

Meijer LPGA Classic

Monday, May 8, 2023

Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA

Blythefield Country Club

Jennifer Kupcho

Cathy Cooper

Grant Boone

Jeremy Friedman

Press Conference



all for joining us this afternoon for our virtual player interview.

You know, as Jeremy said, we've got a really exciting tournament again this year. We are so fortunate to have a strong field coming and we're really looking forward to the 2023 Meijer LPGA Classic for Simply Give.

We think it's going to be very exciting this year, and thanks to all of you who have supported us and who will continue to support us in this.

Last year, if you remember, Jennifer Kupcho won in a playoff over Leona Maguire and our previous defending champion, Nelly Korda. It was just an epic amazing ending.

All three of these incredible athletes fortunately will be back with us this year, so happy that Jennifer Kupcho is joining us today. Jennifer, excited to have you. Thank you.

And to help welcome her, I'm also excited to introduce Grant Boone from Golf Channel, NBC. He'll be a part of crew at this career's tournament at Blythefield Country Club. He's also the voice of the Masters Live, and I'm sure so many of you listen to that and watch that.

Today he's here to moderate our chat with defending champion Jennifer Kupcho. Please welcome Grant.

GRANT BOONE: Thank you very much Cathy. I do have the great pleasure every year of hosting the coverage at Amen Corner, where our defending champion has some pretty good memories of her own from back in 2019 at the Augusta National Women's Amateur. I like to reference that shot every time we do our coverage there at the Masters.

It's going to be my seventh straight here to be back at Blythefield, and I'm not just saying this because I'm on the call, I say this all year: This is as good a tournament as there is on the LPGA Tour. I think Jennifer would back that up.

I think really you don't need to hear anyone say it. You just

JEREMY FRIEDMAN: All right, I think we'll get started. Good afternoon everybody. My name is Jeremy Friedman, media director for the Meijer LPGA Classic for Simply Give.

Thank you everybody for joining us for day one of our -- I like to call it our media week for the Meijer LPGA Classic. That's kind of what it is. It's not only just a media day, it's a media week.

So first off, thank you everybody for joining us. A little over a month away from the LPGA Tour returning to Michigan and Blythefield Country Club, so we're excited to have our executive director, Cathy Cooper, Golf Channel's Grant Boone, and defending champion, Jennifer Kupcho joining us today.

With that, quickie on the tournament. Cathy can expand on this a little bit. We're shaping up to have a tremendous field for the Meijer LPGA Classic. Our early commitments for the tournament, in addition to our defending champion who is on, 8 of the top 10, 21 of the top 25 players in the world.

The majority -- almost all of our past champions of this great championship, which is great.

There will be more news coming on the field in the early commitments in the coming weeks, including our sponsor exemptions.

So with that to talk more about the tournament and talk more about the great things we're got going on this week, like to introduce the tournament's executive director, Cathy Cooper.

CATHY COOPER: Good afternoon. Thank you, Jeremy, for the welcome and the introduction. I want to thank you



look at the field that's there every year. That tells you not just that the golf course is great, not just that the community support is great, but that the tournament is run well.

That players tend to tell you by their presence when they continue to come back, not once ever four years, but every year. Every year we have an incredible field. One thing I think is noteworthy, so many of these players are involved with their own charitable endeavors, but I think everybody, wherever you're from around the world, can appreciate the idea of what Meijer is doing with Simply Give.

Everybody needs to eat. We believe that's something we can get behind, and what Meijer is doing on a corporate level is I think easy to support. I think players appreciate the fact they can be at least a small part of feeding some hungry folks around the Midwest.

Jennifer, 2022 was a special year for you. You've had a bunch of special years in your career, your young career. This is going to be the second -- the Meijer will be the second of three opportunities that you've had to -- will have had to defend a tournament.

You've already done it once at The Chevron Championship, but that was at a new venue. So as you get ready to come back to the Meijer at the same place where you won, what are you most looking forward to and what you expect to feel when you drive down that driveway come June?

JENNIFER KUPCHO: I don't know, I'm excited. Meijer is I would say -- before Chevron moving, Meijer would be my favorite tournament. I have a great host family that week and I'm also so excited to go see them.

It's just a great week. We love coming to Grand Rapids. Everybody on the LPGA does. I'm just excited to come back and be in Grand Rapids, in Michigan. I love the state. I'm just excited to come back.

GRANT BOONE: You'll really love it now because you won twice last year in the state, including the team win with Lizette Salas Dow Great Lakes Bay Invitational.

I am thinking about last year's event. You said something last year when you won. You said, I kind of found myself in a funk, all over the place since Chevron trying to get my game back, get my head back where it needs to be.

Well, your game was there for sure. You opened with a 63. You were in contention from day one. You did find yourself trailing going into that final round. You were shot behind Nelly Korda who herself had come back from that

illness.

And even early in in the final round there was some adversity. There was a double bogey early, and yet you came back, made an eagle at the 8th, birdie at the 9th.

Take me through just the wild swings of emotions on that day. Obviously Nelly was right there, Leona was there, coming down the wire with so many proven players up there at the very top.

JENNIFER KUPCHO: Yeah, I think it was definitely a very different feel from Chevron. I went into Chevron the final day leading by I don't remember how many. I gave myself a nice cushion for my first win and that certainly helped me get through that tournament.

So then coming into Meijer, being behind and then also falling and making that double early on the front nine on Sunday, I think I had a little bit of a feeling of, oh, it's going to happen again. I'm going to fall apart on the last day, because that had been happening coming up, other than at Chevron.

To come down the stretch against such a tough field and then also to win in a playoff, it was -- other than Chevron, I think it was one the tournaments that I was just like I did it. I finally was able to compete against all the top players in the world and really take it head-to-head down the stretch.

GRANT BOONE: It is a golf course that has produced in this event only major champion winners. Some won majors after here; others had already, like, won a major championship. I suppose it's possible that that could be a coincidence when you think about major champions winning at golf courses.

When I talk to players I think they believe there is a connection. Blythfield asks something of a player along the lines of what a major championship would ask of a player in terms of shots you have to hit, patience you have to exude.

Would you comment on this idea of Blythfield and the test? It typically precedes a major championship in the KPMG.

JENNIFER KUPCHO: Yeah. I think, yeah, there is definitely some kind of connection I would say. I don't know if it's necessarily the toughness of the course because I do know the scores always seem to be very low. It's a very scorable golf course.

So I think it's more defending because of that your forced to really go at it and try and make birdies.

I think also just in general, as you talked about in the intro, the field is also so strong. You don't necessarily get that every week out here. I would say at Meijer there is always a really strong field very similar to a major championship.

GRANT BOONE: For sure. Jeremy, you want to open the floor?

JEREMY FRIEDMAN: All right, everybody, if you would like to ask Jennifer, Grant, or Cathy any questions about the tournament, please indicate in the chat.

Q. Good afternoon. Jennifer, as you look at the last year and all the things that happened during the week, the early 63, the hecticness of the Sunday finish and everything, what's your biggest everlasting memory of the week?

JENNIFER KUPCHO: Honestly, probably my host family being there and screaming at me on the 18th hole. I think that's my biggest memory.

I mean, other than when you just -- Grant just reminded me of making that double on the front nine and then the eagle on 8. I don't really remember too much about the tournament. I know I did play really good during the first round.

I remember it was a bad weather day and we got the bad wave, Nelly and I. I remember her saying, I don't know how she shot that in her interview. I do definitely remember that as well.

Q. For Cathy, can you give us a little behind the scenes on Simply Give and what that does for the community?

CATHY COOPER: I'm so glad you asked that. As you know, that's what this tournament is all about for this community. Simply Give is our food giving program. It's Meijer exclusive. We've brought it together with the Meijer LPGA Classic, and all of the contributions that are donated to Simply Give go to local food pantries to feed local families in need.

The great thing about this is 8.5 million to date is a result of the Meijer... (video froze.)

GRANT BOONE: 8.5 was the big tournament.

CATHY COOPER: That's correct. \$8.5 million as a result of last eight Meijer LPGA Classics.

Q. For Jennifer, we're not only approaching your victory here at Meijer, but as well as Dow Great Lakes

Bay Invitational in Michigan. What does it feel like to go through this swing reflecting on the your wins, but also you're sitting at only 6th on Team USA Solheim Cup points, which wouldn't necessarily reflect the level of success you had this year during this swing.

JENNIFER KUPCHO: Yeah, I'm just really excited to get back on the summer swing. It's some of my favorite golf courses that definitely set up better for my game. I know coming into the middle of the season last year I kind of had a rough start as well, and that has been the case this year.

So I'm really excited to get on golf courses and really just in cities and host families that I'm more comfortable with to really go and try and play well.

Q. Could you explain why those golf courses might fit your game better?

JENNIFER KUPCHO: Honestly, I think it's just the difference in the grass. I'm way more comfortable on bent or bent-similar grass compared to bermuda, or poana greens are not necessarily my favorite.

Q. Just a couple quick one for you. Everyone always says the Meijer is special and the crowds and everything. Can you pinpoint what makes that week so special compared to other places on the LPGA?

JENNIFER KUPCHO: Yeah, I think at Meijer we always get a really good fan representation. I think the Great Taste, it really just makes all the fans show up. I think it's also helpful that I think a lot of the times Father's Day is the Sunday and then they provide a free ticket to all the fathers, and that brings out all the families on Sunday.

It just makes it a special finish. At least in the years that I've played. I think the last three years it's been on father's day. I don't know if that's true all the way through, but I think that's always made it really special with the fans.

Q. And just lastly, on a general scope of women's golf, recently obviously the USGA is bringing these major championships to some of the most historic courses that traditionally the men have played, Oakland Hills, Pebble Beach, you name it. Curious your thoughts on that.

JENNIFER KUPCHO: Yeah, I think the USGA, women's golf in general, is really making a good stride. We're getting to play golf courses we normally don't get to play and playing major championships at amazing golf courses here in the U.S., but also over at The Open.

It's going to be really exciting and it's really elevating the



women's game.

Q. I was curious, in these last, you know, year, or in this last year or so, have you kind of felt like there has been maybe some more respect put on your name in this last few years that you've been winning so many golf tournaments? I know you mentioned Nelly saying, I can't believe she shot that in that one round last year. Obviously you beat Nelly in the playoff and Leona. Just curious, have you felt more respect put on your name?

JENNIFER KUPCHO: Yeah, I would say -- I mean, I wouldn't say entirely different, but, yeah, I would say a little bit, as well as playing on the Solheim team with and against all the European players with the U.S. girls obviously.

I mean, you just -- the more you get your name out there the more you play better, you're really just going to get the recognition and feel more comfortable up in the top spots.

Q. And Cathy, I did have a question for you as well. I know the facilities at Blythfield have been under construction, renovation for the last six or eight months. Is there any sort of update or would it be better to ask Blythfield folks where we are with the facilities there?

CATHY COOPER: We did a tour of the facility last week. We are doing one again tomorrow. It's coming along really well. It's beautiful. Jennifer, the women's locker rooms will be ready for you.

Everything is supposed to be right on time and a few things a bit ahead of schedule, so very promising.

GRANT BOONE: Jen, you mentioned that this event happens on Father's Day. I know why dad, Mike, was instrumental, if not the driving force behind you beginning the game. Taught you the game. He caddied for you a little bit when you first got going.

What was it like to win on Father's Day for you?

JENNIFER KUPCHO: It was pretty awesome. I think one of the greatest things about that was I was going to call him before the round because I had a fairly good amount of time before my tee time in the morning, but I just told myself, I'm going to call him with a trophy in my hand at the end of the day.

To be able to follow through and do that was pretty cool. Yeah, it was really special. Yeah, he's such a big -- he's been such a big influence in my whole life, always pushing

me. It was a really special day.

GRANT BOONE: That story will make the broadcast, I can promise you. That's awesome. I just got back from San Francisco where the Hanwha LIFEPLUS International Crown was contested at TPC Harding Park. You talked about the venues, and my colleague, Morgan Pressel, has been beating this drum, venues matters. It's great to have the Pine Needles of the world, which is unique to the women's game, but you're going to play Pebble Beach of course at the U.S. Women's Open. He it women's. This week at the Cognizant Founders Cup you're going to be down the road from Baltusrol, which is going to host the KPMG Women's PGA.

Curious to know if this week you'll get a chance or had a chance to take a peek at Baltusrol or if you've played Pebble or have any experience with some of these courses that are going to host major this year, besides Evian where you've played well?

JENNIFER KUPCHO: Actually, no. I'm actually fairly strongly against going and seeing courses ahead of time. I just feel like that puts more pressure on it.

I mean, obviously it does help to know a course inside and out, but I think it always just puts more pressure on it if I go and play a course ahead of time. I have not seen and probably will not go see any of the big courses we're going to play in the future.

GRANT BOONE: I'll go for you. How about that?

JENNIFER KUPCHO: Perfect. Sounds good.

GRANT BOONE: It was mentioned earlier, what happens at the Meijer could well go a long way towards where you finish in the Solheim Cup standings. I think everyone expects -- not to jinx anything -- everyone knows, believes you're going to be there one way or the other, either by world rank -- I think you're 25th in this morning's new Rolex Rankings.

I think about what Leona did after playing the Solheim Cup. She won. You won three times after playing the Solheim Cup. Just having watched what happened at the International Crown over the weekend, I just can't help but wonder what a team event can spin off in terms of results in individual events and what that specifically meant to you.

JENNIFER KUPCHO: Yeah, I think playing in Solheim was all always a big goal of mine. Playing in Solheim, representing your country on such a big stage like that, it's more fans than we ever see out here. It's definitely a lot more pressure-filled because you don't want to let your

team or your teammate down.

So I think that really probably did spur me winning, just to be in the pressure situation and being able to come out of it and play really well. Solheim elevated my game and made me more comfortable in the spotlight.

GRANT BOONE: Then of course the Solheim duo went on to win at the Dow Great Lakes Bay Invitational.

Jeremy.

JEREMY FRIEDMAN: I've got one for you before we turn it over to the next questions. You talked about your host family that you stayed with the past couple years. Here at Meijer it's almost like a reunion, a family reunion of sorts.

Starting in 2021 at this tournament, so Meijer in addition to the tournament donation, they donated \$25,000 to a charity of the winner's choice. You chose the Kids' Food Basket, which your host family works. Touch on that a little bit.

Talk about staying with the host family, the relationship you built with them, and how you're looking forward to coming back.

JENNIFER KUPCHO: Yeah, my host family is really great. They have two twin boys who are now nine, I believe. They're just so great. I mean, I think it really just relaxes the whole week. I mean, I personally obviously don't have a child but I've heard Stacy as well as other moms out here talk about how having to take care of a kid off the course and just being a mom off the course really changes your mindset of the game.

I think that week is as close as I can get to getting off the course. I have to go home. I can't be upset about my game. Like they want to go play outside. They want to go do this. I'm there as their best friend and their mom for the week. They just look up to me so much.

So I think that's just like a really big thing for me during the week. Really just relaxes it and makes me think of it as a different kind of LPGA week. I think that's just really special.

And, yeah, my host dad does work at that, so it was really exciting to be able to put that money towards that.

It's really special.

JEREMY FRIEDMAN: Follow-up question?

Q. Jen, as you look to your start last year and your start this year, are there many similarities? As you

look back to last spring, what was the spark that really got you going?

JENNIFER KUPCHO: Yeah, I think there is a fair amount of similarities. I think my putting is definitely struggling again at the beginning of this season as it did last season.

But kind of just trying to go back to those fundamentals of what I figured out last year to really make me putt really well going into Chevron last year.

I think that's been really helpful, and I think I'm hopefully getting there. I think at the end of last year I struggled a little bit mentally just trying to enjoy the game, so I think going into the off-season and really into the start of the year I wasn't necessarily prepared to play tournament golf because I took so much time off during the off-season trying to get my head back and love the game.

So I think that's also been obviously a different scenario compared to last year.

Q. With the putting, do you feel it was a technical adjustment or different mindset? What freed you up there?

JENNIFER KUPCHO: Honestly I think just lack of practice. I mean, it's hard when I went through -- I went through a pretty good fundamental stroke change going into the season last year, so not practicing too much during the off-season this year I kind of lost that because I haven't been doing that fundamental my whole life.

JEREMY FRIEDMAN: All right, I think with that, Grant, if you've got any final follow-up questions.

GRANT BOONE: I'm not going to sing happy birthday to Jen, but I'm going to wish her an early happy birthday. And she has a chance to win on her birthday Sunday, do you not?

JENNIFER KUPCHO: That's true. Yes, I do.

GRANT BOONE: And then my last question would be: Was your husband, Jay, more nervous caddieing for an overnight leader at the Chevron or watching his wife play with the overnight lead on Sunday last year at Chevron?

JENNIFER KUPCHO: I'm not sure. I know he was very nervous when I was playing last year. I was at a Taylor Swift concert on Saturday night this year, so I was not with him. As well as he got sick that night. He had a head cold.

I'm not really sure how that went down, if he was nervous or not, because I didn't really see him.



GRANT BOONE: Did you recover in time to be nervous watching him and Allisen play on Sunday?

JENNIFER KUPCHO: Yes. I was very nervous. I think I am more nervous watching her play than I am playing myself.

GRANT BOONE: If you were ever blessed with children, get ready, because that will happen to you again when you watch your children compete.

By the way, Jay, her husband caddies for Allisen Corpuz. I think most people know that. She played brilliantly and they have been a great combo, and Jay has been a big help to Allisen as she has grown now in her second year on tour.

Jen, see you another today or tomorrow out here in Jersey, and can't wait to see everybody up there at Blythfield. Truly is a special event, and Cathy, you and your team are largely to thank you for that.

CATHY COOPER: Thank you, Grant.

JEREMY FRIEDMAN: All right, everybody. Grant, Cathy, Jennifer, everybody on the call, thanks for joining today.

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