

NBC Sports Group Media Conference

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Morgan Pressel

Kay Cockerill

Grant Boone

Tom Abbott

Press Conference



I love an old school, old style golf course. Wonderful design, great undulation, elevation changes, so many unique holes.

My memory isn't super, super clear, but I'm definitely excited in terms of the entire golf course, but I'm excited to get back there next week and go a little bit down memory lane and see some of the subtle changes that they've made over the last year since we have been there.

I think you're all aware women's golf is in a pretty special place right now, especially with the dominance of Nelly Korda, winning just last week with her sixth victory of the season, just something we haven't seen in quite some time on the LPGA tour, really in golf at all, and it has been a lot of fun to watch her through the first part of the season and here to come to, in my opinion, the biggest major championship on the season and really look for her second major of the year and seventh victory. It's pretty special.

As well as the coming home, so to speak, of In Gee Chun, the championship in 2015 and everything she's done for the community in Lancaster and the incredible fund-raising she's done for the families, the staff there at the club, and what she's really meant to the community. Those are two big story lines I'm excited to follow next week.

JAMIE PALATINI: Great. Thank you very much, Morgan. We'll go next to our on course reporter and two-time U.S. Women's Amateur champion, I hope I'm right, Kay Cockerill.

KAY COCKERILL: You're right, and I think having that relationship, being a USGA champion, has always made, I don't know, I guess my relationship with the USGA is special. I've always looked up to their championship. I think the USGA is synonymous with really the highest level championships in golf, whether it's amateur, professional, from junior level all the way up to senior, senior aged golf.

I played in five U.S. Women's Opens, basically back when I was in college through my early years in professional golf, and then I've been really fortunate to cover a majority of them since joining Golf Channel and NBC in 1995, and I think this will be my 22nd U.S. Women's Open. I've seen a lot of great golf through the years, gone to some beautiful venues.

JAMIE PALATINI: Thank you very much. Good afternoon. Welcome to our NBC SPORTS 2024 U.S. Women's Open media conference call. In a moment we'll be joined by members of our broadcast team, Morgan Pressel, of course reporter Kay Cockerill, and play-by-play commentators Grant Boone and Tom Abbott.

NBC SPORTS is going to produce more than 65 hours of live US Women's Open coverage next week from Lancaster Country Club in Lancaster, Pennsylvania across NBC, USA Network, and Peacock. This year NBC SPORTS will have expanded featured women's groups on Peacock and feature two groups in the morning and afternoon waves on Thursday through Sunday.

In addition Golf Channel's critically-acclaimed Golf Central Live From the U.S. Women's Open studio show will be live onsite through the week with coverage beginning next Wednesday. Kira K. Dixon will host that alongside analysts Brandel Chamblee and Mel Reid who will be reprising the role as an analyst for that in the studio the day after making her debut at the live desk last year at Pebble Beach.

Before we take questions from members of the media, we'll start with brief opening remarks from each of our speakers. We'll start with our lead analyst who boasted a top five at Lancaster in 2015 and happens to be celebrating a birthday today. Happy birthday to our own Morgan Pressel.

MORGAN PRESSEL: Thanks, Jamie. I'm really excited for the U.S. Women's Open. It has always been my very favorite championship of the year both to play and to broadcast. As Jamie said, I had the opportunity to play in 2015. I have great memories from Lancaster, love the golf course. One of my favorites that we played during all of my U.S. Women's Opens.



This venue of Lancaster Country Club, I was not there in '15. A different network was covering the championship during that era, but I know that it's just a hidden gem, as many have said. I spoke to Karrie Webb earlier today, and she just really -- the thing that stood out in her mind was what an unheralded golf course it was and that hopefully the United States and the world is going to see this great golf course and really what a wonderful venue it is.

It doesn't have the sexy name that a lot of the USGA Championship have been going to for the Women's Open recently, namely the Olympic Club and Pebble, and next year we're going to be at Erin Hills, Riviera, a host of fantastic golf course, but I think this venue is going to be wonderful, and the community support in the greater Lancaster area is going to make it extra special.

Like Morgan said, a lot of great story lines. I'm just excited to be there. I'm always excited to cover a U.S. Women's Open and look forward to this event, this championship next week.

JAMIE PALATINI: Great. Thank you very much, Kay. We will go next over to Mr. Grant Boone. Go ahead, Grant.

GRANT BOONE: I would say this is easily the most anticipated U.S. Women's Open since last July. The difference is last year's excitement was primarily about Pebble hosting for the first time, and next week is going to be all about Nelly. I think we're seeing the best season by any LPGA player since at least 2013 when Inbee Park won six times in the first half of the year. Three of those were major.

Even if you look at what's happened with Thailand and China, even since 2015 and you realize how many great players have come from there just in that time, you realize how much deeper every field is week to week, which makes what Nelly has done over a variety of courses, conditions, even formats. I mean, she won a tournament that had two formats in the same event in Vegas. It's just a reminder that she's handled pretty much everything that's come at her, and she's even dazzled at the Met Gala in the middle of all of that.

I do think, when you go back to a place where you've been before, it reminds you how quickly the Tour changes. Morgan was contending to win the last time the Open was here, and now she's commentating. Gabby Russell, who's leading the Rookie of the Year race, literally was beginning to play golf for the first time the last time the U.S. Women's Open was at Lancaster, and now here she is with three third place finishes this year.

You look at Korea and how Korea was dominating women's golf at the time, and now really ironically In Gee Chun, who won here in 2015, was the last Korean to win a major championship, and there's only been one since 2020, and she's the only one.

Now the U.S. is back dominating, not just with Nelly, but with Rose and many others. Things change quickly.

Finally, I would say that we're in a great time, as Morgan said, for women's -- I would say women's sport in general with Caitlin Clark and what's happening around the world, but certainly in the U.S. in terms of women's sport.

And I think one thing that has to happen -- and I know the LPGA has a big focus on this -- you've got to have people onsite. You've got to have people tuning in seeing big crowds, you need that. Sometimes we have them on the LPGA tour, and other times not as big. The crowds that were there in 2015 were as big as we've seen in recent memory in the U.S. Women's Open competition, really any American event.

So if Nelly were to work her way in contention on NBC with huge crowds, a chance to make it two straight major and win a seventh time in the first -- what would that be? Four months really, four-plus months of the season -- you're legitimately having a case that this is as good a season as there's ever been. Wouldn't be the most wins, but we're talking about things that are rarely done. Can't wait.

JAMIE PALATINI: Great. Thank you very much, Grant. Last but certainly not least, we'll pass it over to Tom Abbott.

TOM ABBOTT: I'll be quick because I'm sure you have questions to ask. Just pulling up from what my colleagues have said, it's really a very exciting time for the LPGA, and what Nelly has done is really incredible. I think the fact that she obviously had those wins, those run of wins, five in a row, and then slipped a little bit at the weekend of the Cognizant Founders Cup, sort of thought to yourself, is this the end for her? Is she going to start a different form?

Then, boom, she comes right back and wins, not playing her best golf, as she said, on Sunday at Liberty National. Obviously, it was the final day of the PGA Championship, so it maybe didn't get quite as much attention as it maybe deserved, but to win six of seven starts, six of eight in the year is really just getting into unprecedented territory in the LPGA.

So going into the U.S. Women's Open with that story, I don't think it can be much better and a place that really embraces the LPGA from what we saw in 2015 with huge

crowds and support from the community. As we know, the LPGA really thrives when they go to small to mid-market communities, and that's exactly what we're going to see next week.

JAMIE PALATINI: Great. Thank you, Tom. We're ready to open up for questions.

Q. Guys, this question could be for anyone on here. I'm curious, there's been a lot of conversation in the golf world over what Nelly has been doing, and a lot of parallels have been drawn to Caitlin Clark and the movement in women's basketball in the last 12 months. I'm curious, why do you guys think that hasn't been happening in golf to this point, and what can golf be doing to sort of get to that point?

MORGAN PRESSEL: I'll go ahead. Can you explain what you mean by that question? What Caitlin Clark is doing for women's basketball compared to what Nelly could be or is doing for women's golf?

Q. Yes. I think specifically like talking about the massive growth in sponsor interest and particularly TV ratings and audience size. Just generally like the buzz around her growth in the sport and how that seems to have had some downstream effect in women's basketball in general.

MORGAN PRESSEL: I think the one thing is you have a superstar. That is like the big thing is you have a dominant superstar that is creating headlines by their play, their performance on the field or on the court, and that is drawing tremendous attention.

I said that for a few years, certainly as it relate to the LPGA, is that we haven't had a real dominant superstar and kind of waiting to see who it might be. Even up to the first event that we covered this year, who is going to -- will somebody break out of the massive fluctuation of the No. 1 player in the world that changed hands many times last year? Things like that, and who will that be? Obviously we've learned at this point.

But Nelly has said, pick me. I'm here. It's really impressive to watch what she has accomplished, and I think things like what Grant has mentioned, her being at the Met Gala, that is a huge crossover promotion for women's golf, women's sport, the LPGA, for her to shine on that type of a stage with a lot of different media and things like that.

And it definitely is a big time for the LPGA to capitalize on what Nelly is doing this season and to really have that, quote, unquote, Caitlin Clark effect of what has changed in women's basketball for sure. It's a prime opportunity right

now for the LPGA to capitalize on what's happening.

GRANT BOONE: I would also add, thinking about what I said earlier about crowds, Caitlin played at Iowa, anyone at the Solheim Cup in Iowa, who's ever been to any sporting event in Iowa, will tell you how sports crazed that place is. They love their sport. When you have a packed arena coming out to cheer on Caitlin Clark, who by the way plays a couple of nights a week rather than four consecutive days during the day time. She's on usually at night, and you get 15,000 people in Carver-Hawkeye Arena, it just gets people's attention. Then you get the media paying attention because the crowds are paying attention.

Getting back to Tom's point, you go to a place like Lancaster that fits the mold of what the LPGA has seen so successfully through the years, and that's going to a slightly smaller places but getting massive crowds.

That's why I think Sunday could be enormous. If you get a late Sunday afternoon Nelly Korda in contention with massive crowds on NBC, now you're beginning to get some of those ingredients like we've seen with Caitlin.

Q. First of all, happy birthday, Morgan. Secondly, for Morgan and Kay, what impress me most about Nelly's run here is it actually started back at Drive On, and then she took that time off. You guys, being both successful players in your own right, what's the hardest thing about taking all that time off, having a break, and then coming out like she has with basically her best stuff or her B game ever since? That for me is really impressive.

KAY COCKERILL: I'll start. Yeah, I think it's just -- it really shows how disciplined Nelly is mentally because she's able to go into that, quote, bubble that she talks about and really stay in the present and execute her game plan when she's competing. To be able to switch off, go on and off from when you have a chunk of time where you're at home and you're relaxed and you're working on your game and you're practicing and working out, to getting ready for go time and being able to pull it off and execute really is remarkable.

I think she's also learned that she needs to balance herself and pace herself because she has had injuries and illness in the past. I was kind of surprised -- she talked about the fact that her dad actually still does her schedule to this day. He probably started doing her schedule in junior golf and still works out a schedule for her, and he thinks about the pacing of her needs physically and mentally.

Maybe for her it just makes it so much more easy. She doesn't have to sit there and contemplate, am I going to play? Am I not going to play? It's written out for her, and

she makes sure she's physically and mentally ready for those times she does play.

I just think it's exemplary what she is able to do and be able to have the time off and then switch that switch back on. I don't see that many players have been able to do that very well through the years.

MORGAN PRESSEL: Yeah, I certainly agree with Kay. I think that Nelly is somewhere that we've actually never seen her, maybe in her entire career, and that is healthy. She has said time and time again that she's been held back, hasn't been able to practice the way she's wanted to. She said that those seven weeks off were the first time she's voluntarily taken time off because every other time she was forced to take time off due to injury or illness.

Personally you have to be in a very powerful position for her to have been in to be able to take that time off. I know Kim, her physio, travels with her all the time really to make sure that her body stays in tiptop shape and that she's able to fight through the entire season hopefully without injury.

I don't think there's -- I don't think it's a coincidence that we are seeing Nelly healthy and dominant. That has maybe been the piece that's really been missing for her to the point where she's had a bit of a sporadic career to this point.

Q. This question goes for anyone. As far as the U.S. Women's Open, obviously Nelly Korda has been the story of the year. Is there any specific type of player that this golf course favors, and if so, who are the players you're looking at to challenge Nelly?

TOM ABBOTT: I haven't been to the golf course, so I'm probably not the best person to answer that. I think Morgan would be a better resource. As Kay mentioned in 2015 NBC was not doing that broadcast, so I was not a part of it.

Q. Not so much in terms that, but who is playing this year and who you think could challenge Nelly? I certainly want to get Morgan and Kay's specific take on that.

TOM ABBOTT: In terms of who's playing well, Hannah Green is playing great golf. Brooke Henderson has a really good record there. You understand you have to move the ball left to right, which is kind of unusual on the LPGA Tour, a lot of players move the ball right to left, so you would look to a fader of the ball.

Nelly can work the ball both ways, so she seems very in control of her golf game.

It's very difficult, I think, to pick winners on the LPGA Tour, but from what we understand from the USGA, this is a golf course that's really going to test all parts of a player's game, and it should be a very difficult golf course. I haven't been able to see the length of the rough and the width of the fairway, but that's going to be a big factor in terms of strength and being able to navigate your way around this golf course.

But in terms of how it plays, I think Morgan would probably be a very good resource.

GRANT BOONE: It's easier to pick a winner these days more than ever. Just go with Nelly.

MORGAN PRESSEL: Like I said, I really loved the golf course. I know the USGA today in a call we had previously said you might need to fade the ball. Anybody who knows my game knows that I can't move the ball left to right. I did okay.

Maybe it will depend a little bit on the firmness of the golf course, and the advanced forecast looks strong at the moment. I know it's a long way out, but it doesn't look like there should be a tremendous amount of rain, which would be good, and the golf course will play firm and fast.

There's some great, as I said, undulation and dogleg and different blind shots and things that really test all aspects of your game. One of the things that the USGA said today, which they certainly do a great job of in moving tees around and hole location, is they want to you get every club in your bag dirty. They don't want it to be a course where you're just hitting 6-iron into every green. They really want to test all aspect of your game as well as your short game.

I remember one of the biggest -- one of my favorite things about the golf course were the green complexes. Just really important to be accurate in your approach game as well as have a short game that can save you on the chance you miss the right area of the green or end up short-sided. I think a U.S. Open is more often than not one with a putter in your hand.

With the undulation of those greens at Lancaster, not a big surprise that In Gee Chun was the last champion there and would definitely look for somebody who is putting well to contend next week.

KAY COCKERILL: I haven't been there either, but it's always about the consistency of ball striking, ability to hit greens, putting, also elevating yourself for the biggest events in the U.S. Women's Open, which by and large is

considered the biggest event on Tour, especially among Americans.

In non-American, I think one we have to remember and keep in mind is Hannah Green, who's kind of just right behind Nelly in a lot of statistics. She's second in Player of the Year, she's second in CME, she's second on the money, she's second to Nelly in scoring average, she was second to Nelly last week. She's trending well. She has the all around game to get it done.

She actually was there in 2015 as a Karrie Webb sponsor, one of Karrie's sponsorship girls, who she invited two girls from Australia out, the top two to follow her around at a U.S. Open, and Hannah was there as a young amateur watching Karrie. So this is kind of a full circle moment for her to be coming back and competing now as a pro in that event, and that was the first time she'd ever been to the United States.

So that's going to be a pretty cool story, I think, to keep an eye on Hannah Green as well.

GRANT BOONE: I would just add, if you look at who contended that week in addition to Morgan, they were medium length, in some case, to short hitters. Morgan, it was a smoke show. She was bombing it with that patented left-to-right cut.

Everybody else was, you know, medium length. Amy Yang could move it out there a little bit back in 2015, but these were not big hitters.

Really you look at the entire top ten, Brooke would have been maybe among the biggest hitters of the bunch. Again, you like that in a U.S. Women's Open. You want every style rewarded. I would also say it's worth noting, as we consider Nelly's prospects of winning, I realize In Gee Chun was not a member of the tour when she won, but she was nineteenth in the world. She had one of the best seasons that I don't think gets enough credit. She won five worldwide majors in 2015, and this was one of them. She won two others on the JLPGA and two majors on the KLPGA, her home tour in Korea.

You're talking about a player in very, very good form when she got to Lancaster. This wasn't someone out of nowhere, maybe like we've seen at the occasional men's or women's U.S. Open. As you're trying to say now, maybe who might not be the biggest hitters who are playing well, a player like Ayaka Furue, who just keeps stacking good finishes one on top of the other. She's a straight hitter. She putts well. She's admittedly struggled handling late Sunday situation in her very young career. She's just this week, I think, turning 24.

Third year on Tour, outstanding, would not shock me in the least if Ayaka Furue were to win.

Then you look at Rose, who just won a couple weeks ago, had to withdraw from her first title defense at the Mizuho because of an illness. That was just an illness. She's over it now. Rose is not short, but she's not among the longer hitters, and the way that she's playing, she's already won, what, a couple of USGA events. She won a U.S. Am before she even won a U.S. Junior, and she comes in in great form.

This was the week last year she won at Mizuho making her pro debut, so those are a couple of names.

JAMIE PALATINI: Thank you all for joining the call. We will have a transcript of all the comments from our group that came from this call. We'll have that on nbcsports.com/pressbox. That's our new press site that we have launched in the last month or so. Again, that website is nbcsports.com/pressbox.

As I mentioned, we will have comprehensive coverage next week from Lancaster with live from the U.S. Women's Open kicking things off on Wednesday on Golf Channel and live coverage across NBC, USA Network, and Peacock beginning next Thursday.

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