

Mizuho Americas Open

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Liberty National Golf Club

Rose Zhang

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: All right, welcome everyone again to the media center here at Mizuho Americas Open.

I'm sitting here with Rose Zhang, who's coming off one of the most impressive amateur career maybe ever, and now taking this next big step in your career, your professional debut. What's going through your head in these moments?

ROSE ZHANG: Safe to say that the last 48 hours have been incredibly chaotic. I'm enjoying every moment and everyone has been treating me so well and gotten me through the ropes of professional golf a little bit.

I've just been really thankful to be out here, be on this platform. This is something that I dreamed of since I was a little girl, so I'm here now and it's been incredible.

Q. When you were thinking about making your professional debut, which I'm sure has been on your mind, why the Mizuho Americas Open? What called you to make your debut at this event?

ROSE ZHANG: There were so many reasons. First of all the timing. After NCAAs last week I was able to just figure things out a little bit in terms of my schedule and what I wanted to do going forward after my sophomore year at Stanford, and the Mizuho was a perfect place for me to kind of start out my professional debut.

At the same time, it's such a special event and this is the first time I think that the AJGA and the LPGA are together playing the same course. Being at Liberty National there is a lot of history here.

So there were so many factors that made me want to come out here and start my pro debut.

Q. Have to ask, was Michelle Wie West some of those factors? She was in here talking and said some very nice things about you. What is your relationship like and did that have any influence on your decision to play this week?

ROSE ZHANG: 100%. Michelle, her being a Stanford alum, she's talked to me before. Been a great mentor for me and a good role model about what to do, what she did in her professional career, as well as being at Stanford.

She was actually one of the main influences for me to turn professional while going to school at Stanford. So in the following years I'll still be at school finishing my degree, and she played a huge part in helping me with that decision because she's done it before and she said you could definitely do it. That gave me the confidence to try it and see what it would bring forth for me.

But Michelle is just incredible. She's been an incredible name for the game of golf, women's golf, and she's just an exciting person to be around.

So we definitely have bonded a little bit in previous events, and I couldn't be more thankful to have her guidance in things.

Q. We were joking about Grayhawk. You played some really tough golf courses. Augusta National and winning that event and playing so well at Grayhawk the last two years. Any of those experiences at those big-name golf courses prepare you for a week like this?

ROSE ZHANG: Certainly. Those are one of the biggest stages that you're going to be playing at on a collegiate level and amateur level, so there was a lot of media at Augusta, a lot of the media at NCAAs.

That kind of prepped me for what I need to work on, what I need to do or balance things out when I'm playing golf as well as doing media.

So being here at professional level now there is certainly a lot of factors that are very similar to what I experienced those two weeks, and allows me to balance my schedule a little more, my mind a little more before I go out and play.

But those events were incredible. Such unique experiences that I'll never get to probably experience again because they're just such special events that I could just learn and grow with people that I love.



Q. How much do you look up to a player like Michelle? Obviously big factor being here. How much do you look up to her and want to emulate her as you go on this journey?

ROSE ZHANG: Yeah, I do feel like a lot of people -- every person is different. She's got a different career path, as I do, so in terms of emulation I don't really think about it as that.

But she is -- she has such a similar path or experience to what I have right now. She turned pro at a very early age and she was at Stanford. Was able to finish her degree while being on the pro level.

I think for her, she is a living image of something that I want to try to pursue, and if she's done it, it gives me the confidence to really keep going and pursue what I want to do in the future as well.

Q. This is the first big transitional period since you started playing college golf. Has your idea of how you want to impact the game evolved since you matured?

ROSE ZHANG: It's crazy, because growing up I really had a very simple mindset. It was playing junior events simply just to play in it and simply having fun.

And then I went on to figure out what colleges I wanted to go to. Started talking to college coaches, played for Coach Walker. From then on, in college I didn't really think much as well. It was more of try to play for my team, try to play the best that I can, grow in my independence, as a person in college, meet new people.

Now I kind of jumped to professional golf and there is -- I feel like right now the mindset is also very simple: Try to adjust as much as possible to Tour life and figure out what it means to be a professional, what I want to do out here.

I feel like I have a lot of time to experiment what I want to do, so that's kind of the mindset that I have going throughout my career and even going forward.

Q. Just as a follow up, I know you embrace keeping it simple. What's the turnaround been like in the past week going from NAAs to here?

ROSE ZHANG: Yeah, after I was done with semis the walk back from 18 with my teammates was bittersweet, but actually one the most memorable moments that I could have in my college career. Everyone was embracing each other, all laughing, having jokes.

Following that day it was my birthday, so we went back and had a good time celebrating. We all had a little dinner together and then I spent two days trying to make up exams, quizzes, turn in essays. It was just ongoing.

Then the next day on Saturday, I flew out here.

So I didn't really have any breathing room. On top of that, I was announcing my professional announcement so it was certainly one of the most chaotic weeks I've ever had, and that says a lot, including the fact that I played ANWA and NAAs everything happening.

Q. Simple one: How did you know it was time to turn professional? What factors went into that?

ROSE ZHANG: Yeah, that's a very difficult question because I was trying to figure out that timeline as well. Beginning my college career I told Coach Walker that I do want to pursue professional golf in the future, but I didn't know whether or not it would be after four years, during my college career, and whatnot.

But one thing is for sure: I wanted to finish my degree. The second factor was I wanted to see how well I played in college golf. I believe that if you're not able to conquer one stage, then you won't be able to go on to the next one and say that it's time for the next step.

So I wanted to see how I fared in college golf, and turned out well. That's why I tried pursuing it. I thought, okay, now I can see where the trend is going. I see that I have potential going to the next stage. Therefore, I think it's time to make a plan.

And first year of college didn't think about it at all. I was like, okay, just finish college, finish the first year, figure out who you are as a person.

And then going into sophomore year there was a little bit more talk. But I honestly just felt like I'll take the first fall quarter steady and see what that decision may imply, see what kind of routes I can take, if I do decide to turn.

And then I've had great support people around me who have played huge factors. My family, agents, coaches, all of them have put their input in me. I've taken their considerations and their logic of things very seriously, and from there, I ultimately want to make a decision that we work out well for me.

So I think just following through the sophomore year, battling the decision here and there, but made out to be a very good one. I felt like it was time for the next stage. Regardless of what happens on the professional level, I'll

still be at school finishing out.

I think the logistics part of being able to go to school while being a professional also played a huge role in me deciding to turn pro.

Q. When do you hope to graduate?

ROSE ZHANG: No idea. (Laughter.) Stanford is not exactly an easy plays for academics. I tried to take it more relatively chill. I would like to take classes in the fall; winter is our off-season I guess in golf, so I'll be able to take more classes there; and then spring quarter is kind of a speed run, so I'll take a leave of absence and continue that route until I graduate.

Q. Just one more. You have done so well winning when you had all the expectations on you and you were supposed to win. How do you do that? How do you overcome overwhelming moments when you have so much pressure? Or do you feel that?

ROSE ZHANG: Well, I'm human, so I certainly do feel it. Even though out on the golf course I'm very calm, composed, I do think there is an element of composure just because I have a good faith and mindset in the back of my head. I have a fundamental core that allows me to just keep going and not think about other people's expectations.

Growing up my family and the people around me have given me high expectations for what I should do as a person, not just as a competitor or a golf player, so I kind of fall back towards those morals and who I am as an individual.

That allows me to go out there on the golf course and think, okay, today is another round of golf. I'm going to need to do what I need to do on the golf course. If it doesn't work out, I still have a lot of things going for me in life.

So with that in mind, a lot of people do expect me to play well. They expect me to win. If I do win they're like, oh, she was supposed to. But I would say, you know, I take it as a compliment. They think I have the ability to go out there and win every single time, so might as well just try and see if I can live up to those expectations.

Those expectations aren't the biggest things on my mind. I have people around me who really keep me grounded there.

Q. What was is process like to put your schedule together for the Tour this year?

ROSE ZHANG: The process? Well, I had a lot of conversations with my agent, Kevin, and we have tried to figure out what would work best for me, especially with me not understanding what Tour life really is like.

I mean, you're living day in, day out on the golf course and traveling, and that's a huge part of playing professional golf, is the aspects that are not golf related.

So I was trying to figure out what events would even accept me as a player, and thankfully I had a couple sponsor invites lined up for me.

Kevin has done amazing just giving me places to play, and I was able to rack up eight starts in total, which was super, super nice for me to just have a summer that I could just full on play and experience.

And then I'll be playing four majors as well, so that's honestly a super exciting experience to have for the summer.

Q. What do you hope to accomplish over the starts you have this year?

ROSE ZHANG: I don't really have any expectations in terms of performance. It's more of understanding what I need to do as a professional. Take care of myself, my golf game, what works well for me when I transition to every event that I'm playing in.

I think the LPGA Tour, the struggles that a player has mostly pertains to the lifestyle and the entire dynamic of playing golf as a career rather than just a hobby.

So I think I'll be figuring out what time management really is, and how that would fare well with me.

Q. I'm curious, Tiger Woods was in a similar position to you probably 30 years ago now almost. Crazy to think. You're now represented by the same agency. Have you had any discussions with Tiger? Any advice in terms of how to handle the coming weeks and months as you acclimate to life on Tour?

ROSE ZHANG: I've never had any explicit advice from him, but I would say his presence itself says a lot. He accomplished way more than any golfer in this generation, and I think him as a role model for the game of golf, what he did to modernize the entire sport, is truly amazing.

So I never really had any conversations with him, but he did text Coach Walker here and there, oh, congrats to Rose. It just shows that I'm on the right track if he's able to



keep up tabs somewhat of what I'm doing.

Q. So you two have never met?

ROSE ZHANG: We met twice and it was all shaking hands and then taking a pic. That's it.

Q. Second question: I read recently you sort of said that you feel like the players out here don't know who you are. Feels like everybody on in the golf world now knows who you are. Do you still feel that way walking the range, kind of out mingling with players?

ROSE ZHANG: It's actually kind of incredible to see. I don't know if it has anything to do with just the AJGA, but I came out here on Sunday afternoon and I saw so many of my friends that I grew up with from junior golf. I saw Lucy, Megha, my teammate, Alexa Pano, all these people I grew up with.

I just immediately saw them, and it's been a really relieving moment I guess, because everyone on Tour is kind of the people that I've played junior golf with.

And I don't know. I think that now -- I don't know if everyone knows me still, you know, but I think that somewhat I have people who are familiar faces to me and I'll be able to kind of grow alongside them and also just catch up with them.

Q. What's the hardest class you took at Stanford?

ROSE ZHANG: CS-106A. Currently and still trying to grind in that class. It's been a little unfortunate for me. (Laughter.)

I'm not a CS major. Will never code again after this class. But it's weird because I'm a communication major, yet every single person around me are either STEM majors or CS majors. So I don't know. (Laughter.) I don't know how they do it.

Q. Rose, congratulations on all your success at the junior, amateur, and collegiate level. It's been an absolute joy watching you develop as a player and person. You've gone from mentee to mentor overnight. What advice would you give the girls here playing this week?

ROSE ZHANG: It's so crazy to think that I played AJGA two years ago and now I'm here playing in the same event, but as a professional.

I would say even the girls now, like I know a lot of them and they're competing in this tournament as an AJGA

Invitational. I would just say you all know what you are doing. Just enjoy every single moment. Junior golf is really where you get to have those deep friendships from across the nation, and it's a little bit different from collegiate golf because you're always part of a team.

In junior golf you get to meet so many different people from different nations and states. Just enjoy every moment you have with them. There are so many AJGA activities after the rounds where you can bond and grow together as friends.

So really just taking in every single moment and understanding that this dynamic isn't the actual real world is something that I would want them to take away.

And also playing at Liberty National, they'll be able to play this course alongside so many of the LPGA pros, so you'll be able to test your games against the best in the world. That's kind of how I grew and wanted to become an LPGA player, was just being able to have these experiences and playing alongside them. Take in every moment.

THE MODERATOR: All right, if that's all the questions in the room, I'll close with this. Now that you're a pro about to make your first start on the LPGA, is LPGA membership a goal of yours and is that at the top of your mind at all?

ROSE ZHANG: Certainly. I feel like as a professional player it would be a dream to be on the LPGA Tour, play on the weekly, and travel alongside all these best players.

I don't know if just getting the LPGA membership is forefront on my mind because I still have a lot of events coming up that require my full attention, but certainly after all these events I would hope to think that I'll have an opportunity to get that LPGA membership.

But it's what a female golfer always dreams of, playing on the LPGA.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you so much, Rose.

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