on her and I remember Juli saying -- we're watching her play and she was one the ones potentially in my pod.

I was like, oh, my gosh. She has no weakness. And Juli goes, yep, I think I'm going to have to pass on her. We're like, what? She goes, trust me. Just give her another couple years and she's going to do amazing things.

I really think that's a cool thing to make sure everybody remembers about Nelly. It took her a little while to get out here. I think you learn from that and really grow your foundation and basis. That's probably why she's consistently on top every week. I mean, she has no weaknesses and she's I think a great ambassador for the LPGA.

I mean, shoot, if my tee time is opposite of hers I might have to go peek and watch her play a few holes.

Q. You mention you teach all different levels of players. What do you hope to bring back from a week like this inside the ropes competing to your students?

WENDY WARD: Perspective probably. You know, I mean, sometimes seems to easy on the other side of the ball, whether you're the caddie, teacher, you know, the coach, anything like that.

When you're the one holding onto the club having to think about the shot and having to visualize and execute it, and you hear Scottie Scheffler talk about it all the time, is a lot have his success comes from processing the good and the bad and not getting hung up and knowing, hey, there is a bunch of good shots left in the bag still.

It's in there. Just you've got to not hang on the negatives, and that's what I probably see my students do a little too much. We're all critical of ourselves. Whether it's laughing about it or giving yourself a couple seconds to be frustrated and then get over it and go hit a good golf shot on the next one.

Q. You mentioned Solheim Cup and you were part of it as a player and as assistant captain. Talk about the evolution of Solheim Cup and what should we expect this year?

WENDY WARD: I mean, it just gets better and better. Watch out for Team Europe because just seems like they come with all their guns out and they're ready to have fun and go play. Yet I say that, obviously I'm cheering for the U.S.

The U.S. is ready to get back on top. It's not fun finishing second that week. Yeah, I think you're going to see a good match. I love match play. I think just the camaraderie of the players is what as captains we tried to encourage.

Just seems like the Europeans for some reason, I don't know if they let down their guard or just really embrace the moment, and I think we do, too, as Americans. Yet we just need a couple putts or breaks to fall our way and then all of

a sudden the energy comes to our side.

It's a great week and both sides enjoy it. Whether you're a player or captain, either way it's just a fun team atmosphere that everybody looks forward to.

Q. You have been here in Washington almost a quarter century. Do you contribute yourself a Washingtonian now?

WENDY WARD: I do. I lost most of my Texas accent. Every now and then it comes back out. I love the Pacific Northwest. It has the seasons. I teach in a simulator for about three months, and after about a month I'm tired of it so I sneak down to Arizona. I do consider this home.

Q. How much do you miss the ranch?

WENDY WARD: We miss parts of the ranch. It was part of work for -- I saw two people, but it was really my husband pretty much running the show and we had worked our way up to 200 head of cattle. Now we just have the dogs left.

Yeah, there were some very rewarding things about the ranch and it was a quiet paradise to come home to, but it was a lot of the work when I got there.

So now we can do fun stuff like this.

Q. Will be caddie for you this week?

WENDY WARD: He is on the bag actually. He asked me if I could get a big bag for him because he says it carries better. He caddied out her for, I don't know, ten years or so.

Q. So after a round you guys talk about it much afterwards or not...

WENDY WARD: Not really unless there is something that was debatable out there. He's a good player in his own right. Plays all the section events up here as an amateur. He understands the highs and low and you have to flip your switch and shut it off.

I've got family came in. I've got two nephews and a niece that have really never seen me play, so it's going to be fun to go back to the house and hang out with them, and I don't know, got a ping-pong table and just going to have a good time. Probably not think about golf too much after we leave the course.

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