

Hilton Grand Vacations Tournament of Champions

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Lake Nona Golf & Country Club

Annika Sorenstam

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: Here with Annika Sorenstam at the Hilton Grand Vacations Tournament of Champions. Annika, I think you might have the craziest week of all of us this week. You're playing, running your AJGA event, all sorts of stuff. Overall what's the week been like for you, and especially now that we're here at home?

ANNIKA SORENSTAM: Well, it's nice to be here. We love this place. I love being busy. I really do. The AJGA or the ANNIKA Invitational that we just hosted an a fantastic finish. Jana Wilson finished. She eagled the playoff hole to earn a spot into the amateur field this week. It could not have been a better starter than that.

Yeah, it's been busy. Obviously with my partnership with Hilton Grand Vacations it's great as well, and then golfing. So no, it's great. It's great to be here. The course is looking fabulous, and having my husband on the bag, the kids around the corner, my parents and friends and family. It's going to be a busy one.

Nice to be back and play, and of course I enjoy playing with the celebrities. It's going to be fun, and look forward to a wonderful week.

Q. I was going to ask you about Jana. That was amazing news that she's going to get into the field. I saw she's playing really well in the pro-am today. She is going to be something to reckon with. How important was it to you when you partnered with Hilton Grand Vacations to make sure they were bringing your foundation and your work with the next generation of golfers into that partnership?

ANNIKA SORENSTAM: Yeah, I mean, it's an important part of what we do. We really didn't have to sell them on our concept. They already knew our concept. They want to support women's support, women's golf, and this was such a natural, it really was. And then for the girls to play around the corner at Eagle Creek worked out really well.



At to be able to participate in some of the events, I mean, many of these players, their dream is to play the LPGA, so for them to be part of it and be able to come out here and see some ever their role models is another inspiration.

That's really what we try to provide with the ANNIKA Invitational, is inspirational experiences. So we've always said all along that tagline is more than golf. This is a lot more than golf. We have been offer to Boxi Park and did a little financial like session where Missie Berteotti, which is a former LPGA player, she was out there talking to them.

So we try to do more than just providing a golf tournament. So what a great finish of Jana, and obviously Anna Davis played fantastic golf, too. So women's golf, girls golf, is in good hands.

Q. It is, absolutely. Coming here to Lake Nona, what we've been hearing from a lot of players is, Tranquilo is great; this is a very different caliber, type of golf course, and that some of the celebrities are going to have their eyes opened by this course. This is a real track. Have any players sought you out for any advice since you know this place so well?

ANNIKA SORENSTAM: Well, I played with Jack Wagner yesterday in the practice round, so he wanted to know a little bit. But he welcomed the rough. He thought it was good because you doesn't bomb it 330 even though he's longer than I am. He said, This is a real golf course. This is a championship golf course.

I spoke to John Smoltz and he said this is the best condition golf course he's ever seen, and the guy has played a lot of courses.

So I think as a Lake Nona member, we're super proud of this place, and they worked really, really hard. Obviously the last since New Year's we been out here watching them really put all the hours in and make it as good and showcase what we have here.

Q. You should definitely be proud of the menu, too.

ANNIKA SORENSTAM: Yeah, the food is excellent.

Q. Yeah, we're really appreciating that.



ANNIKA SORENSTAM: Yeah.

Q. When you competed in this event last year it was the first time we had seen you tee it up in an event in quite sometime. How would you assess where your game is and how you're feeling this year compared to last year?

ANNIKA SORENSTAM: Yeah, it's a good question. Obviously I'm not as rusty as I was there because I hadn't competed in 13 years. Now looking back I did play in, what, I think five or six events and similar to what I'm playing in. But I really didn't have the best preparation. I had a bulging in disk in November, and December I had to take a little break, and then Christmas came, and then we actually had COVID so I had to take a few weeks off.

So it's been maybe not the best preparation, but I do think I feel overall a lot better, more comfortable. I feel a little bit more into the game than I did then. I really didn't know what to expect. So I hope that that's a good thing. We'll find out.

I'm glad to be here and be part of this event, and this year I am going to play maybe a few more tournaments than last year, so it's good to be here and get ready. Hopefully no more setbacks and I can continue to practice and find my game.

Q. Was there a specific injury that caused the bulging disk?

ANNIKA SORENSTAM: No. I think this is something that came back. I had it in 2007, the end of that season. I took I think three or four months off. I think it's just wear and tear, unfortunately.

So one of the symptoms is I start losing distance, and that's how I realized. Then I realized, You know what? Maybe I'm a little stiff in my neck. Then I worked with the LPGA doctor, Bruce Thomas and his team, and he said, Yeah, you have a bulging disc. You need to take a little break, so I had to do that.

Yeah, it's a little bit of a lingering thing I guess and just got to be more careful. When you're older it feels like things just get worse. (Smiling.)

Q. Just a couple questions about the 4th and 17th holes. Could you give a quick scouting report for both of those?

ANNIKA SORENSTAM: Oh, the par-3s? Yeah, 4, it's playing quite long today. Today we -- I don't know what the yardage was, 180, but that was like our second hole and I

feel like it was 40 degrees out, so it was just standing there and hit a hybrid of some kind.

But, you know, it's a nice par-3. I like all these par-3s, but when they put the pin on the right side just got to be a little careful. Playing more for the center of the green is probably what I'll do all week. That's not one of those holes where I can be aggressive. The green is a two-tier thing from left to right, so going to be on the right tier as well.

But 17 I think is probably one of our signature holes, just facing Lake Nona. Today was no wind. It was pretty much in the middle of the green. So depends on how long the distance is there you can be a little bit more aggressive.

The par-3s are good. Different clubs, different type of approach shots.

Q. Is there certain celebrity or couple celebrities that you're hoping to maybe have a rivalry with by the time the week is over?

ANNIKA SORENSTAM: I'm pretty pleased with my pairing, how about that? To be able to play with Jessica Korda John Smoltz, who is one of the better celebrities, I look forward to the challenge. The last few years I've got to know them quite a bit. I really enjoy a lot of the celebrities, whether I played in Tahoe or I played here last year.

I have said this before: I think that they are an impressive group of celebrities. Many of them are like golf pros, the way they swing, the way they play, and they can hit it. They can really hit it.

So I think this is a fun format. I'm glad that LPGA is working with obviously this event here. I think this adds more to the event. What's also good is they're very respective of these women here, and I think that says a lot about a lot of the athletes.

Q. Rose Zhang is obviously a pretty budding prodigy. She's played in a bunch of your junior events. I just was curious if you had any thoughts on her and how impressive she is to you?

ANNIKA SORENSTAM: Yeah, I would echo what you said. I mean, I've seen her play quite a few times. As a matter of fact, they came over here. I think it was the Curtis Cup team and we were hanging out here at the pickleball court and I was talking to them.

She was there, Rose. She is just one of those players that just know her game really well. She's just super solid. Really doesn't make a lot of mistakes. She's fun to watch.

Yeah, I think she's just a matter of time until she'll be out here and winning.

Q. Can you relate to her handling the pressure of showing up at events and being expected to win?

ANNIKA SORENSTAM: Yeah, well, I guess I could, yeah. That's the thing. A lot of pressure is being put on her. I think she seems to have good mind and just seems to kind of take it as it comes and not making too much of a big deal out of it.

Just enjoying the journey as a college golfer for now and we'll see what happens after that. That's kind of one of the messages I give to the young girls through the ANNIKA Foundation: Enjoy the journey. That was one of the tips that I got, and so I try to pay that forward to them.

So hopefully she does because she has a lot to be happy about.

Q. Just the top 10 women's golfers in the world are all here at this tournament. What are your thoughts on just the field on the LPGA Tour side and how competitive this event should be in the coming days?

ANNIKA SORENSTAM: Yeah, it should. Like you said, you got the best players here. I think it's a great start to the season. The names, there are big names, they're good for the game, good ambassadors, good players, so I have a lot of respect for this generation of golfers on the LPGA.

It should be a good week. It should showcase really well. Like I said, having the celebrities here adds to it, and I think it brings a little more to the tournament.

You know, the girls are getting the respect that they finally deserve with prize money going up and courses of this quality, so very happy to see where the LPGA is today.

Q. And what have you seen from the Korda Sisters as they continue to win tournaments? What impresses you most about the sisters?

ANNIKA SORENSTAM: A lot of things. I mean, I think the first thing that a lot of people say is their power off the tee or power in general. They both have beautiful swings. They're tall, very classic but just very controlled swings.

But then around the greens I feel like they have a lot of touch as well. So it's not just power. It's a little finesse also. I like them. I think they're fun. They're good for the game. I enjoy watching the -- I don't know if they have a rivalry between them because they have a nice sisterhood

at the same time, so I think that's a fun thing. There is love, but I'm sure there is competition between and I think that's good for the game.

That reminds me of when my sister played. We didn't really play the two of us at the same level like that, but we competed with each other, we grew up together, we helped each other, and we supported each other.

But then as we stood on the tee it was, Okay, gloves are off.

Q. Obviously the scores count, but they count a little differently. What's the difference in your approach when you play in the celebrity division as opposed to do the tournament division?

ANNIKA SORENSTAM: Yeah, no, it is different. I think I've always been more of a steady type player, not too aggressive. Just try and hit fairways and greens, which is good in stroke play. But here the format is a little bit -- benefits birdies, benefits eagles. So it doesn't punish you as much for higher numbers.

So having said that, I need to be a little bit more aggressive, but it's not really a golf course that I feel like I can be aggressive. I'm playing -- the yardage I think is says 6600 yards. It's a little more than I prefer, so I'm going to be hitting some longer clubs into the green.

So it's a fine line going for the flag with a longer club than maybe an 8- or 9-iron. I have to find a balance, but I need points obviously. One point here isn't going to do much. I need to be out there, because I know a lot of celebrities are going to have shorter irons to the par-5 especially s and make a lot of birdies.

I might try to be more a little more aggressive and then we'll see what happens.

Q. Also the format, the celebrity format was tried at least once a couple decades ago down at Turnberry Isle. Does it surprise you that it took this long to be able to get a pro-celebrity-event that caught on with the LPGA?

ANNIKA SORENSTAM: No. I mean, I think we've had it now and I think it's good. I like to see it more because I think together is a good combination. I think it obviously works with this field, when you have a sudden limited field. It's hard when you have a full field.

But I think it gets some good recognition with all the other athletes, so I'm glad we're doing it.

Q. I wanted to ask about the Senior Women's Open. Any paraphernalia in the house, in that trophy case, or anything that you kept from the week that is special to you?

ANNIKA SORENSTAM: The trophy. (Laughter.)

Q. Is that in the house?

ANNIKA SORENSTAM: Yeah. I think we got it back. We're sending it to Callaway for an event, but it got canceled so the trophy should be back.

It's funny. I was actually cleaning out my golf bag the other day because I put a new one in, and I found the money clip. So, yeah, so that was the recent one.

I also found the yardage book in there, which shows you much I clean my bag because that was this summer and this in January. Luckily I didn't find any old bananas from Connecticut in there.

No, what a great week; a lot of great memories. Mike actually made a big canvas out of the family photo and the trophy and it's the first thing you see when you walk in the door, so I'm reminded of it every day.

Q. As someone who knows this golf course so well, how would you describe the biggest challenge in it?

ANNIKA SORENSTAM: Well, the way it's playing now the rough is pretty thick. This is not a member's rough. Put it that way. They've let it grow a little bit, and the greens are fantastic. They are getting a little firmer.

It's all about you got to put the ball in the right places. It's important to hit it far, but I also think it's more important to hit it straight here. And not just straight. There are certain places you got to know a little bit where to go.

There are some run-outs around the greens that takes a little knowledge, and just got to look at the yardage book if you haven't played here enough. Then you can maneuver yourself around here.

Q. The competitor inside you, being inside the ropes with a player like Jessica Korda, she said you haven't played together, what's that like for you? What's it like to observe the modern game?

ANNIKA SORENSTAM: I love it. I have a lot of respect. I wish I can say I can compare but I'm in a different phase of my life than she is. It's fun to watch. I really enjoy it.

She's going to bring out the best out of me hopefully by just

playing with somebody at the top of their game. It's a different type of golf for sure. But, again, she's one of the best and she represents the game really well. So glad to see her up there and I'm sure she's going to be there towards the end.

Q. So many great athletes that we talked to have trouble adjusting to what I'll call the here and now. You blistered the Senior Women's Open layout obviously, and now you're here as a celebrity. I was thinking about the Nancy Lopez age when she went to the quote/unquote Senior Tour and was the tournament host in Atlanta when you were in your prime. Do you have mixed emotions about wanting to tee it up and compete, the fire still in the belly, so to speak?

ANNIKA SORENSTAM: Yeah, no, it's a good question. I have to admit, those are thoughts that go through my mind quite a bit. I'm wearing -- I should say maybe I'm lucky to be able to wear a lot of different hats, being a mom and being wife and an entrepreneur and being a philanthropist, and now I'm putting on my host hat and my competing hat.

So of course there are times I feel like it's not enough and I want to do more. Overall I'm just excited to be here. It's an honor to be here, to play here and be part of this event. The Hilton Grand Vacations, my foundation is the beneficiary of that. Obviously I want to thank Mike Laskey for doing that. He's the initiator.

I feel like I have my role to play. If I can just sometimes step away from that, just the hard-core competitor I am, then maybe I can smell the roses a little bit more. We all worked hard to be here, but also want to go out there and do my best.

I think the hardest part is sometimes when you know what a good shot is supposed to look like and you know what it's supposed to feel like and when you don't do it under these conditions, it's like, okay, take a big breath. Your kids still love you. When you go back you're still going to have a lot of things to do.

So it's a fine balance. I try to do the best I can.

Q. Real quick follow-up. Your adopted home of Orlando has been host for the LPGA the past several years. How much pride do you feel that that predominantly golfing community with so much history and heritage dating back to the Arnold Palmer era continues and now is inclusive with women's golf?

ANNIKA SORENSTAM: Oh, I think it's fantastic. I mean, last year was the first time Lake Nona hosted an LPGA

event other than Solheim Cup in 1990, which is so long ago. But the reception was so good. The feel was amazing, the atmosphere. The members loved it and it seemed like the players had a good time.

It was just an awesome combination, as you said. Bay Hill and Arnold Palmer have been successful so many years, so it feels good to be able to come here and for the women to be able to showcase their skill in this town where golf plays such a big part all year-round.

I think it's fabulous, and I know, like I said, Lake Nona is proud to be here, and hopefully it's a partnership that will last for a long time. This time of year Florida is hard to beat.

Q. Last week's news from the USGA and the purse increase and some of the courses the women will get to play on in the near future, can you just respond to that and what you thought? You've been building this women's golf for so many years.

ANNIKA SORENSTAM: Yeah. No, it's fantastic. I mean, big applause. There is no doubt. I mean, Mike Whan has not been at the USGA very long and he's already delivering.

I know it takes more than that, but it's fantastic news to see that women's sport is getting more recognition, at least women's golf, and the purses increasing is fantastic.

These women as we know work really hard and they're committed, and nice for them to be able to have a purse like that. First of all, that just increases not just the standard, but just the respect, and I know with that comes the golf courses that they're going to play. To me I've always valued the classic golf courses.

No, it's fantastic to see the LPGA is really stepping up there, and, I don't know, I'm proud of the team. Obviously now is Mollie in charge as the commissioner. But the players work really hard. Whether it's social media to display who they are, their fun side, or giving back to the community, being good role models, I think they've planted the seed and finally starting to see the roots and see some fruit from these trees.

So it's great.

Q. The logo, Fizzy Beez. I was trying to look it up on the internet, but there wasn't a lot of information. Can you clue us in?

ANNIKA SORENSTAM: Yeah, no, there is not a lot yet, but it's a company that Mike and I started in COVID 2020,

and were full flavored sparkling classic cocktails sweetened with organic honey, and it's coming in a can, a sleek 12 ounce can, 5% alcohol, and we're canning in two weeks.

So Mike came up with a name, Fizzy Beez, obviously the Beez is the organic honey, but the Fizzy is based on Busy Bee, that I'm a Busy Bee. He looked at me, why are you doing this? You have nothing else going, so let's start a ready-to-drink company.

Thanks for asking. It's fun. We've done a lot of tastings the last 18 months, and we're going to launch in Ohio next month. So we're super excited about that. Thanks for asking. Hopefully next year you will see a lot of Fizzy Beez here. You can guys can try, we'll be cheering and buzzing.

Q. I was going to say, if you need more tasters...

ANNIKA SORENSTAM: Oh, more tasters? Yes.

Q. Media tent is always a good place to start.

ANNIKA SORENSTAM: Yeah, well if you go to our website we have something called join the hive, join the hive and you can be one of the working bees.

Q. I think you have a lot of takers right now.

ANNIKA SORENSTAM: Thank you so much.

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