

The Annika driven by Gainbridge at Pelican

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Belleair, Florida, USA

Pelican Golf Club

Rachel Kuehn

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: All right, pleased to be joined by sponsor's invite, Rachel Kuehn. Rachel, just talk about the level of excite, some thought and feelings being able to play here at Pelican Golf Club.

RACHEL KUEHN: Yeah, I'm incredibly thankful for the opportunity to be here. It's not every day that as an amateur you can compete against some of the best players in the world, so I'm incredibly appreciative of the chance to be here.

I got the chance to play the golf course for the first time yesterday. The condition is amazing and I am definitely really excited to get the week started.

I feel like Thursday can't come soon enough.

Q. You were on the pre-season ANNIKA Award watch list; now you're getting to play in her namesake tournament. First of all, how much does it mean to you to be on that list and play here now? What does that all mean?

RACHEL KUEHN: Right. I was telling someone earlier, anything that is associated with Annika Sorenstam, it's always -- it's just taken to the next level, what she's done for the game of golf and what she does to give back to it is incredible.

So getting a chance to be on her watch list, you know, it's something that's really coveted among college players. There is work left to hopefully do that in the spring, but I think that's really cool.

And then obviously to be able to be here, not only playing in an LPGA event, but playing in Annika's LPGA event, I just think it just means a lot to a lot of the ladies out here. I'm just incredibly excited and thankful.

THE MODERATOR: I think Jeremy has a little note for you.



JEREMY FRIEDMAN: Actually on Thursday, the end of the season watch list is coming out Thursday, so you are on that end of season watch list for The ANNIKA Award for next year.

And following up on that, if you saw, The ANNIKA Award trophy is out there on the driving range. Annika has been one of your idol, kind of like what Matt said. What does it mean to you to be also in your fifth year at Wake and coming off your big win at the East Lake Cup last week, to be in the top echelon of women's college golf, which is what Annika is trying to push forward for the next generation of players?

RACHEL KUEHN: Yeah, I mean, I didn't know that, so that's really cool to find that out. I've been lucky to be on that watch list before. Hopefully it's something to go out -- and I know every girl covets that trophy, so it's something to go out and play for this spring. I think what you said is exactly right. Her attaching her name to that award makes it mean all the more.

It's something that only a handful of players can say they've won. To see the trophy out there on the driving range, because I definitely spotted it while I was putting, I just think it keeps everything in perspective of what you're working for long-term.

Every week you want to come out and play your best golf, but it reminds me and I think a lot of people of the longer term goals, too.

Q. This is your third LPGA event this year, fourth overall. We talked to you back in Meijer, June or whatever. Where do you feel like you are in your game or confidence as you have gone from here to Evian? Where are you at, your confidence level in your game?

RACHEL KUEHN: Right, I definitely think my game this year has gone through a little bit of a roller coaster. It's been up and down, and luckily this fall it's started to steady out. I've used the past year and will continue to use the next semester as some time getting ready to turn professional in '24.



So I'm really just trying to use these weeks to gain some experience and to start to get comfortable out here so when I do take that next step I want to feel ready and prepared. I think I'm hopefully going to use this week as a chance to prove to myself that I can compete out here.

I think the goal is definitely of course to be here on the weekend and then to just see if I can climb that leaderboard.

Q. We talked to you earlier. You joked with us. Spent two days at Wake Forest for school and you're emailing professors, hey, I'm playing another pro event. You went to the World Amateurs. Just balancing travel and playing and school, what's that all been like for you?

RACHEL KUEHN: I've been really fortunate that my professors have been really understanding. I don't think they were quite expecting, and neither was I expecting the hectic end of the season that it's been, but I've been telling everyone that between the World Am and East Lake Cup and here, they have been things I've been really excited for, and it so makes packing and makes the travel fun.

Again, I have really great support system at home advisors and professors and friends, and they've been able to help me stay caught up on school. My poor partners in group projects I don't think are quite as thrilled.

It's been great, and I'm definitely ready for some down time after this to spend some time with my roommate that I feel like I haven't seen all semester. So excited for the week, but excited for the next couple months back home to get ready for the spring again.

Q. When did you first get a chance to meet Annika? What do you remember from that encounter?

RACHEL KUEHN: I first met Annika at her collegiate event my freshman year. I was taken aback by how friendly she was. She took time to look me in the eye, shake my hand, introduce herself, and wish me good luck. I'm sure she met hundreds of people that week. It would've been very easy for her to just bush me off as another participant. She took time to ask me where I went to school and how I felt about the week.

She made a really good impact on me. We've been back every year since and I've got to know her and her husband decently well over the years. Always been incredibly supportive and friendly. I just think it's inspiring how much not only she gives back to the game and the impact she's able to make on all these people at the same time.

Q. You come from a golf family. Your mom is probably closer in age to Annika. Did your mom give you any insight into Annika from times they may have crossed paths, and did that make meeting Annika any easier when the time came?

RACHEL KUEHN: I think it was something growing up in a golfing household, I was never really -- I didn't have to have anyone explain Annika Sorenstam to me. I just kind of knew. I knew she was the greatest female, and arguably the greatest golfer of all-time.

I was definitely a very star struck when I met her. It's funny, as I've gotten older and I look back on that, oh, my gosh I was so nervous. But rightfully so. You're meeting the GOAT.

So I think mom shared -- I don't know if they quite crossed paths, but I just think that the story is every golfer knows her. I don't know if I had to be explained who she was.

Q. Golf has taken you all over the globe. What was your experience like at the World Amateur?

RACHEL KUEHN: I had the best week at the World Amateur. I had two incredible teammates in Megan Schofil and Anna Davis, incredible captain. The week I think none of us played as well as we had hoped. I know as a team we were hoping to finish higher.

But just the week as a whole, I know we all just really soaked it in. You don't know when you're going to get the chance to go back to Abu Dhabi or Dubai or anywhere in the Middle East, so we really just tried to take it all in and enjoy the experience as a whole.

You know, even though the golf wasn't quite as -- it wasn't what we had hoped for, we all just really enjoyed the week. And to get closer to those girls was really fun. Any chance to represent your country is really special. I'm glad I went and glad I could make it work with my college season, too.

Q. What have you learned about yourself and your game in the handful of LPGA events you played?

RACHEL KUEHN: I think every LPGA event I've been fortunate enough to play I've learned something new, whether it's about handling just how new the situation is to me. There is a lot people here. You don't see that at college events. It's normally just team members and coaches.

I was kind of taken aback the first time I walked on the range and saw all the reps and everything. There was a lot

going on, so kind of learning how to handle there.

And then learning how to really just focus on my golf when I got on the golf course, and not let any of the outside distractions. I'm still working our on that, and I think I have a long way to go and a lot to learn. But I think every week I get the chance to do it I'm learning something new.

Q. What is the biggest challenge balancing -- we see the golf side of it -- balancing the academics and the time, getting the practice time? What's the biggest challenge?

RACHEL KUEHN: I think the biggest challenge is just there is just not enough hours in the day sometimes. I think every student-athlete would love to dedicate 100% of their time to their sport. I know if I could I would be at the golf facility 24/7, but even here I'm going to do a nice condensed practice after this and I have to go back. I have a meeting for a group project. You have to make the time sometimes.

As much as I would love to be out here and spend all day, that's what professional golf is for I think. You know, we are still student-athletes and student always comes first in my family. The biggest challenge is making sure you make time for both.

Q. Following up on the student-athlete part, so last week won the East Lake Cup last week. So two parter. How does that week and winning the East Lake Cup with your teammates, how does that help you prepare for this week? Secondly, not only with the Eastlake Cup but with the World Am and Meijer and also the NCAAs last year, playing in front of cameras, how has all that prepared you better to play out here?

RACHEL KUEHN: I think the first part of your question, college golf and individual golf are very different, especially when you have match play event like East Lake Cup. It's really cool to see how momentum in one match affects the other matches. It shouldn't, but it does.

I was really happy how I played. I hopped straight off a plane and was a little jet lagged, so there was just a lot going on that week and I was able to battle through all that and put up a good finish in stroke play and win two points for my team in the two matches.

Definitely feel like my game is trending in the right direction, so excited to see that carry on into the week.

And then the second part of your question, I've been very fortunate to have a lot of really great experiences and great finishes as a team and as an individual as well. I think all

of that, it just kind of builds your confidence.

You know, you're out on the golf course and you're over a golf shot, and I think every golfer instinctively goes back to a time they executed said golf shot.

I think when you have had the experience to play in front of cameras, you can then draw on experiences when you executed in front of cameras before. It builds a new type of pressure really. I remember the first time playing in front of cameras. I was so out of my element and didn't handle it well at all. The next time was a little better and next time was a little better.

Now that there is actually a lot of college events on TV I think it's really cool for the growth of the game. I think a lot of girls are finally getting the opportunity to play in front of cameras before they come out to the LPGA.

It just kind of builds your toolbox and your memory box of times when you executed golf shots under pressure I think.

Q. I wanted to ask you, the LPGA has elevated to some amazing courses recently: Pebble Beach, I think Riviera is on the forefront, as is St. Andrews next year. Is there a course on your Bucket List that you would really like to play as an LPGA player when you turn professional?

RACHEL KUEHN: That's a great question. Yeah, I think I've been very fortunate to check off a lot of Bucket List golf courses. I really have, between ANWA and Curtis Cup and some of the really cool events.

I haven't played Pebble so I was a little sad to miss out on the Women's Open this year. So that one is on the Bucket List. Cypress Point is on the Bucket List. They're hosting a men's collegiate event now. I haven't played much over in the U.K. so anything over there, St Andrews, all of that. I don't know if I can pinpoint one.

Q. (No microphone.)

RACHEL KUEHN: I've actually played Augusta National, but they host that Women's Amateur event every year. Gosh, I don't know, too many good golf courses in the world, isn't there?

Q. Curious, she was rival and she'll be a rival again; this is a gap year. What did you make the Rose Zhang's transition to the professional ranks?

RACHEL KUEHN: A rival would not be the word I would use to describe Rose Zhang. She's the most friendly, kind human being.



Rose is incredible. It's been so much fun to watch her flourish as a professional. I think of her as a teammate just between our two Curtis Cups and the World Amateur team we were on.

She was in a league of her own in amateur golf, wasn't she? To watch her win her pro debut and make the Solheim Cup team, I feel like I'm her biggest cheerleader from back home.

Definitely I think it has been inspiring to a lot of girls that are still amateur knowing that if Rose can do that, we can go out and compete, too. I don't think she realizes the impact it's had on a lot of us still in college.

So I'm always rooting for her and taking confidence from what she's done. I haven't even done it, but knowing she can do it gives me a chance to think I can go out and do it, too.

THE MODERATOR: All right, I think that'll do it. Thank you so much, Rachel.

RACHEL KUEHN: Yeah, thank ya'll.

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