

Mizuho Americas Open

Tuesday, May 30, 2023

Jersey City, New Jersey, USA

Liberty National Golf Club

Michelle Wie West

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Welcome everybody to the media center both in person and virtually. I'm sitting next to Michelle Wie West, our tournament host for this week's Mizuho Americas Open.

Michelle, welcome.

My first question for you as I kick things off, how important and special is it for you to be hosting our inaugural event this week on LPGA Tour?

MICHELLE WIE WEST: Yeah, it's been a dream come true for me. Always something that I dreamt doing since I was a little girl, since I was a junior. Just so, so honored that Mizuho Americas has asked me to be the host of this event. Something that I thought would happen 10, 20 years from now, but it happened so fast and it's amazing.

Mizuho Americas has been an amazing partner and has been unbelievable. I can't believe it's here. Thank you all for being here. It's going to be an amazing week.

Q. The AJGA aspect is unique this week. I'm wondering how important it was to get the AJGA girls involved with the LPGA players this week?

MICHELLE WIE WEST: Yeah, that was something that Mizuho and I really aligned on super early on. They wanted to make this event elevated. The pillars in their own company is to empower women and advance the next generation.

That's exactly what we're doing here in Mizuho Americas Open. We're elevating the women, empowering them, and also advancing the next generation with the top 24 AJGA juniors in the field.

It's something that's super near and dear to my heart, because as you all know, I've played in LPGA events since I was 12, 13. So I was in their shoes and it changed my life. I think this week will change a lot of lives.

And it's one thing for girls to watch other women on the TV.

It's another thing to watch them in person outside the ropes. And a whole 'nother thing for young women to watch other women inside the ropes, competing alongside them.

And it's just going to be an amazing week. Mizuho is very passionate about elevating the women's game. The steps that they have made this week paying for everyone's room in New York City, doing the ferry system like how the PGA TOUR does it and also incorporating the AJGA girls, it's just incredible.

Q. Speaking of you playing on the LPGA Tour, we see you playing with us less, but how important is it for you to still be involved with the LPGA hosting events, and what can we expect from you next?

MICHELLE WIE WEST: It's honestly so much fun. Since I stepped away from playing I've really got to spend the time that I have really doing things I'm passionate about. I'm really passionate about the LPGA. Really passionate about junior girls. Really passionate about making golf a better place for everyone.

It's just been so amazing to actually have the time to focus on those things. But also have the opportunity like with Mizuho and this event, to actually put things in action and not just dream about it, think about it. Actually make all these big dreams into actionable items and have a partner like Mizuho that believes in the exact same thing.

It's just fun to brainstorm with a company that aligns so closely to you. I remember one of our first meetings we were talking about venues, being at Liberty National. Mizuho wanted to have an iconic event, and only place we could think of was Liberty National.

We also were like, okay, it's so close to New York City. Hotel rooms are so expensive. It's been really fun to have Mizuho be like, okay, we'll pay for everyone's room. And I know that may not seem like a big deal to a lot of people, but for female athletes like myself, it's a huge deal. The amount of money that we invest every single week is a lot, and I think this week it just eases it a little bit for the players.



The players are being treated how they always should be, and hopefully we'll create a ripple effect for other events.

Q. Thank you for having us this week. You look back 15 years ago, would you ever have expected this to be where you're at in your life now? You're not only a successful mother and obviously businesswomen, but out here changing the game and doing things and acting like a Founder is one thing I think you really pillar on. Is that something you would've seen yourself doing 15 years ago, and what does it mean to be able to do that?

MICHELLE WIE WEST: Yeah, I dreamt of it. You know, I just count my blessings every single day. I have a beautiful daughter and just being able to host such a beautiful event, it's a dream come true for me.

It's something that I've always wanted to do. You know, but it's fun because I feel like when I was playing, playing was the only thing on my mind and the only thing I allowed myself to think of.

I went to college, I've done a million other things, but it was always like -- there was always a sense of guilt, if I'm being honest. Okay, I'm not fully putting 110%. I had always had the dream of wanting to do things like that.

It's fun, it's fun to have the time and the space in my mind to really go for it. Just feel really blessed.

Q. You inspired a generation when you came out in the early 2000s, especially those of Asian-American descent. What does it mean to inspire the next generation?

MICHELLE WIE WEST: Yeah, we had a welcome party for all the juniors yesterday. It was so much fun. It's amazing to see so many different ethnicities being represented in the younger generation. These are the future of the game. These are the next future stars, girls that will carry the sport on for generations to come.

And this is why it's so important that Mizuho Americans Open is including these top 24 juniors. It's not just about the current players on tour. It's about the next generation. They're the ones that will be carrying the sport.

So I was so pleased to see yesterday so many different ethnicities, different looking girls. It's just great. I mean, the future looks very bright.

Q. For those who don't follow the LPGA much, but will perhaps see the beautiful skyline and tune in this weekend, why do venues matter so much?

MICHELLE WIE WEST: Oh, I've said this so many times. Venues -- and I will say it for anyone that will listen. Venues are so incredibly important for elevating the women's game, and I think the reason is, is that people want to be able to recognize the courses that we play.

You know, people -- I mean, I think that's why the Masters is one of the most highly watched sporting events, is because the spectators, even though many of them have never played it, they memorized every shot that Tiger has ever played on that golf course, every shot that Phil has ever played on that golf course. They know when someone tees off that -- you know, they know exactly.

When they watch the LPGA Tour and let's say we play a golf course that people don't recognize, it's hard to get highly invested in it. Being here at Liberty National. Presidents Cup was here, Northern Trust. People recognize this golf course and that is so important in getting new fans, and that's how you grow the game, grow the purses, and that's how we eventually will close the pay gap.

Q. This is a big week for Rose Zhang. You've been in her shoes. What's your best advice for her with so many expectations?

MICHELLE WIE WEST: Yeah, she's a rock star. She has literally won, I mean, every single thing that she could have won. It's a very natural step for her. I think she spent more time being World Number One than I think more weeks than I stayed an amateur, so...

I'm incredibly proud of her. I think it's just so great to see how much she's loving Stanford as well. Seems like the team dynamic is so great. I spent a lot of time talking with her about finishing her degree. I'm so proud that she's decided to do that. Hopefully she'll get her degree.

But she's loving school, loving it. I think she's going to do great. I think she's going to transition great. She played the U.S. Open, a couple big events. I always know that debut week is always nerve-wracking. I very vividly remember mine. Didn't turn out the way I hoped so; hopefully go better for her this week.

(Smiling.)

Yeah, I think she's going to do great. I think she is a rock star and I cannot wait to see what she does on tour.

Q. One follow up about Stanford specifically. Have you shared with her why it was important for you to get that degree and what that meant to you?

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

MICHELLE WIE WEST: Yeah, I don't think I even have to -- I didn't have to explain it to her. She knows. She loves being at college. She loves the life. She loves the school and studying the and team dynamic. Obviously going to be a little bit different now. We're called civilians, the ones that were on NCAA teams. She now will be a civilian on campus.

Yeah, I don't need to explain it to her. She knows. She wants do it. It's just a matter of it seems impossible. It seems impossible to get a degree and play full time on tour, and I think it just telling her that you can do it, it is possible, appeasing her in that way I think went a long way.

Didn't have to do much explaining. Once you go you just kind of -- it's just so amazing you want to be there. You never want to leave.

Q. First a follow up on your first week and how it was a mess. I don't know if you used that word. Take me to that debut and what were the emotions like and how did you manage them? Any specifics would you great.

MICHELLE WIE WEST: I played great. Came in fourth. I don't know if anyone remembers that. It's what happened after that that made more the news. I almost dropped the first drive though.

I remember hitting 3-wood on the first hole because I was so nervous and I thinned it so hard and it barely left the ground. And I know I hit a low stinger, but I was trying not to hit a stinger. I was actually trying to hit it high and it went so low and skipped the grass. But it got there. It went straight.

I played great. I nervous as hell all four days. And, yeah, I mean, I still think to this day that I did nothing wrong. I dropped it in the right place. You know, whole different story.

But you live and you learn. Things happen for a reason. Yeah, it was an interesting week, but I had fun. I played great and that's what I'm going to focus on.

Q. And then another one on Rose. I think I read recently she feels like - this may be her being humble - there have been more talented players at her level of her career.

MICHELLE WIE WEST: There is no better player.

Q. Okay. Okay.

MICHELLE WIE WEST: Than her.

Q. Beyond her being super talented, what intangibles does she have that other players don't? She is a great golfer, but what else does she have that the other players lack?

MICHELLE WIE WEST: Yeah, I think she has proved that she's a great golfer and the fact that she can handle herself when the pressure is on her.

You know, you saw it ANWA this year back to back NCAA champion. You know, she's done that with all the eyeballs on her. The NIL landscape is a different story than before. So having sponsors on top of that, I mean, she's already living a life very similar to a professional golfer. There are contracts, sponsor obligations.

Winning the ANWA and the NCAA with sponsors is a big deal. I played with her last year at U.S. Open. She's just a great girl. Very even keel on the course. Just it's just -- looks easy for her when she plays. I've definitely made the game look very hard when I played, but she makes to look easy.

I'm really excited for her. I'm incredibly honored that she chose this week to make her debut, and very excited for her.

Q. You spoke to your passion for the LPGA earlier. What other parts of the Tour would you like to impact in the post-playing act of your career?

MICHELLE WIE WEST: Yeah, you know, I spent the last two years being on the player director board and I learned a lot about the business side of things, the side that we as players usually don't see.

Yeah, I mean, I'm very close with Mollie, the commissioner. We talk all the time. Just always love giving my two cents and trying to help wherever I can. Always try to keep an open communication.

Obviously I would love to continue to help the Tour get more recognition, help the players get more support, help the players get more recognition.

You know, we're just trying to close the pay gap. We're trying elevate our purses, elevate dining, elevate the fan experience, statistics on our tour. There are so many areas we're working, on and I'm just lending a hand, an ear, whenever the Tour or Mollie wants it.

Q. Being here with you almost ten years ago for the tour after you won the U.S. Open Women's Open, I



don't think a player has done that since. I know that's just next start. What did you think playing Pebble Beach for the first time, and are you getting practice in now?

MICHELLE WIE WEST: Yeah, practice. Yeah, it's happening. I did a nice range session on Sunday here. The range is very nice. I could personally attest to that.

Yeah, I played the back nine at Pebble. Haven't got to play the front nine. Back nine was great. Pebble Beach is a special golf course. It's really cool. It's breathtaking first off. Also the little kooky features on the golf course are so cool, so iconic. Every time you go there you're just like, wow, it takes your breath away.

Yeah, in terms of practice, I'm definitely starting to ramp it up. Obviously this week is a busy week for me. Starting next week it'll be in full swing.

Q. What do you remember about that tour, the city, almost ten years ago and the importance of the LPGA being in this market?

MICHELLE WIE WEST: I think I blacked out during that entire stage. I just couldn't believe this was happening. It was a surreal experience being on the shows, carrying the trophy around the city. New York City is one of my favorite cities in the whole world and it's just so amazing how big the city is.

You know, that was one of the reasons why Mizuho and I wanted to bring this event to New York City and take advantage of that. That's why it's so important for the players to stay in New York City. I think it's just great, the opportunities for eyeballs, you know, Liberty National is an iconic golf course, New York City is an iconic city.

Having both of them makes the tournament so iconic. New York City is just amazing. I love it. My experience in 2014, yeah, I don't remember much of it because I think I felt like I was dreaming. I was like what is happening?

THE MODERATOR: All right, thank you so much, Michelle Wie West.

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