

# AmazingCre Portland Classic

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Portland, Oregon, USA

Columbia Edgewater Country Club

**Juli Inkster**

**Natasha Andrea Oon**

Press Conference



So I think just playing out my senior year really gave me the type of footing to see, okay, where should I go in my life; am I going to go for like an office job or am I going and pursue professional golf, which I've been doing my whole life.

It was amazing to me that I was able to just come back so quickly from an injury because I was giving myself like about six months or maybe just to see if I could get that competitive spirit back.

But really, really happy that I did, and fully went out there, completing the year without dropping out in the middle. I think it was just super important to see how well I could have done. Yeah, for sure, so really happy.

THE MODERATOR: Juli, why is it important to you to award college seniors? And maybe for a little history, can we hear how this award came about?

JULI INKSTER: Yeah, I'd love to. Personally I'm pretty good friends with Anne Walker at Stanford, and the LPGA qualifying school is in November, where it ends, and the LPGA lets amateurs, collegiate players go as an amateur, and if they make it, they have their card, and if they don't make it, they go back to school.

A lot of these really good collegiate teams were losing their best players.

To me, it's leaving your teammates, it's leaving your school, and really leaving your coaches high and dry. They have a chance to win a national championship, and I know it's a lot of pressure on the kids that, you know, I got my card, I probably should go; I don't know if I'm going to be able to get my card next year.

So we kind of sat down and started brainstorming what we could do, and Workday got involved, and they made it really easy for me to follow through with this because I'm very passionate about team sports. I'm very passionate about school.

I think leaving early, I like to see people follow through on their commitments. It gave me a chance to really be hands-on with my winner.

The last three years with Natasha winning this year and

THE MODERATOR: Here with Natasha Andrea Oon and the legendary Juli Inkster. This year Natasha won the Juli Inkster Award that goes to the best college senior -- the highest ranked college senior, and I know we've talked a little bit about this before at Meijer, but tell me what it means to you to be able to win this prestigious award.

NATASHA ANDREA OON: Actually, I feel like it means way more than it did before because I feel like the trials that I've gone through until this moment have actually put me into perspective of like how much of a struggle it is to transition from an amateur to professional.

I think just Juli making this award a thing has helped me so much free my mind up to play these amazing tournaments and expose me so much to these really, really competitive level type of golf games.

Just the pressure out there, managing my expectations, having weeks of just LPGA golf just makes me feel like a little bit more ready to just be out there next year, just to try and just qualify my way into LPGA or just any tournament right now.

I just want to compete, so yeah, for sure, really happy.

THE MODERATOR: How important to you was it to play your senior year at San Jose State? I know that was your alma mater, as well, Juli. How important was it to finish out your college career?

NATASHA ANDREA OON: I think my mom, she's always like made it such an important thing to just get my degree, and I did in December.

But the year before that I was injured and also COVID was happening, so it was very -- it was a very gray area for me which path I was going to take.



Jaravee winning the year before and Natalie winning the year before, I still stay in touch with them.

I just didn't want to put my name on a trophy. I really wanted to be involved with their career.

As Natasha said, it's a big jump going from amateur golf, collegiate golf, to professional golf. If they have someone in their right pocket they can call and ask, what tournaments should I play or how should I set my schedule up or how you go about playing a tournament, and I'm there for them.

I think it really helps them. With Workday, it helps them financially, and they don't have to worry about getting sponsors. They can go out there on their own and make a name for themselves.

It's been a great award. I want to keep building it. Mark Ganz with KBL, I approached Tom Maletis who the trophy is named after here. He's a good friend of mine. If we could get the Inkster Award to have an invitation here, and they were all for it.

So in order for them to be able to really compete and see what it's like to play an LPGA event, because a lot of these girls have not. As Natasha said, it's a big curve, and you can really see where you need to work on your game and how these professionals go about practicing and playing a practice round.

We got an exemption here, and the tournament, Meijer, gave us an exemption. So, Natasha, really this is their tournament, which a lot of players don't get that opportunity. She'll go to qualifying school, and now she's prepared and ready to go.

I'm really excited about it, and it's great that Natasha from my alma mater, San Jose State, got the award, because the other two schools were on the East Coast, and it's nice to have the West Coast represent.

I hope to build this award with Workday and just keep making it bigger.

THE MODERATOR: How special is it for you to award this to someone who played at your alma mater and someone you play with all the time, as you said?

JULI INKSTER: Yeah, it's been great. I've gotten to know Natasha because she played at San Jose State, and Pat Hurst is a friend of mine and she was her assistant coach. We always knew Natasha had the tools; she just overthinks a little bit.

So I'm getting her to just go out there and play and not think. Judy Rankin always told me the biggest advice is Juli, don't blink, just play. That really helped me. Let your natural talent go out there and play, and she's got a ton of it.

It's really fun for me to watch her take this next progression to Tour golf.

**Q. (No microphone.)**

NATASHA ANDREA OON: So I think like my biggest takeaway from this whole experience was that we actually -- I actually feel like we do need to have conversations about the transition from amateur to pro, because it has been hard. It has been really hard.

It's really easy like in college life to just go with the wave because everything is planned out for you. Like oh, I have this; there's a calendar and everything is just planned out for you. You don't want to go? You'd better go.

Now it's like everything is in your hands, and you can listen to your body, but at the same time, it's like you don't know when to push yourself, you don't know when to take a step back. It's just been like how do I make sure I'm taking care of myself while playing every single week. Do I need to take this week off? Where can I play?

I'm just really lucky to be where I'm at in terms of college, because I still have the connections I made and I can still play courses like Los Altos and Castlewood.

But thinking about those amateurs that do not have those, I really don't know like how they handle it out there, because it's been really hard. Like when to book flights, how to rent cars, where to stay in tournaments, how to avoid -- where and when can I see my coach.

It's just been a whirlwind, and this award just means so much more because of everything that I've went through these past two years for sure.

**Q. (No microphone.)**

JULI INKSTER: I really didn't have a mentor. I just kind of learned on the fly. It was different then. We just traveled in the United States, and we traveled mostly with our college buddies that we played with.

Nowadays a lot of these girls don't go to college, so you don't really know, so you don't really have a support system.

As Natasha says, it is a lot different because you go from

having everything planned out for you, what tournaments you're going to play, when you're leaving, travel is all -- packing is all done for you.

All of a sudden you're an independent contractor out here by yourself, and there's a lot of unknown questions and a lot of lonely time that you've got to try to figure it out.

Natasha is only 20 -- 1. Happy birthday.

She came over here from Malaysia at 16 and got her degree in three and a half years, so she's smart, but she's not street smart. We're trying to get her to be street smart. She can learn from me; I'm not smart, but I'm street smart, so we make a good pair.

But Natasha knows that I'm going to be there for her, that Brian, my husband, is going to be there for her. She always has somewhere to go, someone to talk to, and same with Natalie and Jaravee.

I talk to Natalie a little more than Jaravee, but I always try to check in with them and see how they're doing. It's been great for me because I love doing stuff like this. I love being able to have these girls transition to something they love.

They love to play golf, and their goal is to be a winner on the LPGA, and if I can help out, it just makes it all worthwhile.

**Q. (No microphone.)**

JULI INKSTER: It's expensive. They're 75,000 probably a year, and that's if you're staying in private housing and stuff like that. Workday has given me 50,000, and I've given all 50 to Natasha here.

The last couple, because we're growing it, I wasn't able to give them all 50, but I think it's important that I do give them the 50. My travel expenses and stuff come out of the foundation.

I want them to be able to have the freedom of not having to worry about their money right away and that they can afford to have a good caddie and they can afford to eat.

She's not old enough to rent a car -- you did? Oh, nice. Good for you. You're not driving, are you?

This is all the things she's learning because it's amazing. It's like having kids. It's like, oh, my God, we've got to pay our electric bill or our phone bill? All of a sudden these things add up.

Ralph, my caddie that's caddied for me for a long time is caddying for Natasha, and he's been around. He's making it really easy for her. He's a good caddie, and Natasha is listening to him about course management and practicing and preparing and not overworking, because four days is a lot of golf.

We're just trying to do little things to make it easier for her.

**Q. (No microphone.)**

NATASHA ANDREA OON: I think it's like caddie and also taxes. Like I feel like I got my first LPGA paycheck like two weeks ago, and I was like, oh, yay, and then I looked at the thing, and I was like, taxes. Oh, my God, taxes. It's a lot. Like it's a lot. So, yeah, that's crazy.

JULI INKSTER: Street smart, like I said.

NATASHA ANDREA OON: Just travel, airlines, yeah. Like I also lose all my receipts. Gas, caddie.

JULI INKSTER: Have you paid for one yet? No, but it adds up. Just getting from A to B these days is not easy. If you don't have any status with airlines you've got to pay baggage fees, and then you've got to rent a car and eat.

If you have a physio or someone to try and keep your body in shape -- taxes.

THE MODERATOR: Natasha, I just want to know what some of your goals for yourself are. Maybe not just necessarily on the LPGA, but your goals for yourself in general and how you plan on relying on Juli to help you with those.

NATASHA ANDREA OON: So I think my goals are just to be more comfortable out there. I think I'm very uncomfortable out there, which is kind of -- at first I was really mad at myself about that, but I kind of stepped back and be like, okay, let's be realistic here. It's your first time really as a professional out here.

But as I said, this award has made things a lot more easier. Like I feel like it would have been such a longer transition if I didn't have this award with me.

I think my goal just would be try and just ASAP get on this Tour because I love it so much out here. Also, I think it would be nice to just also do what Juli does, which is help a lot of the other girls out there come into this Tour and hopefully grow the Tour more, because I'm very passionate about golf and what it has done for me.

I think it would be really nice to maybe help the girls back



in my country or just at my college just to be -- just to make it more easier to chase their dreams, as well. Yeah.

THE MODERATOR: Juli, what are your goals for her?

JULI INKSTER: I think she nailed it. It's to grow as a person, grow as a player, and give back. Always try to leave it better than when you started.

Natasha, I don't think she realizes how good she is yet, and I think when she gets more comfortable out here she's going to have a successful life on Tour, if that's what she wants.

And if she doesn't, she'll be successful off the Tour, too, because she is a smart gal. She's a hard worker. The thing that I think she has that a lot of players don't is she likes the hunt. She likes being in the mix of things.

She says she gets nervous, but we all get nervous. But I've seen her and her scores on Saturday and Sunday how she plays well. I don't think you can teach that. I think you just have that.

I think she doesn't realize she has it, but what I've seen of her, it's definitely in there.

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