

The ANNIKA driven by Gainbridge at Pelican

Tuesday, November 11, 2025

Belleair, Florida, USA

Pelican Golf Club

Annika Sorenstam

Dan Doyle, Jr.

Rachel Heck

Press Conference



think we've achieved that.

Q. Annika, same type of question. Naturally you've been involved with other golf tournaments over your year career. You saw this tournament from afar, right, for the first few years. What's it been like for you in the past three years to be the tournament namesake?

ANNIKA SORENSTAM: Well, it's been a dream come true, what can I say, to come here. Obviously it's a little bit surreal to see your name everywhere, but it's been fantastic to have a partner like the Doyle family and obviously Gainbridge that support women in general in so many ways.

Just kind of everything lined up so beautifully. This time of year, Florida, and just this golf course, the hospitality here, the club, everything just about it is just really what I think both Mike and I dreamed about.

Like Dan said, it's gotten better and better because we care and we're committed and we're dedicated and we want to make a difference. We want the players to feel extremely happy to be here and feel special, and also bring in the community.

As you know, there are so many things going on this week with charity work, et cetera. So I'm super proud. When Dan said every year we sit and we think about what to do and make it better, I'm thinking, what am I going to do for '26? I'm not a person to settle.

But we have I think thanks to you and your team we've come a long ways, and I think we're all just very proud of what we have here this week in particular with the players and the sponsors and just the engagements in general and just the support from people like yourself, the media. It's been very, very positive.

Q. Dan, speaking of community and community engagement here, one year ago at this time we were just blessed to be able to host this event because of the two hurricanes that came through. Talk about the community and the membership, that and the club that just came together to put on this event this past year

THE MODERATOR: Good afternoon everybody, and thank you for joining us for our pre-tournament news conference for The ANNIKA driven by Gainbridge at Pelican. Joining us today we have Dan Doyle, Jr., owner of Pelican Golf Club, and tournament host and tournament namesake, Annika Sorenstam, host of our great event.

Dan, start with you. This is the sixth year of the tournament, third year with Annika and Gainbridge as a part of the event. Take us back a little bit to 2020 when you and the family were building this place and had this idea with Justin Sheehan, the COO here, and fast forward to how excited you are for the growth of first six years of this event.

DAN DOYLE JR: Yeah, so you go back to 2020, which none of us really want to remember the COVID year. Best time to throw a golf tournament and then you're told you're not allowed to have spectators here.

But it was a perfect dress rehearsal, and we kind of figured out how things flow, people flow, the crowds moved around. So the next year it was great to have spectators here, and the third year we were still excited about it and how do we grow, how do we make it better.

And then Annika came along and, I mean, you take it from this level to this level, and we have accelerated it from there. I think it's fun. So our family at the end of every tournament how kind of sit down, how can we make it better, and now we sit with Annika and Mike and say, how can we make it better together. I think every year we've kind of upped the ante. The idea was to make it one of the best tournaments, whether it's men or women, make it one of the best golf tournaments in the United States, and I



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and then the community engagement this past year leading up to this event this week.

DAN DOYLE JR: Last year we got hit with two hurricanes back to back. The golf course I can tell you was under water at one point in time, the entire golf course from rain. The members showed up on that Friday with chainsaws and we butchered the place and cleaned it out and got it ready.

I think actually the golf course last year looked perfect. I mean, I remember going back and looking at it on TV and going holy smokes, three weeks ago this place was under water. It just shows. I mean, it's the membership. They're very proud of their club. That was part of the idea behind it.

So this year you go fast forward, like you asked, and it's not even just the members, it's the town of Belleair. They're very proud of this tournament and they volunteer. They're the ones handing out the golf balls to the players. They're lining up the golf carts down below. They're directing traffic and things like that. They take a lot of pride into this.

It's always fun to hear the buzz when Annika and Mike are out for dinner. Oh, my gosh, Annika Sorenstam was at our restaurant for dinner. It's a neat buzz that it creates in the town. This is a three square mile town, so everybody knows -- shoot, everybody knows what everybody had for dinner the night before.

So it's just been an excitement and it's built year over year. It's a lot of fun.

Q. The buzz of this year's tournament is through the roof. One of our sponsor invitations, Kai Trump, was just in here talking about her excitement on the week. Talk about the buzz of this event, and also, Dan, Kai Trump was talking golf club sponsor invite, so talk about just the goal of enhancing the tournament and seeing that through the buzz from this week?

DAN DOYLE JR: So the idea of the exemption, when you go into the history of exemptions, is to bring attention to an event. She's a lovely -- I mean, you got see her live. She's lovely to speak to and she brought a lot of viewers through Instagram and things like that that normally don't watch women's golf was the hopes, and we're seeing it now on Instagram and social media.

So it's created a buzz on top of the other great players that we have here. So I think the golf course is set up I think probably the toughest it's been, so there will be a lot of buzz about that.

But the leadup was great. We slowly brought out all the exemptions. All of them are great in different ways. So it has been great buildup, and now we're going to get to see to starting tomorrow.

Q. Annika, same question on the buzz leading up to this week.

ANNIKA SORENSTAM: Yeah, I think any tournament wants buzz, and I think we've had it now for a few weeks for a lot of different reasons. Obviously with Caitlin Clark coming back, I think that is a big deal and all the different initiatives we're seeing throughout the week. You know, the Women's Summit, the Annika Inspiration Award.

Of course a lot of it has been to the sponsor invites, but I agree with Dan. It's about bringing people in with aspirations of maybe being a professional and playing and enjoying the game and bringing something to the tournament. I think that's what we see in all our three exemptions.

It makes me think about when I played at the Colonial in 2003. That was at the time maybe a little bit of a controversial invite. In the end it was -- obviously I appreciated it and I think it just brings attention to the tournament, to the sport, to women's sport. That's what we want.

In this case Kai brings a lot of different people to the sport and we want people to hear about our tournament and be part of it. The word is spreading and I think that's a good thing. Keep in mind, The ANNIKA Foundation is a beneficiaries here, and we're all about providing and empowering our women. It really fits in our mission as well. We're really looking forward to the week.

Q. Annika, there are so many layers to this tournament. Could you tell us a little bit about the highlights for you this afternoon at the Women's Summit?

ANNIKA SORENSTAM: Yeah, you're right. Well, one of them, she's right here, Rachel Heck. That's a highlight, to get a chance to talk to her and meet her. I don't know if you've done that.

The ANNIKA Inspiration Award is something that's been in the works for the last few years. We wanted to celebrate a young lady that's been part of our foundation for a few years and gone on to do other things. Rachel, I mean, she really checks every box and I think you'll be super impressed hearing from her.



That's another thing that I really love about this tournament, that we get to highlight the things we do in the foundation. We get invites coming here. We have -- on Saturday we have Share My Passion clinic. We have a lot of young girls coming here getting a chance to watch their role models, et cetera.

So that's what this tournament is about, it's the youth and the future. Here we have somebody who has played the game for a long time and now wants to inspire others. Super excited about that.

Thank you for the question.

Q. Annika, wanted to go back to Colonial for just a second. How did you handle or deal with the controversy that surrounded that invitation and the pressure? What do you remember about it?

ANNIKA SORENSTAM: I remember it was overwhelming. You know me, I'm not really a person that loves to hold the microphone and kind of grab all the attention.

Even though you would have thought that I would've thought about what was going to happen accepting that invitation, I just did it for the reason of trying to get better and reach my full potential and get better as a golfer.

All of a sudden it felt like the whole world had an opinion about my game and why should a woman play in a PGA event. There was a lot of thoughts out there and comments out there. I think what was most interesting is people that never really covered golf, especially women's golf, all of a sudden they were experts in my game.

It's one of those things you take it personally and then you giggle because all of a sudden now you're engaged. So that was kind of funny. I just tried to look at it as I'm thankful for the opportunity. Probably not going to get another one, you know, so make the most out of it.

I've always felt like a little bit of a responsibility to carry women's golf once I became No. 1 in the world, and that was an opportunity. So I just -- as you know, through life you're always going to have people that have comments and maybe don't agree with you, but I stayed on my path and I knew what I wanted to do and I had so much support and the people poach around supported me, the sponsors supported me. In the end looking back it was a good experience.

So I think just in general when you have something controversial for some people, just stay strong with your values and just kind of be yourself. That's how I handle it. I think golf out to me a lot of things.

Q. Obviously it's a big leap competitively for Kai making her LPGA debut. How do you think she should define success this week?

ANNIKA SORENSTAM: Yeah, no, that's a good question. I mean, I don't think anybody here is thinking that she will be the one holding the trophy on Sunday. It's about opportunities and memories and lessons learned. I spoke to her a little bit yesterday. You know, just make the most out of this week. There will be lessons learned. Take them to the future and learn.

That's how we grow. I mean, she's 17, right? I mean, there are so many lessons she's going to learn through life and today is -- this week is going to be the biggest lesson learned.

Hopefully this will inspire her even more to work on her game and get better and start setting some goals. But as far as success for her, I mean, I can't speak for her. Just come out here and absorb, meet players, enjoy the atmosphere and the course, and just maybe make new friends; you know, create memories with your family.

And then you go out there and do your best. That's really all she can do and I think that's all anybody would love to see. So I wish her the best. We've offered to help her in different ways. I mean, I'm very impressed with her, as of many others that are here. I want women's golf to succeed, so we can either do this together or we can not.

I choose the first one.

Q. Dan, for you, why is it so important to you personally, Pelican Golf Club and partnership with Gainbridge and Annika, to continue to invest in women's sports like you guys have over the last six years?

DAN TOWRISS: It was kind of our passion when we started building this club. We looked at the Bat Area and said, you know, there is not a professional women's sporting event in the Bay Area. We have hockey and baseball and football, but we didn't have a professional women's sport.

It was funny. This was pre everybody, oh, we should support women. We just said, you know what? It's our duty. Let's create it. It started with our --in all honesty it started with our women's locker room. If you get the chance, walk in there. Pretty impressive ladies locker room.

We're just said, we're going to make this the best damn

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women's golf club in the U.S., and we went out of our way to do it. As I said, those first three years we kept trying to figure out how do we make it better. Meeting Annika and Mike who have now become good friends of ours, I mean, they helped accelerate that, like I said.

Annika, as she said, she doesn't like to stand here in front with a microphone talking, but she has got some great ideas and great opinions and we kind of captured those and said, all right, what's the next thing we can do. Now it's almost become like a passion project, kind of like the way the club was.

Just tried to figure out ways how we are going to make this the best golf tournament out there.

Q. Annika, on the LPGA celebrates its 75th anniversary season, you're obviously so critical to the Tour's growth globally and how well you played when you were a full time competitor out there. Speak to what this organization has meant to you and even now seeing how much it's grown, how much parity we have on Tour, especially this season in particular? Could you just speak to that?

ANNIKA SORENSTAM: Yeah, I'd be happy to. I wouldn't be here if it wasn't for the LPGA, as you know. Growing up in Sweden and playing golf for fun and getting a chance to make it a living and have dreams come true through the LPGA, it's been tremendous through the years, whether it's people you meet or places you go or just trying to achieve your goals.

So it's been an honor to be able to be part of it and continue to grow the Tour and the tournaments and the players and women's golf in a positive direction.

So as you know, it started with the Founders and then the trail blazers and the next generation, we're all just doing our part, and hopefully more young women will pick up the game and look at it as something they want to do and get partners to join, et cetera.

I don't know. It's cool. That's why can I think it's still fun to still have my name with the LPGA, with a tournament, to continue that and try to make an impact in different ways. Obviously I don't hit any shots to impress anybody anymore, so now it's about how can we get more people involved and grow the game with partners like Dan and Gainbridge.

It's been fun doing it this way. We won't be here for the next 75 years, but maybe somebody else will sit here and talk about 150 years and where women's golf is at that time.

Q. Regarding Caitlin Clark, you've been very candid about having her presence here to bring new audiences to the game of golf. From year one to year two what have you admired about watching her learn and improve on her golf game, especially inside the ropes?

ANNIKA SORENSTAM: Yeah, she's a little busy playing another sport, so I don't know how much time she has to work on her game. I know it's been maybe not the season she wanted in the end. But a fan, started out as a fan from outside the ropes, outside the court and then to get a chance to meet her here, she left very good impression I think on a lot of people, and especially me.

I was like, she's really cool. She's very down to earth. Wow, she loves this game. To see what she brought to the this tournament, the people that came here, it was terrific. I'm just glad she's coming back. She really enjoys the game and I think she has a lot to add to it. I'm glad she's going to be here.

You know, another fan of another female athlete that's doing a lot for the sport, so thank you, Caitlin.

Q. Curious if the roles got reversed and you had the opportunity to scrimmage with her on the basketball court...

ANNIKA SORENSTAM: No, I'm not going to try. It was funny. I picked up on the back nine and we got to hole 14 and 15 and she said, this is really hard. I'm tired. I looked at her. I know I just played a few holes so it was different, but 18 holes for us is not a big deal. I said, how can you be tired? You can run up this court about 100 times and you probably don't break a sweat. I would do it after one time.

It's just a different type of sport and different type of endurance. You know, in the end of the day it's fun to share stories and what's important to her and her goal setting. I enjoy listening to her, the way she works out, just, I don't know, sharing ideas and kind of also see where women's sport is today.

So I loved that opportunity.

Q. Dan, you mentioned kind of the boost you hope to get by having someone like Kai, Caitlin here. I was looking on Instagram. The photo of Kai and Annika on Instagram from yesterday has almost 20,000 likes, whatever that means. Are there any other metrics like ticket sales or sponsorships that you've seen increase this year especially?



DAN DOYLE JR: I haven't paid attention to ticket sales. Sponsorship has been fine. Could always be better. Again, I go back to we always think we can be better.

No, I think we gotten the buzz. We kind of went off the buzz and we kind of valued that and said, okay, we've got the buzz we want. Now it's our job to monopolize on it. I think ticket sales will be up. I have a funny feeling tomorrow crowd -- I mean, last year with Caitlin the crowd for the pro-am was unbelievable. Kind of took a few people by surprise.

Have a feeling tomorrow's pro-am will be overwhelming as well. I think we will have a great Thursday, Friday. Weather is supposed to be perfect. At the end of the day it comes down to last year we had the No. 1 player win the tournament, which it's out of respect to the golf course you kind of go, okay, it's great when the best player wins and we have great crowds on Saturday and Sunday, and I think we'll just continue that.

The field is stacked I would say, and I think it's going to be an extremely busy weekend. And then as Annika mentioned, it's fun watching Annika with all the kids when they show up. It's a whole different environment on that side of the golf course. During the tournament you can go over there and there are hundreds of little girls out there running around swinging golf clubs getting ready to be our next generation of golfers.

So that's just as exciting.

Q. Do either of you have any sort of anecdotal story of somebody that may not watch golf or paid attention to this tournament that has reached out to you?

DAN DOYLE JR: Yeah, I'll give a local one. There is a little restaurant up the street that I eat breakfast at on Mondays. The waitress there is over the moon about the event this year. I've eaten there for ten years. Walked in on Monday and she has an ANNIKA hat on, ANNIKA T-shirt on. I mean, she's all in.

And then we snuck up there to grab something since everything was closed here. We snuck up there and she's screaming to everybody in the restaurant about tee times and who is playing where. Everybody needs to get up there, which I've never seen before, so that was exciting. And also a little bit scary. You go holy smokes, I mean...

Q. What's the name of the Restaurant?

DAN DOYLE JR: Belleair Cafe.

ANNIKA SORENSTAM: I don't know if I have a particular story. In general this is the third year for us to be part of it. I feel like more people know about the tournament. The last two weeks I've had people say good luck at the tournament. First my thought was, I'm not playing anywhere. Then, yeah, they mean or tournament down there.

So I just feel like the word is out there and people are watching and caring. We've had a few more people ask for tickets than normal, so it's like they want to be here. They heard how good this tournament is as far as just the golf and the players and the course and the food. I mean, everything is just great.

But I would say what Mike and I noticed is we got to know quite a bit of members here. It's fun. When we go in we have lunch and members come up and it's like you start recognizing them and they become family. That's pretty cool, too, when the members are so engaged. It's cool. Feels like a little bit of a second home when we come back and people are sharing stories how it was a few years ago and where it is now and asking how they can get involved and help.

Q. Annika, your first sponsor exemption I believe was in Tuscon all that time ago. You were in college. What year were you in college?

ANNIKA SORENSTAM: Yeah, that was my first year as a professional, but you're absolutely right, yeah, it was in Tucson.

Q. What do you recall from just the feelings of going into that first time teeing it up with LPGA pros and what were you looking to get out of it?

ANNIKA SORENSTAM: Yeah, no, I'm glad you brought that up. I actually went to Tour school the year before and I didn't get my Tour card. I missed it by one. I got at the time what they call conditional. So I was like fourth conditional, which I translate into fourth alternate really.

So I got the invite because I went to the University of Arizona. I got an invite there, and the course we were playing at the time was Randolph North. It was just one of the public courses in the middle of town. That was our college course so I had played it about a million times.

Yeah, I was super thrilled. What I remember most was just standing on the range and you had all the players that I've been watching through years, whether it was Patty Sheehan, Pat Bradley, Nancy Lopez, Dottie was there, Beth Daniel, you name it, all the people I've been reading about and just kind of watched on TV.



So just to have a chance to hit balls next to them was very special. You know, of course I enjoyed playing, but just being around them in the locker room, and I was fascinated how great the locker room was at the time.

You know, just things you really didn't know. And then I got an invite the following week in Phoenix and then in Las Vegas. So I received three LPGA sponsor invites. I know what it's like and I'm very appreciative of those.

Q. This question is for either or both of you. You talked a lot about just want to go grow this event, make it better. Curious what you see as the future and vision for this event and the future?

ANNIKA SORENSTAM: Yeah, I mean, it's very broad to say we want to make it better. I wouldn't say we want to make it bigger because this year we have a smaller field as you know. It just fits better for us for this time of year.

So I think that more doesn't always mean better. I think just if you think of the facility, the course, how we treat the caddies, players, sponsors, just a lot of things, I would love for this tournament to be like when the players in January, when you look at the schedule and you look at tournaments you want to play, I would love them to say, we're going down to The ANNIKA.

That would be a dream. And why? Because of things we do, how we take care of them and how they feel here and the importance of the event. Those type of things are a measurement.

I would love to hear Dan's thought. That to me -- when players love the tournaments that are here, if they come, other people come.

DAN DOYLE JR: I agree. One of the big things, we look at what we can do to help the players. If you look at women's golf, if they're not finishing in the top 10, top 20, it really almost costs them money to show up at these events. We're constantly are looking for ways to get the ones that finish at on the bottom make it so they break even.

So we are constantly looking for, okay, how do we make sure, to your point, in the beginning, in January, they circle our event and say, I'm not missing this one.

That's the goal.

Q. Annika, could you just tell us your first impression of Kai's game? You played with her yesterday.

ANNIKA SORENSTAM: Yeah, second time I met her but first time I played with her. Hits the ball really high. I think she drove it well. You know, as she told me she has to work a little bit on her putting and short game, and she realizes it, especially around these greens. It's quite the test.

As far as distance, I don't think that's going to be an issue. Obviously this is a big scene for her, big environment and big golf course. For her, just kind of getting used to that is going to take time. There is no doubt that she has a passion for the sport.

We were on the third hole and she started to ask questions about my golf swing and why am I doing that, why are you not looking at the ball. I was talking to her about my tendencies and said, what are your tendencies, and she went off and this is what I do and I'm trying to do that.

Wow, she's really interested in just getting better and learning about her swing. You know, she was telling me her hip is going this way and everything. Okay, I'm just listening. I'm not going to give you any pointers here because it's a little bit late, just a few days before the event.

Just the excitement of learning and getting better. So I thought that was pretty cool. Keep in mind, 17. I was trying to remember if I was 17 I would play with somebody if I would dare to ask a question. I probably would've been super quiet.

Yeah, she was kind of forward in that sense and confident, but then again very appreciative. As far as her game I think she has distance. It's just going out there and playing a big course and environment like this. I'm sure she's used to a lot of people looking at her and analyzing everything.

One thing that's different this year is I've never seen so many Secret Service people around here. I feel super safe. So that's another thing.

Yeah, obviously her background, I just don't know how she does it honestly. To be 17 years old and hear all the comments, she must be super tough on the inside. I'm sure we can all relate what it's like to get criticism here and there, but she gets it a thousand times.

So that's why I just want to give her a break, come out here and have fun. We want her to feel like family here and I want her to feel welcome. I mean, give this girl a chance, right? I think that's our responsibility this week.

DAN DOYLE JR: Well said.



Q. What do you think the sponsor exemptions, players, could learn in Rachel Heck and other future winners of the Inspiration Award?

ANNIKA SORENSTAM: Why don't we get her up here. All right. Talk about yourself a little.

RACHEL HECK: Can you repeat the question?

Q. Sure. What can the sponsor exemptions learn from you as they take this opportunity this week?

RACHEL HECK: I don't know, I hope they just soak it all in. I feel like that's the perspective I had when I got to play in my first sponsor exemptions or in qualifying for the U.S. Open the first time when I was 15.

My perspective, I didn't have a goal. My goal wasn't to make the cut or finish top whatever. It was just to soak it in, because at the time I thought even though I thought, oh, I'm going to have a thousand of these, this is the first of a thousand, I still decided to soak it in. It turns out it was one of two U.S. Opens. Maybe be one in the future.

But I'm glad in the moment I was able to take a step back, learn from the girls around me, meet people, remember those experiences, because you don't know where life will take you and you don't know if that's going to be the last time you do it.

THE MODERATOR: Everybody, Rachel Heck, 2025 ANNIKA Inspiration Award. So today is Veterans Day and a great backdrop for this in the press conference. Annika, you touched on it a little bit, but talk about The ANNIKA Inspiration Award, the origin of it, and then Rachel receiving the trophy in the Women's Leadership Summit today.

ANNIKA SORENSTAM: Yeah, thank you for asking about that. So the Inspiration Award has been kind of a conversation in the foundation for a little while. We just didn't have it buttoned up for a while. Just a lot of ideas. But how can we celebrate a young lady that's played in one or two or three events but now has gone on to do something different.

We have over 8,000 that have done that through the years of the foundation. We wanted to just keep in touch with them and know what they're doing, and so eventually we came up with the Inspiration Award. We kind of wrote down a few things that mattered and what was important, and Rachel here, she fits every single box and more and we didn't want the story like that to go away.

We wanted to highlight that. Her story is so inspirational,

which is really what we try to do with the foundation. It's not necessarily to create the next superstars and major winners, it's more about the human being and making a difference in the community.

So therefore this award came about and obviously we got a great sponsor with Cleveland and the Cleveland Brothers that were just here. And to be able to present it this week with you guys here and all the young women around here. I mean, Rachel has a lot of friends that are playing and I know you're excited to see them and they been asking about Rachel since yesterday, like where is she. Like she's coming.

Yeah, so that is what this award it about. We are going to continue to do it every year, but Rachel has set bar really high and super proud of her. Life is tough sometimes when you make decisions, which you were meant to do something else and have the courage to pivot, which is what you did.

So, yeah, it's been a cool thing to see and be able to share her story. I know you would've shared the story anyway thanks to who you are and what you do, but we're so happy to be part of that journey.

THE MODERATOR: Rachel, for the members of the media who may not be familiar with your story, so All-American at Stanford. Take us to when your final playing days at Stanford and your decision to not turn professional and what you did next.

RACHEL HECK: Yeah, it was probably the most difficult decision I ever made not to turn professional. I think the hardest part was admitting to myself that that's not what I want. Because if you would ask three year old Rachel what she wanted to be when she grew up, I would would've said professional golfer.

So in my mind I kind of locked myself in a box of this is who I am and this is my path forward. So it was hard and it took some difficult experiences with injuries and just low points playing to step away from the game and realize like I don't need a golf club in my hand to be happy. There are other things in life that I'm really passionate about that I want to pursue that I won't get to pursue if I play professional golf.

So it was difficult. I think I decided fall of my senior year. That right, mom? That's my mom. Yeah, okay. Yeah, that's when I decided I wasn't going to go pro. Now I'm an Air Force reservist, ROTC for those who aren't familiar throughout college, so I commissioned as a second lieutenant when I graduated in the spring of 2024. I've just been absolutely loving it so far. I've got to go to now four



different bases and do four different assignments within the U.S.

I hope to go abroad this year and the following year, but that's where my heart is. Nobody knows what's best for you more than yourself, and I definitely learned that and am proud of my decision.

THE MODERATOR: The Air Force Reserve in you and the LPGA fan in you, how excited are you to be this week and hear what Annika and Dan and now Dan Towriss at Gainbridge, kind of their vision of growing this event and elevating women's sports in general?

RACHEL HECK: It is so cool what they've done at this event. They've done a fantastic job. Just talking about the buzz it's got. Everyone knows what's going on and that's pretty special. As Annika was saying, all my friends are out here and they deserve the biggest stage and they deserve all eyes on them.

I got to see Rose Zhang, one of my best friends who I haven't seen in a long time earlier today and we'll hang out the next couple days. I mean, they're a talented and. It's incredible how much they've put a spotlight on this event, and the girls deserve it 1000%.

Q. What does it mean to get this award on Veterans Day?

RACHEL HECK: It is, it is so special how this worked out, this happened to be on Veterans Day. I thank the brave men and women that have paved the path before me. I'm just a second lieutenant trying to figure out what on earth is going on, but I can promise everyone who has come before me that I'm going to do my best to make this country proud.

Q. Annika and Rachel, two-pronged question. Rachel, how has Annika inspired you? And Annika, how has Rachel inspired you?

RACHEL HECK: I'll start. That's easy. I mean, she was a legend when I was -- she was already a legend when I was growing up. I like to tell the story of I had a Game Boy. They don't make GameBoys anymore, but there was a Tiger Woods golf game and the only female players you could play is Annika.

I would play as Annika on my GameBoy every day, and I thought, this is got to be the coolest thing in the world, the coolest women in the world. Obviously I looked up to her game. I mean, you don't have to be a golfer to know you're witnessing greatness, which is pretty incredible.

And then I admired her decision when she was done playing golf. She obviously kept her hand in the game and now this is the ANNIKA on the LPGA. She's done so much to uplift women in the game, but she was able to step away from the game because she knew what she wanted.

I thought that was incredibly impressive, because she could have gone on to win ten more majors if she wanted to, but she stayed true to Annika, and I've always admired that.

ANNIKA SORENSTAM: Well, I've seen Rachel play for quite sometime. She's always been super friendly and happy. You know, looked like she enjoyed what she was doing. Always thought you were, you know, so with your friends like very social and very -- just people love being around you. I think when I didn't see your name for a while I was like, I wonder where she went because the injury and you were not there.

Yeah, I think I saw you at Augusta I believe. I was like, why are you not playing? We were talking and then I read your story and I think really what inspires me is that young lady has such a solid head on your shoulders, but to have the courage to go and do really what your heart is telling you to do.

But I think also it makes me proud of the sport, that the individuals that come out of this sport, it's just something we're so proud of and using golf as kind of a step on the way, right? You're not leaving the game. You're still going to play a little and you always have the connection to golf, but then able to do other things to inspire others.

I think when you look back at people that have made a difference, it's the emotional connection that kind of stays with us. You know, yeah, people remember your golf, but it's more the person you are and what you do. I think that's what I admire about Rachel, and also I'm super curious, excited about your future, what you're going to do.

I think that's -- so we'll keep an eye on you for sure. Who knows, might be another award, a veterans award or something. But you're part family and I hope that you stay that way.

Q. Rachel, curious when somebody takes a huge pivot in their life, part of that is letting go of the thing that you had been wrapped around for so long. Do you remember the moment, the day, evening, where you finally came to terms with yourself about I need to let go of gold so I can walk through this next door I'm really passionate about?

RACHEL HECK: Yeah, that's a good question. I don't

know if it was a certain moment that I let go. Honestly I think the separating my identity, the letting go from golf happened a bit before I decided not to turn professional.

I think it happened toward the end of high school, first time I injured my back. Just happens. We're athletes. We're going to be injured sometimes. That's when I had like a full identity crisis. Who am I without this game? Who is Rachel Heck? What do I stand for? Who am I? Which is a lot for a 17 year old to be thinking about.

But I'm glad I had that experience. I became super depressed and realized I needed something more in my life than golf. That's when I had the idea to just try ROTC. So when I decided not to play golf anymore that was long after I had stopped defining my identity by what I did, so I didn't feel like -- it wasn't too difficult to eventually leave the game because I wasn't losing a part of myself.

I'm still -- I feel like golf is a family and I'm still around it and still love the people. I keep in touch with the people. But I had already separated golf from my identity by then, so it didn't feel like I was missing anything.

THE MODERATOR: Dan, Annika, Rachel, thank you very much.

ANNIKA SORENSTAM: Thank you.

RACHEL HECK: Thank you.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you everybody. Let's have a great week.

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