

Meijer LPGA Classic

Monday, June 3, 2024

Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA

Blythefield Country Club

Cathy Cooper

Lexi Thompson

Brooke Henderson

Leona Maguire

Press Conference



GRANT BOONE: Thank you very much. It's a real honor to be part of this call. I go back to my first year covering the Meijer, 2017. Brooke will remember that year well for having won it the first of her two titles. It was love at first sight for me. Huge crowds, a tremendous golf course, great community, copious amounts of gourmet food near our announce trailer, and the kind of cause that I think all of us can get behind, making sure that all of our neighbors have daily bread.

Then you have these phenomenal players like we have on the call today, and every year they deliver the drama that you don't see necessarily every week on the LPGA Tour. This week, this tournament every single year delivered.

Lexi, I want to begin with you. I only you know have a few minutes to be with us. Obviously last week in Lancaster with the U.S. Women's Open, you announced that you're going to be stepping away from the LPGA Tour, at least in terms of full-time competition. I know folks who didn't see the unbelievable video that you and your team put together making that announcement or those that didn't see the press conference, they can find that part online, those really, I think, heartfelt tender words that you shared last week.

I guess what I would start out with is what have the last few days been like for you now that you've made the announcement? How have these last few days been?

LEXI THOMPSON: Yeah, last week was definitely a lot. You know, expected going into the week. But I had so much support. I had my family and friends there and loved ones there to support me throughout the week. The fans were unbelievable.

The golf course was very challenging, so that was enough on its own. But I actually had so much love and support throughout the week, on the course and off the course. It's been nice being home the last day or two just to decompress and let it all kind of settle in.

Looking forward to being there at the Meijer LPGA Classic next week. It's always a tournament I absolutely love. Going to enjoy this week at home, decompress, and get

JEREMY FRIEDMAN: Cathy, take it away.

CATHY COOPER: Thank you all for joining our virtual player interview this afternoon. I want to tell you that we're really looking forward to the 2024 Meijer LPGA Classic for Simply Give. This year as you know is our 10th year, and we're really looking forward to celebrating this milestone with both the community and with you.

We've had 10 years of great golf. Since our very first tournament we've raised more than \$10 million for Simply Give, and I have another \$2 million goal for this year's tournament, which supports Simply Give, our hunger relief program, and all of this goes to stock the shelves of local food pantries across the Midwest.

This year I do want to tell you we've got another fantastic lineup of committed LPGA professionals, including the world's top three players, No. 1 Nelly Korda, Lilia Vu and Celine Boutier.

But today we've got an incredible 2023 defending champion here, Leona Maguire. We're thrilled to have her. She won our tournament last year.

We've got also Lexi Thompson who's joining us. She is a previous champion of the Meijer LPGA Classic in 2015, and we're excited to have you back, Lexi.

Then we've also got Brooke Henderson, who also won the Meijer LPGA Classic two times, 2017 and 2019.

With that, I'm going to introduce Grant Boone from Golf Channel NBC, and he is going to lead us in this event today. He's the voice of the Masters Live, and Grant, I'd love to welcome you to this call today.



ready for some weeks coming up.

GRANT BOONE: Let me bring in our other two Meijer champions. Brooke, you won here in 2017 and 2019. Leona, you're the defending champ. What about this event, besides the fact that you all won it, what stands out? What makes this week unique?

BROOKE HENDERSON: I think there's so many different factors that make this week so special. The golf course for me is very beautiful, and it's very similar to what a lot of courses that I grew up playing on in Canada, so I really like the way that feels. You mentioned it earlier, the great atmosphere. The crowds are always insane. They're always so supportive, and there's always so many of them, so you can really feel that energy and adrenaline.

I think there's just so many activities and great food, great drinks. There's just a lot of fun things that all the fans can do, and us as players, we can take part in, as well.

Just overall and then for Simply Give, as well, you feel -- when you're out on Tour playing week to week, when you come to an event where they're giving back to the community, you feel a little something extra, and you feel like you're playing a great role in helping to give back to the local communities, which is a great feeling.

LEONA MAGUIRE: Yeah, I think Brooke covered pretty much everything there. But no, I think it's great when you come to an event and you really see the community rally behind the event. I think we saw that in Lancaster last week. The crowds were phenomenal. It's like that at Meijer, too. There's a real buzz about not just at the golf course but just in the town in general and in the restaurants and the supermarkets, everywhere you go.

I know there's a lot of events, runs, different things organized outside of the golf course, as well. Just walking up 18 with those grandstands fully packed, yeah, it's a really cool event, and it reminds me of home, as well, I guess. It's that smaller sort of rural feel a little bit that you get in the Midwest, that you get in Ireland, too. It's all very green with the trees and the grasses, and I love that.

I've really enjoyed every year I've been back there, and it's definitely one that excites me every year.

LEXI THOMPSON: Now I've got to follow up with both of theirs. On top of what they both said, there's just something special about the event. Kind of everything that goes into it, the hospitality, the way the tournament treats us, the hospitality is amazing, but what they do for the fans with the tents onsite and the hospitality that they give for them and the little kids out there, too. I know there's

something alongside I believe the last hole for kids to just roam around and have fun, but the way they give back to the community, I think that's a huge part, too. The atmosphere of the event is one thing, but the way they give back to the community and how the community comes out and supports us, that's huge.

I feel like we're doing something by just teeing it up out there and giving back. What the tournament does is really special.

Q. Lexi, didn't you have a chance to see some of the good work that is done in the food pantry was it last year?

LEXI THOMPSON: I did, yeah. It was last year. It was something that I'll really remember. They tell us about it during the week, but to be actually there onsite and see what they actually do by stocking up the shelves in the local pantries, it's amazing what they do. It's very special, and I was happy to be a part of it and actually get a firsthand look at it all because we can hear about it all day, but to be there and see the difference that they make, it's unbelievable.

GRANT BOONE: It just feels like in a time in the world when no one can agree on anything, I think everybody can say, yeah, I think let's make sure everybody has enough to eat. That seems to be as basic as need as we can get, and it's incredible to think what Meijer has done for Simply Give, and you all are a big part of driving that.

A question again for all three of you. In addition to your wins here, you all have a great track record at Blythefield. Lexi, you've played every year. Your total under par is 115 in nine starts, which I triple and quadruple checked --

LEXI THOMPSON: Only you would find that stat.

GRANT BOONE: Well, guilty as charged. 115-under par, which probably explains how you top 5 here just about every year.

Brooke, you've won twice. Your scoring average is 68 and a half on a par-72, which is nuts.

Leona, the third time for you was a charm. Last year you finished solo second, then you were a playoff runner-up, and then I think you played the last six holes last year in 6-under, and you broke through and won. This one also I had to go and double check. In the 12 rounds you've played, your worst score is 70 on this par-72.

I would ask all of you what is the source of your sorcery at Blythefield? Why is it this way? Why do you always seem

to play well here? Is it a coincidence or is there something special about the place for each of you?

BROOKE HENDERSON: Yeah, I kind of mentioned it earlier. It's very similar tree-lined course, very traditional, and similar to a lot of courses I grew up playing on back in Canada, so when I first arrived there I was like, ooh, I love this place. Then ever since playing my first year in 2016 and then winning the next year, I have a lot of great memories there on pretty much every hole, which is a great feeling, so on every tee box I feel like it suits my eye and that I have good memories to kind of think about to get me through the hole.

I think it's -- again, just going back, it's just such a special event overall, and just having the fans there and having their support, it gives you a lot of energy and can help you make some more birdies.

LEONA MAGUIRE: Yeah, I mean, I think, again, similar to what Brooke said, it's a golf course that's always suited my eye, and I think going there, you know the scores are always going to be really low. It's kind of the direct opposite to last week, what you know what a U.S. Open is going to be. It's kind of go low or get left behind, and you're just out there trying to make a lot of birdies and eagles on the par-5s. It's a lot of fun, and then obviously with the crowds you're trying to give them as much to cheer about as possible, and they're always cheering you on and things like that.

It's a lot of fun. You can be quite aggressive, and you get to do that some weeks on Tour, not a lot of weeks on Tour, but it's a lot of fun to make a lot of birdies, and you kind of have to putt well. I feel like on those greens, the greens aren't the biggest greens on Tour, so if you hit a lot of greens you're going to have a lot of chances. It really comes down to on sort of the back nine on Sunday who holes the right putts at the right time.

LEXI THOMPSON: Yeah, I think what they both said again. It's definitely a golf course that probably suits our eye, I guess, according to our results. But it helps that the golf course is always in really good shape for us, as well, and what you see is what you get when you get out there. You know that you have to make birdies and play very aggressively.

But like I said, it's always in good shape for us, so we just try to go out there, make as many birdies as we can, and hopefully get a lot of fans to come out and cheer us on.

GRANT BOONE: I call it the easiest hard course on the LPGA Tour because you've got to go low to win it, but at every turn, one mistake and you can make a big number.

You all have been brilliant at navigating Blythefield, and I would expect nothing less than another great performance from each of you.

Lexi, I know you've got to go, but I want to ask one more question. Since 2016 this event has been played on Father's Day. The final round has been played on Father's Day. I've talked to each of you, and I know about the role that your fathers have played in your careers, and I wonder if maybe you could speak to the fact that you get a chance to finish a great tournament on a special day. Lexi, maybe a word about your relationship with your dad Scott.

LEXI THOMPSON: Yeah, it's also a special event, too, because it always falls on Father's Day. My dad is always there with me supporting me. He makes it out to quite a few events, and my dad has played such a huge role in my life. He's been my number one supporter, obviously alongside my mom, as well. But he's been my coach, my dad just all in one, and he's been there for me every step of the way, good and bad. I'm so thankful and grateful that I have a father like him in my life. Sometimes we butt heads, but we know it's all tough love and we get through it. He's just truly amazing, and I'm very blessed to have him in my life.

He'll be there next week supporting me, so I'm definitely happy for that.

GRANT BOONE: Leona, how about your pop Declan? I know a longtime educator, just the role that he's played in your life.

LEONA MAGUIRE: Yes, he's been a massive part. He introduced both myself and my sister Lisa to the game, and he's just a big sports fan in general, so he kind of got us involved in all kinds of sports when we were younger. Drove us to every practice, every tournament, set up drills, collected golf balls, whatever it was that needed to be done, and definitely wouldn't be anywhere close to where I am now without his help and guidance, and obviously mom, as well.

I suppose you always need people to believe in you even when you don't see it yourself, and he's definitely sort of more happy to be behind the scenes. He's not one for the spotlight or in front of the cameras or anything like that. He's come to quite a few more tournaments now that he's retired, but he generally doesn't like watching or following the scores like in real time. He'll sort of -- he'll record it and go back and watch after the fact.

I guess Father's Day last year was a little bit more stressful than he would have liked. But no, he's been a massive support and a massive help and very grateful to have him

as part of my journey.

GRANT BOONE: Brooke, you've had a dad who you've been close with all these years, but he's been your coach, as well, and he's been there when you won your two Meijer LPGA Classics on those Father's Days. Maybe just a thought about your dad Dave.

BROOKE HENDERSON: Yeah, he's been my coach since I was like three or four years old, just starting and learning the game. It's really special to have not only my dad there on Father's Day but also my sister caddie for me so we can both kind of give back to him in that way, and to be able to do it twice and kind of hand him the trophy and say this one is for you has been very special.

Just very meaningful because he and my mom have both sacrificed so much to allow us to live our dreams out here on Tour. So just a gesture like that I think made us both feel pretty good.

GRANT BOONE: Lexi, I know you've got to go. Can't wait to see you next week. I hope only good things for the rest of your 2024 and we're going to keep trying to drag you back out for a few events in the future years, as well. We'll look forward to seeing you next week.

LEXI THOMPSON: Sounds good. I'll see you there.

Q. I just wanted to ask both of you, how impressed are you or blown away by what Nelly has been able to do, another player that has done quite well in this tournament?

LEONA MAGUIRE: I mean, it's been incredible. I think she's really raised the bar for women's golf, and it's fantastic to see her getting all the coverage and the attention that she deserves. She's making history right now that we may or may not ever see again. It's tough for us as competitors. We're trying to keep up with her. But it's very, very impressive, and I suppose I've been fortunate to sort of go toe-to-toe with her at the Meijer 2021 and '22, obviously. But she's a great player and a great role model for golf, and we're lucky to have her on the LPGA right now.

Q. You've won tournaments in all sorts of ways through the years. This venue lets you go out on Sunday, be really aggressive, make some birdies. You've come from behind, shot the low numbers. As a player, what's the freedom of that, and what's the feeling of when you tee it up on a Sunday there and can go really low? How does that change how you think out there?

BROOKE HENDERSON: Yeah, I think this course requires a different mentality than just every single week on Tour, which is really fun. You're chasing birdies right from the start, especially on Sunday. If you want to move up the leaderboard or keep your position, then you know that you have to go low.

I think it just makes it really fun.

I will say that this course does play generally a little bit different every year just due to the conditions. Early when I was first playing, it was pretty soft, and it was lots of rain and storms, and then the last few years it seems to be running a little bit firmer and a little bit drier. The changes to the course I guess in 2021, as well, has made a big difference.

But just generally you're going to have to make birdies and play smart aggressively.

Q. Leona, you had that spurt on the back nine last year with the eagle and the birdie that kind of got you really going toward the finish. What's the difference mindset of being aggressive on a golf course like this?

LEONA MAGUIRE: Yeah, I mean, I think it's interesting. I think Grant alluded to it earlier. It's tight off the tee, so you can't be too aggressive. If you get out of position, you can rack up a number pretty quickly. But if you do have your driver dialed in, you hit a lot of fairways, you hit a lot of greens, you will give yourself a lot of chances.

For me last year in particular I knew I was playing well, I just had to be patient and just sort of had to wait for that one putt to drop and get that momentum shift.

Like Brooke said, you know everybody is going low. You know everybody is going to make birdies. You just have to keep making birdies to even stay where you are. You can't get too defensively really. When you are in the lead you can't protect it, you keep having to go on the offensive. I just keep trying to keep your foot down and keep going.

For me last year I didn't look at a leaderboard until I got to the 18th green because I just -- I felt like I needed to make birdies anyway, it didn't matter what other people were doing. In hindsight I think that was a good thing for me. Obviously my caddie knew what was going on, but I still thought I was maybe one back at that point and I needed to make a birdie on 18, so it probably wasn't a bad thing in the end.

Q. Question for Brooke and Leona. What would you say is maybe the hardest part about playing at Blythefield? Is there a certain hole when you come

back to play every year that you're kind of dreading playing? We heard a lot about what you like the most about the course, but what's one of the more challenging parts, as well?

BROOKE HENDERSON: Yeah, I think there's definitely probably a handful of tee shots that when you step up to the tee, you're like, okay, I need to really focus here and need to hit it in a good spot. I feel like that's one of the most challenging things because the rough can play long.

You want to be putting yourself in good positions, so especially on those few tee shots that are sticking out in my mind right now, you want to make sure you put a good swing on it and put yourself in position so then you can go from there and hopefully give yourself a birdie opportunity.

LEONA MAGUIRE: I think for me, the two that stand out in particular are probably 1 and 18. Off the first you can pretty much hit any club off that tee. You'll see anywhere from a driver to people hitting irons and definitely a premium on hitting that fairway. It's pretty small green, very sloped, lots of runoffs around it. I've used different strategies over the years, and depending on how firm or how soft when we get there next week will sort of dictate that again this year.

For me 18 is always a tricky one because I can't quite carry that bunker on sorta the right side of the fairway, so sometimes you try and skirt a driver just past it on the left, sometimes I've hit 5-wood, 3-wood and just taken it from there.

A little bit of strategy required on those holes for me, and it obviously makes it interesting.

Q. We mentioned this at the top, and the name of the tournament is the Meijer LPGA Classic for Simply Give. You two have been a part of this with the food pantries and all that, so this tournament benefits hunger relief. How important and meaningful is it for you two to play an event that donates so much money every year? The tournament has a goal of donating \$2 million to Simply Give this year. How important is that in the big picture for you guys playing an event that means so much to the local community?

BROOKE HENDERSON: Yeah, absolutely. When you come into an event and you see the goal and then when you see them reach the goal of donating millions of dollars to allow good things to happen in the community, it makes you feel really great, and it makes you feel like you're playing a small role in a very big thing and very meaningful thing.

I think just knowing -- golf is very important and we're going out to win next week and we're going to play our best, but knowing that you've made such a big difference off the course and in life and helping people with simple needs like food and not going hungry, it just makes you feel really great as a person.

So I think the combo of having golf and having so much help is really key and makes you feel really nice.

LEONA MAGUIRE: Yeah, absolutely, I agree with Brooke. Just as we're very privileged as golfers, we get to travel around the world, go to all these great places, fantastic golf courses, great weather, you sometimes sort of live or die by every shot, but sometimes you need that sort of reality check of there's a lot of people with a lot more problems in the world, and it gives you a bit of perspective knowing that there are people out there hungry, and it is fantastic that Meijer have done so much to help ensure that the people get the food that they need. Yeah, for us to play even a small part of that is very humbling and special. It means that we're part of something a little bit bigger than ourselves, which as golfers we sometimes can be a bit selfish out there by ourselves, but it's nice to be able to give back and to impact a community in such a positive way and to be able to put smiles on people's faces, especially if they're going through some tough times.

For me, it's nice seeing it going up and up every year. We talk a lot about prize funds going up every year, something this event has done, as well, but it's nice to see that the charity aspect of it is going up, as well, and in some way that we've contributed to that is a nice feeling.

JEREMY FRIEDMAN: Cathy, do you want to touch on that from the tournament side, as somebody who's been to all of these food pantry visits with the players, you've seen this firsthand, how much impact on the community via the tournament this has had an impact.

CATHY COOPER: Well, that's a great question because we see the need every day, and as we talk to our partners, we visit our partners, it really accentuates what we hear, and we see the reality of it.

We talked to one partner just recently, and he said their numbers have gone up incredibly just this year. There's one pantry we work with that feed over 400 families a week. A week. You take the multiplier on that and you look at what this tournament does to support that, and it's great to hear Leona and Brooke really talking about how important it is and how they see it, too. It means a lot to us.

Q. Cathy, you obviously have a great field coming,

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which is a huge challenge for any tournament director. How has your role changed through the years, and what do you find to be the bigger challenges these days?

CATHY COOPER: You know, my role really hasn't changed through the years. I think as we've grown with this tournament, it's really thinking about how we can be better every year and not be complacent and how we can do more.

But it's kind of grown in itself, and the support we receive from both the LPGA and the great field of players that come to this tournament year after year, it's not faded, it's growing, and we continue to just have wonderful weeks with key players, with great fields, with great support from community, and amazing support from our sponsors, as well.

GRANT BOONE: I would just close by asking Leona and Brooke one last thought, and that is as you look forward to the rest of the season, what is number one in your mind? I have a hunch what it is for each of you, but I'd like to hear from you.

BROOKE HENDERSON: Well, first, I'm playing this week at ShopRite, so I am looking forward to being back here and then Meijer next week, both very important weeks to me because I have won both places, so I love that feeling of returning as a past champion, which includes KPMG Women's PGA Championship, our next major, which again, I am past champion at that golf course, so I am just really excited and looking forward to reliving some of the memories that I had there eight years ago and just trying to rekindle some of the magic that I had that week.

GRANT BOONE: Pretty much every week over the next few weeks you're going to be a returning champion, so that's a fun position to be in. Leona, how about you?

LEONA MAGUIRE: Yeah, I mean, obviously we've got a really exciting summer ahead. Next week is really exciting for me. My first one I actually didn't get to defend on the golf course that I won on, so it's nice to actually go back to somewhere that I have these great memories with all the people there. Yeah, that's going to be really special for me next week, and obviously a busy summer ahead with the Olympics and Solheim Cup.

I think British Open at St Andrews is one that I'm excited for. Been there a lot as a kid and as a junior, so to be able to play a British Open there will be a very cool experience.

GRANT BOONE: As we can see on your hat, it's always big to go to the KPMG Women's PGA Championship.

They're an incredible sponsor of women's golf --

LEONA MAGUIRE: Yeah, I'm playing in the KPMG Women's Irish Open as well at the end of the summer, so I've got a very busy summer.

GRANT BOONE: By the way, that field is great. You just keep adding big names to that in addition to yourself, right?

LEONA MAGUIRE: Yeah, we'll have to get Brooke to come over at some point. I'm actually going to Canada for the first time this year, so I'll have to get some local tips for that one.

GRANT BOONE: Brooke will have to return the favor. How is your Irish accent, Brooke?

BROOKE HENDERSON: Oh, very poor.

GRANT BOONE: Luckily that's not what you do for a living because what you do for a living is incredible. Just a final word to both of these two people. They're great golfers; we know that. Lexi, same thing. But all of them are incredible ambassadors for the sport. I wouldn't just say women's golf, I'd say for the entire sport. Each of them are national heroes, Brooke in Canada, Leona in Ireland, even though we try to claim them because they live in Florida and they've become adults here down in the U.S.

Cathy, as I send it back to you, it's just such a joy to call the golf by these great players like Brooke and Leona and Lexi, and knowing what kind of people they are I think makes it even better. That's why you love a week like the Meijer LPGA Classic for Simply Give. You all are not just putting on a golf tournament but you're literally changing lives, and it's a real joy and a pleasure for me to witness firsthand.

CATHY COOPER: Thank you, Grant. We're looking forward to having you back with us next week. Obviously a huge week for us. Leona, Brooke, and I know Lexi is not here, but just want to thank you two for always being with us, for being so loyal to the reason we do this tournament and for appreciating how this helps the community. That's big to us. We're so thrilled you will be back with us next week, and I'd love to see you both when you get here, and we're looking forward to another really big week.

We've got our 5K that's back. We've got J. Brewers and Frederik's, which is 5,000 square feet bigger. Grant, you're going to have to walk farther and longer.

GRANT BOONE: The 5K is number of calories per day? Just checking.

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CATHY COOPER: For you, yes.

We've got Discoveryland, but all in all, our \$2 million goal to Simply Give is really what we're trying to achieve this year. Thank you all again. We'll see you next week, and really appreciate you being on this call.

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