

# Golf Channel

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**Paige Mackenzie**

**Kay Cockerill**

Media Conference



JEFF SZKLINSKI: We'll go ahead and get started then. Good afternoon everyone. Thanks for making some time to take part in today's call as you look ahead to the 75th edition of the U.S. Women's Open next week. NBC, Golf Channel, and Peacock will dedicate more than 25 hours of live coverage surrounding the final major championship of 2020.

Joining us this afternoon are Paige Mackenzie and Kay Cockerill, both of whom will be on site next week in Houston for us.

Before we kick things off, I just want to extend a few reminders to those on the call. First, this call is being transcribed, so we will distribute the transcript later this afternoon to those of you on the call. I think everyone knows how we typically conduct these calls, so feel free to jump in and ask questions as you wish.

I know we had a few writers back out earlier today with schedule conflicts, so if this ends up being a relatively quick call as a result, that's totally fine.

With that, let's go ahead and get started. Paige, Kay, thank you both for making the time this afternoon.

Before we open up to questions, I hoped you might just kind of kick us off with some initial comments on what you're looking forward to next week.

PAIGE MACKENZIE: The biggest thing is obviously just seeing the U.S. Open in December. I'm excited to see a finale towards the end of the season where we're getting big events.

Oftentimes, especially with other tours, you don't see the kind of climax towards the end of the year. It's kind of end of season and a little different time of year.

So we're getting one of the greatest championships on the LPGA Tour schedule kind of building to this crescendo, which is very cool.

Also to finally see some of the big names back in this play. With Jin Young Ko not playing most of the season there was definitely a void. We talked so much about her and all the accomplishments that she's had in the couple years she played on tour, so to see her and to see Jeongeun Lee6 back and So Yeon Ryu is back in action this week, and I'm sure in preparation for the U.S. Open.

It's going to start to feel a little bit more normal, I think, where you're seeing the best women in the world playing the most difficult test on the biggest stage. So I'm certainly very excited just for the people that we're going to actually see in competition.

KAY COCKERILL: Yeah, this is Kay, and I definitely ditto what Paige said. And in addition to that, I've always held a huge place in my heart for USGA events, and I'm fortunate enough to have won a couple of them in the past. I know that players really feel like this is the championship they want to win.

I'm excited about the fact they're going to Champions Golf Club, and kind of following a trend of a lot of major championships, including the U.S. Women's Open as well as KPMG and AIG Open Championship, of going to venues that have traditionally held men's events.

So the Champions Golf Club has had a couple of Women's Amateur Championships, but this will be the first U.S. Women's Open. So I'm excited to see the course and what it offers to the players. I think it's going to be a tough preparation for the players to learn two golf courses. They'll be playing both Cypress Creek and Jack Rabbit Thursday, Friday and trying to figure all that out as well as just getting their games in shape.

Also pretty cool that it's just the second time the U.S. Women's Open has been held in Texas. A lot of great players have come out of Texas, both men and women, and I think it's about time that it gets back there. It's hard to believe it was '91 when it was at Colonial that was the last time.

So, yeah, excited about that and excited of course about all the potential storylines that we all are looking forward to seeing what plays out.

JEFF SZKLINSKI: That was great. Thank you both.



Obviously a lot to look forward to next week and keep our attention as we get toward next Thursday.

So with that, we can open up the call for questions. If you want to ask a question, go ahead and chime in. Keep your line on mute when not asking a question or speaking.

**Q. You touched on the fact that there will be two courses on display this week. I was wondering, how are you guys preparing for broadcasting that? That's got to be an interesting challenge.**

PAIGE MACKENZIE: Yes, it is. Yes, it is. I will be in a day early. Or actually almost two days earlier than what I would normally be on property just to get a feel for the two different golf courses, get a feel from players how they're preparing differently for this week.

I know there are multiple players that have gone over and played it in their off weeks to prepare, but from my perspective, I think that's the only thing that's maybe a little bit different.

It will be interesting from the broadcast side to see how -- I mean, because I don't have experience working multiple venues -- how we do kind of interplay the highlights from the one course as we're broadcasting, you know, two at the same time.

KAY COCKERILL: I've done a little bit of preparation from afar in terms of the USGA has a good flyover, drone flyover of the Cypress Creek course, so I wrote down some notes on that. I also talked to Billy Ray Brown who's from Houston and he's actually going to be working some of the telecast next week.

Also Jean-Paul Herbert, who his godfather is Jackie Burke, Jr., and he grew up in the Houston area. They both just are gushing about the golf course and say it's pretty much traditional tree-lined, classic feel, bermuda rough is up.

But the big characteristic is enormous greens, at least on the Cypress Creek course. Billy Ray Brown said we call them three-club greens. You can have a 6-iron to the front and a 4-iron to the back. So you could obviously end up with 30- to 45-footer plus putts all day long which could wear you down.

So I think long hitters, if they can challenge some of the doglegs and get it out there where they have a shorter club in and can get into the right quadrant is probably going to make a big difference.

But like Paige said, for us getting out there a couple days early and talking to players, caddies, finding out what holes

they think are going to be the toughest, the easiest, how the two courses compare and contrast, those are all things we'll be soaking in a few days before the competition starts.

**Q. This is Beth Ann. Hi, Paige and Kay. I want to ask, with the schedule being so different this year and majors being in strange places, but the Women's Open has in the past been up against some men's events. Memorial for example last year. But there really isn't anything in the golf spectrum big to pull away from it as in the past. It's not bumped up against a men's major either. How do you think this will play in terms of unique space in terms of viewership, and do you think players can do anything to help drum up interest? Obviously there is the NFL at play, but as far as from a golf audience standpoint.**

PAIGE MACKENZIE: I don't know if there is anything the players can do. I mean, it always comes down to creating its own drama with the golf. I am excited for the idea that there is a potential to get a newer, a different golf audience coming from this time of year and not having the usual competition. Maybe we'll get different eyeballs.

But I don't see -- I don't know. I don't see a lot different from the players' perspective on the viewership side. Maybe Kay's got a different input.

KAY COCKERILL: I think players are pretty savvy with social media, so I'm sure they'll be pushing out a lot of their own social media, which will grab a certain amount of the crowd and remind them to tune in to the U.S. Women's Open.

And I think because of that, at least we have a lot of hours that we're on air, and during this time there is such a golf starved audience. They just love turning it on and finding some golf, and maybe accidentally some of the people that don't normally watch women's golf will stumble across it and say, Hey, I'm enjoying this.

Maybe a fact, again, a course that a lot of people know about and have traditionally seen the men play. Maybe they'll be curious to see how the women play it. I think we're going to see that same theme hopefully carryover next year to Olympic Club who's hosting their first ever U.S. Women's Open, and Pebble Beach two years after that.

So some really cool venues coming up.

I think it's going to be a pleasant surprise, because normally you aren't watching a women's major in the middle of December. This will be a nice treat for the golf

fans.

**Q. One more, too. Obviously there are usually a lot of dads that caddie at the U.S. Women's Open, and maybe some people that don't have a whole lot of caddie experience. How important a role do you think the caddie is this week with two golf courses to learn, and in most cases in a short amount of time?**

PAIGE MACKENZIE: It's big, especially considering that the LPGA Tour is playing the week prior. So from that perspective, there is not really the opportunity to gain the extra days. If you wanted to get there early and prepare, it's still going to be a pretty standard work week for the players.

So scouting the golf course and putting the time in, it's super important, especially the week of a major championship where emotionally and mentally it can be such a draining week. Last thing you want to be doing out there is spending hours and hours and hours on end leading up to when the competition date starts.

So in particular, I think it's important with the two golf courses, and knowing also that daylight can be an issue in the practice rounds, too. Historically U.S. Open practice rounds are longer. Again, you want to be as efficient as possible, and part of that is preparation and the partner on the bag.

KAY COCKERILL: And probably, Beth Ann, we're thinking the amateurs, the 24 amateurs that are in the field, and they're usually the ones that have a father or a brother or sister or some sort of relative or good friend or maybe a teammate from college who are on the bag.

For them, I don't know that it's going to be that big a difference, because they're sort of coming in from a different angle anyway, whether they're playing their first major or another major, their second major. I don't think they're as intense with the caddie situation, so they're sort of coming at it from a different way.

But I agree with Kay. It's just going to take a little bit extra pre-planning to make sure you feel comfortable. And then like some players -- I know Brittany Lincicome, she's working through COVID. Hopefully she's going to be there, but she is someone that says, I don't want to play a course too much. I would rather play it hardly at all than overplay it, so...

PAIGE MACKENZIE: Sometimes ignorance is bliss.

KAY COCKERILL: Exactly, exactly. Not knowing where the bad places are and just really focusing on the right

targets and not having the sort of memory bank of negative can really help.

So in that respect, everybody is coming to this golf course pretty fresh except for maybe a few of the players that have gotten out there to play extra times in the past, like the Texas girls that are in the field.

JEFF SZKLINSKI: If I could, I did receive a few questions from a writer who had a conflict pop up this afternoon hoping you both might be able to weigh in on.

Wondering if you had any thoughts on whether players will change the preparation at all having two enormous events in back-to-back weeks to close out the season with obviously U.S. Women's Open next week and Tour Championship the following week?

PAIGE MACKENZIE: I haven't talked to any players about their preparation leading into these two kind of back-to-back weeks. I think, again, it goes back to mentally and emotionally draining to be playing in a major championship or the TOUR Championship.

So I think for that reason alone I think a lot of players typically are a little more cautious with their energy conservation during big weeks, making sure that they're just as efficient as possible, because it is a pretty draining week to do back to back.

But, again, I haven't spoken specifically to anybody about any changes that they've made.

KAY COCKERILL: No, and maybe that's why a few of the top names aren't playing this week in Texas, to just sort of focus on the following two weeks, the U.S. Open and the CME.

This year has been such a crazy year. I think a lot of normal preparations and normal routines that players have been thrown out window, and you kind of just have to go with what is presented.

This is the way it's ended up, and I think everyone, they're probably delighted that they're having the chance to play the U.S. Women's Open. So it's strange that you have these two events back to back, but if you can drum up some kind of great momentum, maybe these two weeks will be two of your best weeks for a certain handful of players that we've seen.

On the flip side, if you're struggling or a little off with something, it could be two really bad weeks. That's the way it goes in sports, right? So I think that whoever is the best able to adapt to the kind of strangeness of this year

and the fact that you've got two big events back to back, we'll just see.

JEFF SZKLINSKI: I had one more. James or Beth Ann, I don't want to step on their toes if they have other questions. The second question was just wanting to know if you expect Jin Young Ko's lack of reps in 2020 to have any negative impact on her next week?

PAIGE MACKENZIE: I don't from just the idea that -- assuming that she's been practicing and preparing. The competitive rust, I think by next week should be not an excuse given playing Pelican and Dallas.

However, you always test -- your game gets tested the most when you're in competition. It's not having a lot of opportunity in between events to then prepare and address anything that she may have needed to do.

But at least the sharp -- as long as the long-term preparation is there, the competitive rust should not be there next week.

KAY COCKERILL: Yeah, and you could probably say, Paige, kind of the same thing for the defending champion, Jeongeun Lee6. None of the players have played the amount that they normally do, and 6 really hasn't played particularly well in the few LPGA events she's played in.

So I wouldn't say that she's someone you're really looking at as being a contender. There are a lot of other players that have had better records leading into this week in Texas and then next week at the U.S. Women's Open.

I think this week in Texas will be kind of interesting to see who's sharpening up. Again, kind of just back to my theme of everything has been a little bit strange this year. You know the talent is there with all these players. It's just who can bring their best stuff when they need to, starting next Thursday.

**Q. I just have one more. Kind of going back to the previous question about the run-up events, we haven't seen Danielle Kang in a while. I guess what do you make of her taking this extended time off leading up to the two events, and what have you liked about Danielle this year in terms of how you think she's grown as a player?**

PAIGE MACKENZIE: I am not worried whatsoever with her taking time off leading into events, because we saw what happened after last time she took a lot of time off and ended up coming out of the gates firing, you know, fire blazing.

From that perspective, I've learned to really understand and appreciate the process and Danielle Kang has. Even during KPMG week -- as least I learned, I don't know if she talked about it previously -- but that he she plays her practice rounds in her hotel room the night before.

Understanding that behind the playful personality and the charming smile, there is a player that's incredibly studious and cares a lot about preparation and planing and strategy.

So I feel like we at least were -- it was revealed to us kind of more about who Danielle Kang is as a player. We always knew the fighter mentality and how great she was in match play, but to kind of have the curtain lifted a little bit on how she thinks and how she plans, I think speaks to what you were alluding to, her maturity and who she is as a player and the world class way in which she goes about treating her career like a job.

KAY COCKERILL: I almost see Danielle as the -- she's the type of player, the bigger the stage, the better she is. The tougher the golf course, the more demanding the golf course, and the higher the stakes, the better she is engaged with what she's doing. She's a high-level player, and I almost think that, quote, regular events she might fall asleep or get bored unless there is something about the course or the tournament that really engages her.

So I think she just is built for big time majors and big time tough golf courses. I also think with this COVID year, the pandemic and all the time that players have had off, the forced time off, I think it's allowed them to reconnect with who they are and what they need in terms of their schedule, and that it's okay to take some more time off. It doesn't mean your golf game is going to go away. Maybe you have to be a little easier on yourself, on your mind and your body, because golfers are perfectionist and they're hard-driven and they want to practice 120% of the time.

I think this whole year has been a kind of learning experience for them to remind themselves that, Hey, sometimes less is more. When you get to the position that the top level players are in, they can afford to pick and choose and play just the places that really mean something to them that they get up for.

So other players just want to play every week. I think about old school Sherri Steinhauer. She hated to stay home and practice. She would rather be out competing. There are a lot of players that are built that way, too. But you have to honor who you are and how best you play and what brings the best out in you as a competitor.

**Q. One last question from me. Obviously first year for NBC covering the U.S. Women's Open in a while. Is**



**there anything different about covering this year's event versus your other majors or other LPGA Tour events?**

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PAIGE MACKENZIE: Kay, I'll let you lead on this, because I know where USGA sits with you.

KAY COCKERILL: Yeah, I mean, it's so true. It's interesting. I was just thinking back and thinking through my career, and I was lucky enough to play in five U.S. Women's Opens, and then this will be the 18th that I've covered for NBC Sports and now Golf Channel.

So earlier this summer when we got the call that the USGA was back, the package was back with NBC and Golf Channel, I was just so delighted. Working the U.S. Women's Amateur was the first return back to USGA events.

So I think NBC Sports and USGA are perfect partners, because Tommy Roy, who leads the team, is such a massive golf fan and a big venue and a big championship fan. He's always loved the USGA, and his love for the USGA Championships permeates through the entire crew.

He wants perfection from everybody. He wants 110% focus on what you're doing. He brings an energy. He makes everyone energized. I just think that the professionalism and the way that NBC Sports brings this championship to the fans is just, I'm happy to be a part of it, proud to be a part of it, and I can't be more -- I couldn't be more excited to be back at the U.S. Women's Open.

PAIGE MACKENZIE: So this will be my first U.S. Women's Open, and I got goosebumps when I got to the call to be on the call. When I grew up this was the championship that every little girl looked up to winning. This was it. Going through the ranks of playing in USGA events, you got a sense of how special the USGA makes each and every one of their championships.

So it was so neat to get and hear the announcement that it was going to be back at NBC Sports. Everything that goes with it, the music around it, everything is nostalgic for me. When I think about watching golf growing up, I think of watching the U.S. Open and everything that goes on with how NBC Sports presents it.

So I couldn't be more excited to be a part of it. It was truly one of the more exciting phone calls that I got that I would be a part of the broadcast team.

JEFF SZKLINSKI: Awesome. Thank you guys. Really appreciate it. We'll go ahead and wrap up the call. Really appreciate everyone making the time to join us.

