

# LPGA Media Conference

Sunday, February 21, 2021

USA

## Madelene Sagström

## Roberta Bowman

### Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Well, hello, everyone, and thank you so much for joining us on a Sunday. I know this is not our typical timing of when we usually gather together for these Drive On pieces, but due to a few schedule conflicts and just making sure that we got you all in here for what we feel is a very important story, we thought it was really important to do this today, so thank you so much for joining us.

Today is really special for all of us here at the LPGA as we get ready to launch a new Drive On spot tomorrow with Madelene Sagström. Madelene is joining us here today, and this story really is a bit of a departure for us. It's a new angle that we get the privilege of helping to tell, and thought it would be really important to kind of give you guys an opportunity for some of our key media to be here with us as we do that.

As I mentioned to all of you in connecting yesterday, we are embargoing today's media availability until tomorrow morning, Monday morning at 10:00 a.m. eastern time. We are going to plan to launch the video you will soon see and a first-person piece, as well.

Ready to get things started, and as I said, this story is very close to all of our hearts and you'll see why in a moment, and I'm going to let Roberta give us an introduction.

ROBERTA BOWMAN: Good morning, Kelly. Good morning, everyone, and thank you for joining us. I have always had the wonderful privilege of introducing essentially the stories behind our Drive On stories. It will be two years in March that the LPGA launched its Drive On platform, and frankly we didn't know where that would take us, but if you have followed the LPGA, you know that the platform of Drive On, the storytelling, has become really important to our players.

As Kelly mentioned, this is a piece that's textured on many levels and one that we are very proud to partner with Madelene and tell. It's a five-minute piece. You will see that there is an important role for Robert Karlsson of the PGA TOUR, so you should know that they are partnering with us in the telling of this story.

Drive On, of course, is about celebrating perseverance and tenacity and hard work. Madelene is all of those things and more. Hers is a story of violation and introspection, of growth, of learning, of triumph, off allyship, and most importantly of a strong sense of purpose. With that, Brienne, if you don't mind sharing the screen we'll show the video and then welcome some of your questions.

(Video shown.)

THE MODERATOR: I think you all heard the audio and the beautiful story that was told, and Madelene, it's a beautiful video and it's a really important story to tell. My first question to you this morning is really, why did you want to share this story now?

MADELENE SAGSTRÖM: Well, obviously this is extremely close to my heart. It's something I have shared in the past, and just when it was brought back up from the LPGA and Amy, it was one of those things, it was like, you can never talk about this enough.

I had the fortunate experience that I've been able to deal with, what happened to me when I was little, and had an amazing support network, and I just want to share this with people to say that you're not alone. All I want to do is to catch that one person and help one person.

Over the years, my platform has grown. Being a winner in 2020 has just opened up the doors that I know that I can share more of myself, and it's going to reach more people. So I figured it was perfect timing. The LPGA has been amazing with all the support. We worked on this for a very long time, and I think the timing is great. I just wanted to just help somebody out there.

THE MODERATOR: Thanks, Madelene. I think that's a message that you've really shared with us very often as we worked on telling this story is just wanting to help one more person. Can you talk about your thoughts from the moment you told Robert and the way your journey has come from there?

MADELENE SAGSTRÖM: Well, this was something I was never going to tell anybody. It was a story and it was an experience that was deeply hidden within me, and I was never going to share that with anybody, and I just come to



realize when I started working with Robert, this has changed me. This has made who I am today. I just wanted to become a better -- first of all, a better person and also I wanted to become a better athlete at the same time.

For me I really started to dig deep inside of myself and figure out what affects me as a person, what am I holding back, what can I do to grow, and this was one of the things that has really played a huge part in my life and it's really affected me in every way that I do on the golf course. Like I mentioned in the video, that's where it really showed the most, like I couldn't handle my emotions out there.

So I started digging in and just like, can this help me somewhere else, and when I started talking about my story and the abuse that I experienced, I've blossomed even more on a personal level. It was just amazing freedom to let it out and just say it and just be, okay, it's out there now.

THE MODERATOR: And I think this says so much about Robert is you felt that he was someone you could talk to about this. When did you come to that realization that he was there for you and that you had someone you could talk to and let this out to?

MADELENE SAGSTRÖM: I felt a connection with Robert really early in our relationship because he is a golfer. He's done this for so many years, has so much experience, and when I talked to him about things how I felt, I could feel he understands me. When I was growing up and I told my parents, they were like, it's just golf. And I'm like, no, it's not just golf, because for me it was so much more. So he was one of the first people that I was like, he really understands me. So I just felt that trust to him, and I just -- I just wanted to challenge myself and grow, and that's why I think that trust between us came from.

ROBERTA BOWMAN: We've had the pleasure of getting to know Robert in this process, and I guess I would characterize it as he's a reluctant star of this show, if you will. He has been very, very humble, wants the light and the spotlight to be on Madelene, obviously extraordinarily supportive of her but appreciates that this is her story to tell.

I have developed great respect for him. We do have a first-person piece from him, as well, but as storytellers, and all of us are that, have just incredible respect for him at that very moment, responding in a way that we all hope a fellow human being would in the face of someone sharing their trauma and their pain.

Madelene, I think you were really lucky to make that connection and to have his support, not just on a mentor

basis but on and off over these years that have followed.

MADELENE SAGSTRÖM: Yeah, definitely. He's an amazing human being in general and also he's a good golfer, but he's an amazing human being.

THE MODERATOR: Roberta, I was going to follow up with you. As Madelene mentioned, this has really been a journey for all of us that we've gone on in sort of telling this story. Can you take us through the process from the LPGA's side a little on what we went through with Madelene in wanting to tell this story and taking so much time to tell it in the right way?

ROBERTA BOWMAN: Yeah, and so this piece actually started about a year ago. Obviously we have known through Madelene's own Facebook posts about her experience with sexual abuse, but what we try and do at the LPGA is even in the face of what we know is an important story, our primary goal is to represent and protect our players. And there is a sense of readiness in storytelling, particularly one like this that is so incredibly personal.

So it was after Gainbridge last year at the height of Madelene's sort of career success, and just watching how she handled herself in the aftermath of that, the thoughtful answers to the media questions, and then she did something very interesting, and she posted on her Facebook page a letter to little Madelene, and that became the signal to us that there was a growing sense of comfort in a broader sharing of this story.

Amy and Madelene got together. It's been an ongoing situation. Obviously COVID happened, which created some of that pause, but we really needed to satisfy ourselves, both Madelene and the LPGA, that she was ready to do this.

As you know, this type of disclosure, you kind of walk into a vortex of the world around you and all that comes with it, and she already plays a game where you're exposed, and she plays a sport where your mental focus is such a critical part of your performance. We just needed to be satisfied that she had thought through all of that.

So the pauses over the past year were extraordinarily helpful to us, and every time we picked up another part of the conversation, it started with, are you ready, Madelene, to the point that I think we annoyed her.

But it was always really important to be calibrated in this important step forward, and when she said over and over, yes, I want to tell this story, then our reaction was, well then let's tell it together and tell it in a way that you can be

really proud of and feel like we have done honor to your story.

You all can judge for yourselves whether we've done that or not. It's been just an incredible journey to partner with Madelene on this storytelling.

THE MODERATOR: Thanks so much, Roberta. I'm going to start opening it up for questions.

**Q. Madelene, your strength and your bravery is just really inspirational. This is the second time I'm seeing your video, and it made me really emotional again, so I would love to know from your point of view, like Roberta said, this is a year in the making. What is it like for you to watch this video, and how are you emotionally preparing for this to go public tomorrow? What are you doing tonight to kind of get emotionally prepared for that moment?**

MADELENE SAGSTRÖM: Well, I think the first time -- I mean, the first time I went public about this was in -- well, the first time I talked about it was in 2016. The first time I went public about it on my own social channels was in '17. So I have kind of -- it's at a point now, I don't cry about it anymore, so it's taken years, obviously, of work to just get to a point like am I fine sharing this to this extent.

I think the video is such a good capture of darkness leading into light because that's kind of how I felt about the whole journey in general. It's so easy to feel stuck in your own ways, to feel stuck in yourself, but the more -- when I started talking about the sexual abuse that I experienced and just how I felt, I just became lighter and lighter and lighter.

It's at a point where I'm really proud of it, but at the same time I'm sitting here shaking because it's emotional because it's a big part of me and what I have gone through. You're showing yourself kind of naked in a way, but I'm really happy that we're doing this because I know there's a lot of people out there that feel alone, and not just in any kind of trauma, in any kind of hard experience. It's easy to feel like you're the only person in the world.

I just want to be there for somebody else knowing that I have a platform. I can share my story and maybe reach out to somebody.

But tonight I'm probably just going to do what I normally do, I'm going to sit and I'm going to knit and I'm going to hope for my passport to get back.

**Q. At the risk of asking the same question again, there are going to be a lot of people tomorrow morning who**

**have maybe never heard of you or never watched a shot of professional golf who are suddenly going to know this story. Are you prepared for the worldwide impact it's likely to have?**

MADELENE SAGSTRÖM: Definitely, because I think the journey that I have been on, I started playing golf because I loved golf, and then golf turned into this thing that absorbed all my energy, and it was all about golf, and I just wanted to be the best player in the world.

Now my life and my career has turned something into more. I stand for so many more things than just sexual abuse in that sense, and I just feel like there's so much more to my life now than just golf, and I want to share that and just share that it's okay to what everybody says, it's okay not to be okay, but you can work through whatever you're going through, and I'm hoping that people can see my story as an inspiration to work through whatever you're going through, no matter in what way you choose to do it. But I'm definitely ready for it. I'm ready to be -- in getting a label, and I want to break out of that label because I'm so much more than just this story.

**Q. I don't what you said in 2017 on your post and how detailed you were there, but I'm curious if from that post and since that time if you've talked to other victims of sexual abuse who have maybe reached out to you?**

MADELENE SAGSTRÖM: I haven't. I think the story when I first came out with it didn't actually jump out. For me it was more -- it kind of was a freedom, like peace, and I haven't actually been in touch with anybody since then.

It's something that I think will grow out of this and see what happens with this story and when it comes out, but I'm ready for whatever will happen, and I'm just going to be there for people, too.

**Q. Have you thought about what those conversations might be like and what you would share if someone came to you for advice?**

MADELENE SAGSTRÖM: Yes and no. I've thought about it for sure, and I think it's going to be emotional for sure. I think that the sad part about sexual abuse is that it is so stigmatized. It's hard for people to talk about because it's something so taboo.

I know there's so many more people that experience this than dare to talk about it, so I know that even if somebody doesn't say anything, just knowing that more and more people share their stories -- I mean, this is not a first-time scenario about this, but I know when people talk and share

about their struggles, someone will see that, and even if they decide to tell somebody or not, I know that can help and they can feel a little less alone in it.

ROBERTA BOWMAN: Can I just add that we've had great support and resources in some of the national organizations, and all of us that have been part of this storytelling have really learned a lot in the process, as well.

As we were thinking about launching this piece next week, we started to go through our LPGA resources and realized that through our LPGA/USGA Girls Golf we touch close to 100,000 girls a year through our program, so one of our team members had the good idea to use this as a start of a conversation with our Girls Golf leaders and ensure that they have the resources as adults and to potentially provide to the girls so that if, in fact, their life has been touched with sexual abuse that they have the resources to begin that healing process.

**Q. In the video you talked about how earlier on golf was kind of an escape for you; I'm just wondering if you could elaborate more on that, just golf's way of kind of being a safe place for you to escape to.**

MADELENE SAGSTRÖM: Yeah, golf -- I've always felt when I played good golf, I'm a good person. That was my -- I kind of put that as the thing. Like playing good golf, I'm okay. So that was my whole thing.

I think that's -- it's one of the reasons why I'm sitting here and playing the LPGA Tour because that's the correlation I had with it because I was searching for perfection, I was searching to become the best player I could be, but I was -- but now afterwards when I look back at it, I was missing the person Madelene. I was just focusing on the golfer. So that's why I call it -- it did save me in a sense because it was all I put my focus and energy on, and I became really, really good at it, and it was hard because I didn't identify myself with anything else. I didn't like who I was as a person when I was growing up but I liked myself as a golfer, so I knew if I spend more and more time on this, I'm going to be fine.

**Q. I'm wondering if you could walk us through the process of sort of how you started telling this story and then like just how it came to fruition with the LPGA?**

MADELENE SAGSTRÖM: Well, the whole -- everything started when I started working with Robert in 2015-'16, because the whole reason why I wanted to start working with Robert because I want to be the best golfer I can be, so I was like, I want to work with the best, I want to be the best golfer, and it just led into this relationship.

When I learned that the person Madelene was more important than the golfer, that if I work on myself, the golfer will follow. That, and it just -- when I had that connection with him, I just felt that trust, like I mentioned before, to tell him my story.

And then from there it literally happened overnight in a sense. One day we were on the golf course, I was hiding behind Robert in the pro shop, not saying anything. I told him what had happened, and the next day I was like, I'm here, come see me. Like it really felt like that to me. I just literally grew overnight, and I felt like I can take space.

I'm still going to focus on what I love, which is golf, but I just felt so much more comfortable being Madelene and just being free in that sense.

Since then I've kind of been using my platform. I'm mostly active on Instagram, but I like to share how I feel. I like to share about my successes and about my struggles because it's a part of who I am, and I know that that's kind of where the LPGA has picked up my story along the way because I write about those. I try to do it on a very authentic level because those are important to me, and it's just telling the story about who I am and who I want to become.

So that's kind of where it went. I'm really good at rambling in general, guys, so just heads up.

**Q. I'm curious over this last year as we have worked together on this story what that part of the process has been like for you in terms of your growth. Has it been hard to talk through some of these things and to have the interview, or has it been somewhat therapeutic in a way? What has it been like?**

MADELENE SAGSTRÖM: I think since this is such a hard -- it's an emotional experience. Every time I talk about it, it becomes less hard. Every time I open my mouth and say some words that I thought were hard to say a while ago, it becomes easier and easier, and I think that every day that I go up and I own my story, I own my history and I own who I am, I'm growing. So I think it's been -- it's obviously very emotional still. It goes from one day I will be like, no, I'm pulling out, I'm not doing this, and the next day, it's like, this is perfect, I know this is great. It's still hard, but life is hard in general, so I'm just trying to ride those waves and figure it out along the way. But I'm really proud of the way we've done it, all of us, and I've felt so much respect from both you and the LPGA and just wanted to share this story in the best possible light and doing it so gracefully and just so nice and giving me the chance to pull out any second has been awesome.

**Q. I would love to know about in addition to the LPGA's support, what has it been like from the players, your peers? Have you told your story to them? Have you been open to them? Who has been part of your support system in addition to LPGA, Robert, your family, your friends? From the player side, who's been on your team?**

MADELENE SAGSTRÖM: Well, I think when I first launched it in 2017, it was a lot of the same kind of -- like being brave, being strong, sharing my story.

But it's the same thing with everything. Things fall down. That's what I love about the Tour because you don't get identified by things that happen to you. People see me as me, which I really love.

But I have my closest friends. I'm really close with Pernilla Lindberg and I have my best friend at home who used to play on Symetra, Julia. They have been the ones that I have shared my journey with. But it's not one of these things that I just go talk about on an easy weekend. It's hard. It's a hard subject to talk about. So you kind of go with the flow and figure out when the timing is right. I mean, it's nothing that I talk about every day.

ROBERTA BOWMAN: You know, what's interesting is in many ways this story is just starting. We all appreciate that, and yes, we're as prepared as we know how to be, but we know there's just a lot of factors out there.

The next chapter of this story I think will be perhaps Madelene's most important in terms of that disclosure and outreach.

MADELENE SAGSTRÖM: If I can just add something for my part, the biggest thing for me is it's like I'm telling the story but what I want to focus on and what I want to share with people is it's the steps that I've done afterwards, the decisions that I have decided to do to grow, because for me it's about how can I be the best version of myself every day, how can I wake up and do something a little bit better today, and that's the story I want to share with people because it's not about the situation, it's not about what happened, it's about how did I grow out of this, how did I become the version that I am today and the version that I like of myself because I went through a lot of experiences where I was like, I don't like this person, I don't like who I am, and how can I figure that out and share that with the world.

THE MODERATOR: Madelene, you're so good at this that you stole my last question already from me, what you were hoping people will take out of this. Roberta, you just heard

Madelene talking about that message. What do you hope that people take when they see this piece, and as you said, it's just really the beginning of telling Madelene's story and her helping so many other people just by telling the story.

ROBERTA BOWMAN: Yeah, I actually think there's two messages from our perspective. One is our players are so much more than golfers, and every athlete has their own story here, and to really appreciate and respect these dimensions that they bring outside of being golfers. She's an amazing talent as a golfer. Yes, she's a survivor of sexual abuse. She's a beautiful writer. She loves photography. She doesn't follow directions, so she's not a very good baker. That's all part of who Madelene is, and every one of our players has that type of richness and diversity, as well.

The other thing from the LPGA perspective is again, there are so many layers of this particular story. What we hope is that it becomes a conversation starter. If your life is touched with trauma, to have that conversation and reach out to others. If you are lucky enough that you've been spared that, maybe you'll find yourself in the role of a Robert Karlsson and having to have that judgment at that very moment, and to create that conversation around how can we appreciate and support people going through their own changes, because quite honestly, if COVID taught us nothing, it's that we're all in this hard life together and that human support, that human touch at just the right moment can actually turn a life around.

THE MODERATOR: That's such a special message. Madelene, I know we've talked so many times about your story, about all of these, and there's so many things as you talked through this, but I think it's so powerful to see that relationship that you have with yourself and that love that you have for yourself, and I know -- I think that's a message that's really going to resonate through this and through your story, as well, as we all individually have our own struggles with loving ourselves and being there.

So proud of you for telling this story. So proud of you for what we're going to see come out of it. And just really happy to be there with you on this journey, and you know we're here with you every step of the way.

And thank you to all of you who joined us today in helping to share and tell this because I do think it's remarkable the opportunity that we have to connect with people, and as Madelene said, let people know they're not alone. Thank you all so much again for joining us on a Sunday. I really appreciate it.

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