

ANA Inspiration

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Rancho Mirage, California, USA

Mission Hills Country Club

Danielle Kang

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Welcome to the virtual media center here at the ANA Inspiration in Rancho Mirage, California. I'm pleased to introduce the 2017 KPMG Women's PGA Championship winner and the current No. 2 in the Rolex rankings, Danielle KANG. Thanks so much for joining us today.

DANIELLE KANG: Thank you.

THE MODERATOR: This is the second major in a four-week span. You finished T32 at the AIG Women's Open. How did having a major tournament so recently help prepare you for this moment, especially in familiarizing yourself with competing at this championship level in this type of setting, no fans.

DANIELLE KANG: Playing in the AIG Women's British Open was definitely a different experience for me. It was a bubble, not being able to go out, and it was different. I think it prepared me in a way as in the major atmosphere is still there, and the golf course still definitely brings all the difficulties to the table. I'm really excited to see how this week is going to pan out.

It's definitely different, the bleachers not being there, the grandstands on certain holes, because I've been playing this for the last 10 plus year, and it's a different vibe, but you still walk up and the golf course is still the Dinah Shore Mission Hills, the one that I remember. I'm really excited.

THE MODERATOR: Still the same course that you remember?

DANIELLE KANG: Yeah, but the golf course is in a little bit different condition than it is earlier in the year.

THE MODERATOR: Obviously a bit of a different atmosphere as you mentioned and especially this week with caddies being allowed to take electric carts or push carts if they so choose. What was your initial reaction to the news and how have you approached the option with your caddie?

DANIELLE KANG: My caddie and I have decided not to go along with that option. We are going to do what we normally do, what we've been doing for as long as I've known, which is to walk, and I understand the LPGA protocols and why they made that rule for making the health and safety being their priority number one for their players and caddies. But yeah, my caddie and I have respectfully decided to take the option that we've already been used to.

THE MODERATOR: Sticking to the routine, make it easy.

DANIELLE KANG: Yeah, per se.

THE MODERATOR: You're a two-time winner so far in 2020 at the LPGA Drive On Championship and the Marathon Classic and obviously a past major champion. The goal every week: Raise a trophy when the tournament is all said and done. When you win like you have this year and can draw on your major championship pedigree, how hungry is Danielle Kang to win in So Cal?

DANIELLE KANG: Answering that question, I guess it's a major you definitely want to win, especially in California. I'm from California, so I think it would be really awesome to be able to win in this state. Last year I came close. It wasn't the final round that I wanted, but I think having another opportunity this year is going to be really interesting.

The golf course is definitely playing different because of how the Bermudagrass has grown over the rye now. It's playing way different than I expected. I didn't know that the golf course could change from April to September that differently, but I'm really excited to see what kind of golf course and what kind of game is going to be shown this entire week.

THE MODERATOR: Last year you secured a career-best finish at the ANA Inspiration of tied for sixth. We've talked about some changes around the Dinah Shore course. There's roughly 100 trees that have been taken out, numerous bunkers that have been added, and then obviously no grandstands. What has it been like just so far this week in preparation, like you said, with even the grass that's different, adjusting to this new setting and how you hope to build off what you accomplished here last year?

DANIELLE KANG: I think what I normally do when I get to a tournament, kind of figuring out the green speed, the conditions around the greens and how it's going to play is the most important. I played nine holes earlier this morning, and they tightened up the fairway even more than they normally do, I've noticed, and around the greens, if you kind of -- if the ball just rolls over the green or just short, it gets into a little bit of a funky lie.

I think having different types of shots and being able to handle the situation that has been handed to you the best you can, and I think it's going to be tough in a different way than it normally is.

THE MODERATOR: A true major championship test?

DANIELLE KANG: Always.

THE MODERATOR: You're a California native, San Francisco born and So Cal raised, competed at Pepperdine University before turning pro and you played extensively in the SCPGA program as a junior golfer. What does this week mean to you to come back home and compete as a professional?

DANIELLE KANG: I think normally we have a lot of fans out here, and everybody that lives in Southern California comes out and watches, and that's one of my favorite parts about being here. But I know that that's not the case in 2020, so I think I can just do the best I can and play for them, and I'm really excited to play in California for the first time this year and just be able to perform for them whether they're at home watching or not. Really excited to just kind of have the opportunity to play well and give myself the best opportunity to and will this week.

THE MODERATOR: Are there any specific memories that stand out from your junior golf days in Southern California, any specific stories you remember as you learned the game of golf around here?

DANIELLE KANG: We had a tournament here. I was winning, and there was a whole jumping in the Poppies Pond thing, as well, during that event, and I ended up three-putting and three-putting and lost in a playoff. They wanted to actually throw me in the lake regardless, and I said no, maybe that opportunity will come one day. That's something I remember about this place is that I lost that tournament and another girl got to jump in. But yeah, that's something that I remember from here when I was young.

THE MODERATOR: We've asked everyone today to find out the array of answers, if you do get the chance to leap into Poppies Pond for the first time, what style of jump would you do and why?

DANIELLE KANG: I mean, probably normal. I think it's like -- to be honest, I kind of want to walk in or run in and that's what the original -- when they first did it, that's how they did it, and I think I always like to keep the respectful tradition, and that has become the tradition, so I don't think -- I don't know if I'll dive in the pond or anything like that. I probably wouldn't do it. But yeah, when that moment happens I'll let you know.

THE MODERATOR: The amount of times you've played this course, especially in this event and the rich history obviously each major has a rich history, that's why it's a major, but when you're from the area and you notice the rich history and you've played here so much, can you explain maybe from your background as a California native what kind of history there really is here growing up and seeing this tournament and now playing in it?

DANIELLE KANG: The history behind this golf course, I mean, it's evolved into -- not even evolved, but it was a major even before it is now. The great players that have won here, they're one of the best women golfers that have ever played here. The drama that the golf course has presented itself, the final stretches coming down, there has been multiple playoffs out here, especially with the 18th hole being reachable the final day. You get eagles or birdies.

I don't expect anything below what it has already given us, which is just the epitome of kind of a major that we come back to every year. I don't know, I'm just -- this is just the one play that I feel consistent at when I come here and I know exactly what to expect, and it's just been the traditional consistency, and that's what I love about it.

Year in and year out, you come here and you expect it to be the way it is, and it actually even exceeds your expectations when you come. I get surprised every time I come up here.

Yeah, just looking at how to play that hole. I keep looking over to see if they're hitting on the 18th hole and if they're hitting it and if they're using the backboard.

I don't know, there's so much to learn on this golf course and you never stop learning. I've played here numerous times, and I'm still playing a practice round and going, okay -- still trying to learn the golf course, especially with the different grass and especially with the Bermuda this week here. It's just going to be different, but I'm excited.

THE MODERATOR: We are joined by Danielle Kang in the virtual media center. At this time we'll open it up to questions.

Q. You gave some wonderful tips for our PGA Junior League players in the past, and I have two quick questions. Your recent remarkable run, any particular keys to trigger that, whether it be short game keys that you relied on? Your short game was immaculate during the run. And any keys for success for the kids in that area. And the second part would be for the kids, a significant moment early on when you realized that golf was going to be your living and your dream and you knew that you could be successful on the LPGA Tour?

DANIELLE KANG: Okay, so part one of that question, things that I worked on during the quarantine, was my game specifically itself, I had to work on a lot of fairway woods. That was something that I was lacking.

For the kids, I would love to tell them to always work on their putting. People underestimate how much you can shave down shots by just practicing speed with your putting. I think that instilling good feel and good distance control when they're young is really important to play good, especially later down the road. That would be my advice towards the kids.

The second part of the question was --

Q. A significant moment in your early career when you made the decision this is going to be what I'm going to do.

DANIELLE KANG: I didn't really -- it didn't really hit me until I probably won the U.S. Women's Amateur. Golf was something that I did and something that I was good at and I enjoyed playing, but the minute I decided that I wanted to turn professional and that I wanted to compete, it wasn't as a career. I wanted the next level of competition, and that was as soon as I won the U.S. Women's Amateur.

Then the ultimate was when I won it again. That was the day that I wanted to come out here and compete against the best women golfers in the world.

THE MODERATOR: Danielle, you were just looking out at 18 quite frequently as we were talking. Is there a hole on Tour that you step on the tee and you look down at the possibilities that you could have with scoring and the excitement that maybe builds more adrenaline than No. 18 here?

DANIELLE KANG: I really like reachable par-5s on the final hole. I like when a score can alter on the last hole. 18th hole at Olympia Fields, even 18th hole at Arkansas, but that one is a little bit shorter, so people are reaching it

and it's got a little backboard normally. I like it when there's like a little bit more to it where there's bunkers and water and you know that there is a bogey or an eagle.

It's a three-shot hole. It's interesting. I love the drama that it can bring. It's kind of the holes -- even on -- just the reachable par-5s, you can't underestimate them because it's not an auto birdie and there is a bogey and a double there, as well, and that kind of hole really makes it exciting for me, and that's kind of the things that I look for in this hole specifically.

THE MODERATOR: Danielle, thank you for your time today. Thank you to everyone for joining on the virtual call and best of luck this week.

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