

Mizuho Americas Open

Wednesday, May 6, 2026

West Caldwell, New Jersey, USA

Mountain Ridge Country Club

Yana Wilson

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: Welcome inside the media center here at the Mizuho Americas Open. We are here with Yana Wilson, 2023 AJGA champion of the Mizuho Americas Open. It's been a big day for you. We want to show a quick video off the top for your LPGA DriveOn resented by Ford series that launched today.

(Video shown.)

I know you've had big dreams your entire life and I know you talked about it in your DriveOn story, but can you just elaborate on some of things you would like to accomplish as an LPGA Tour member in your rookie season?

YANA WILSON: In my rookie season, yeah, you know, obviously like, I mean, I try not to be so result-oriented, but I just want to be super consistent. I mean, last year on Epson Tour I finished with like a career high top 10s. I actually -- could've been a tour high top 10s.

I would love to set the same record for the LPGA. Obviously not off to a great start, but trying to feel my way into it. You know, obviously Rookie of the Year would be such a cool accomplishment and getting my first win and hopefully getting major win would be really cool. I set the bar really high, but I need something to work towards.

Q. When you watch your video, what do you feel? I you're a Power Her Drive participant and in that mentorship program obviously run by Ford. To see yourself in such a big campaign for the LPGA at this young of an age, what you do feel when you watch that?

YANA WILSON: Honestly, I've watched this video like countless times just today. It just kind of reminds myself of just like little me and kind of just, you know, I feel like I am making her really proud right now and it really just touches the heart.

Honestly, like I'm really hard on myself as an athlete, so just kind of seeing that video and seeing my progress throughout the years, it kind of makes me feel a little bit



better about myself and makes me proud.

Q. You've obviously done a lot already in your career at just 19. What would you tell little Yana about what she's going to expect from her -- not only her professional career now, but from her junior and amateur careers?

YANA WILSON: I don't even know what I expect, honestly. You know, I would just tell her to hang in there; don't get so frustrated. I was -- I always got frustrated as a kid.

Just stay in the moment, stay in the process, and keep grinding and working hard. Yeah, I guess that's it.

Q. What does a partner like Ford's commitment to this kind of work, this kind of storytelling, but also with the Power Her Drive mentorship program mean to you as a participant?

YANA WILSON: Yeah, Ford has been such a great sponsor for the Tour and a great sponsor for the six upcoming rookies. They're such a big company, and to be able to support women's golf is just incredible, especially the rookies. We're all up coming and not a lot of rookies have a lot of sponsorship deals. For them to be able to step in and kind of take it hands-on and not only give us a sponsorship, but to have a mentorship program for us and have Michelle Wie be our mentor is pretty frickin' incredible.

So, I mean, it's just awesome and I'm really grateful to be a part of it.

Q. One more from me ans then we'll open it up. You won this tournament in 2023. I know this event had always dreamed of having one of its AJGA players back in the field as a professional. How cool is this moment for you knowing where you were in 2023 to where you are in 2026 and to be back in this event playing as a professional and as a rookie on the LPGA?

YANA WILSON: It's super cool. Honestly, I didn't expect it to happen this soon, because, you know, in 2023 I was kind of deciding on if I should got to college or turn pro out



of the gates of high school, and I just didn't really know how long it would take me to get to the Tour. I knew it would happen, but I just didn't know it would happen this quick.

And honestly, it's really special to be back here as a pro, and being so young and still being friends with a lot of the juniors that are out here makes it really special.

Honestly I think we're going to keep seeing this trend over and over again with how incredible these juniors are. Honestly, like I got to play with Aphrodite Deng who was last year's champion on the junior side. She's incredible. I think she's almost ready to turn pro soon. So, yeah, her game is incredible.

I think we're going to keep seeing that trend with the juniors turning professionals. I think about five years we're going to have a lot of juniors playing in this event. I'm just really excited to see what happens.

Q. Yana, you mentioned Michael Jordan in your little featurette there. Why MJ for you?

YANA WILSON: I don't know. I think just something about him. Just he's like a performer. He just draws your attention and he definitely drew mine. Just that grit that he has. He's got that quote, heart is what separates the good from the great.

I don't know. He's just such an inspiration to me and I just loved his work ethic and I've just always tried to model that and tried to align that. I feel like we have similar values and I've tried to align myself with kind of his values.

Q. Have you got meet him before?

YANA WILSON: I actually have, yeah. Crazy story. So I feel like I've kind of told it here and there. Actually made a vision board in 2022. I do it at the beginning of every year in January, New Year's. I put a red Jordan shoe and a photo of Michael Jordan doing a slam dunk. It was like kind of cool. Just for no reason. I liked him. I liked him as an athlete. Obviously he is the GOAT. Sorry LeBron, but like he's the GOAT.

Yeah, so I had that on my vision board. Then sometime in October my friend was like, hey, do you want to go play MJ's course? I was like, yeah, of course.

Q. How was that?

YANA WILSON: It was sweet. The course was sweet. He actually happened to be there and I got to meet him and talk to him for a little bit, which was really cool. Actually I

got a pair of the same Jordan shoes that I put on my board from Nike, so it was pretty cool.

Q. That's awesome. Just keeping on the theme with apparel and footwear, you obviously rock Lululemon. What are some of the things that's really excited you about that partnership that you have?

YANA WILSON: Oh, just about everything. I mean, I've been a long time Lulu wearer. I don't know how else I would say that. My mom has bought me Lululemon since I was ten or maybe nine even maybe. Yeah, it's just been great.

They've been great partners. I love their clothes. Always have. Even outside of the golf course. I love just the material and everything and just feeling comfortable. And not only just golf, but I do pilates too and they help me with some pilates stuff.

It's been awesome.

Q. When can we get you and Min Woo in an ad together?

YANA WILSON: We have one. We have one. You can see us in the stores. Sorry.

Q. I imagine when you were growing up playing AJGA events you looked up to a lot of the pros. Now that you're on the pro side, I know a lot of our juniors look up to you. Do you feel like a perspective shift or different sense of responsibility this week being around the AJGA juniors?

YANA WILSON: I would say absolutely. I definitely want to be someone that they look up to. I mean, it was kind of like I'm going compare it to me and Rose Zhang the first year. I grew up playing junior golf with Rose and she turned pro and won this event and I was like, whoa, this is like crazy. She's kind of like an idol to me now and before she was kind of like a friend.

I guess it's kind of similar in that way, but honestly I just want to be a friend to every one of those 24 girls out there. I don't want them to think of me as a celebrity of some sort. I'm not anywhere near that.

I would love it if they came to me as a friend, and if they have any questions, please come and ask.

Q. You talked about your vision boards and in your DriveOn piece you mentioned them. Can you just take us through the genesis of your vision boards and what's on -- tease us with what's on the 2026 vision

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

board if you can.

YANA WILSON: Yeah, actually don't think I put any result-based goals. Just things I like on there. Honestly I don't even know what I like put specifically on this vision board. I'm trying to think.

Like they're always just in the corner of my room and I see them. I don't think I have like a clear image of what exactly what was. I don't remember. I would tell you, sorry.

Q. It's all good. We know you have some pretty cool mentors, Annika Sorenstam over the years and Michelle Wie West. Really let's talk about Michelle and what she meant to you. Fellow Hawaiian. What has she meant to you and your career thus far?

YANA WILSON: You know, she's just incredible. She's been such a great mentor and a great friend. After meeting her for the first time in 2023, her and I have gotten really close, and honestly, like she's just like one the sweetest people ever.

She hooked me up with her trainer and like her -- like I don't know, I met a lot of people through her. Just being able to build on that relationship throughout the years, and we're going to play together tomorrow, so I'm just really excited for it.

I hope we can just keep continuing our relationship and our friendship and just grow closer throughout the years.

Q. Congrats on being a part of this and choosing to share your story through DriveOn. It will be great for fans to get to know and you follow you this season.

YANA WILSON: Thank you.

Q. Last year on the Epson Tour you won in your fifth start and in the final events of the year just sprinted to the finish line with a flurry of Top 10s and a win, Top 3s; finished second on the points, season-long points race. How much difference is there in courses, setups, level of play between LPGA and Epson, and can you talk about the learning curve that players face in their rookie year on LPGA?

YANA WILSON: Yeah, absolutely. I think there is a difference between Epson Tour and LPGA, and just difference with course setup. I think LPGA has got it more tougher playing I guess more well-known courses that are like -- they set up pretty hard sometimes.

I would just say that.

The travel is a lot more on the LPGA Tour. A lot more plane rides, so getting used to the jetlag has been interesting and traveling all the time.

Yeah, I would just say like I mean, as a rookie my biggest lessons that I learned so far are just kind of how smart the girls are out here. Me being so young, like I have a little bit of ego in my game, so sometimes I go for things like I shouldn't go for at all.

So, yeah, just trying to learn how not to do that and just stick to my game plan. But I would say that's all I've really learned so far this year is just how to play the course smarter.

Q. You talked about AJGA players coming up to you and looking at you as a mentor. Are there any players out here that are older -- obviously mentioned Michelle Wie West -- but that you're looking to attach yourself to, hopefully take you under their wing and improve your golf IQ?

YANA WILSON: That's a good question. Honestly, I made some friends out here. I guess not really like in a mentory type of way.

But I haven't really thought of that. I probably should think of that. Yeah, I would say Michelle. She's not really -- well, she's coming out of retirement, right? Maybe, I don't know. Here and there.

I ask her for advice if I need it. It's my go-to person for any questions that I have, yeah.

Q. She's a pretty good one. Finally, Yana, obviously there is a learning curve and the scores haven't been quite as steady as you would like them to be so far, but you mentioned in the DriveOn piece that days when you don't have it and you show up anyway, that's really where heart lives. How do you view your results so far and what's your confidence level now compared to the end of last season?

YANA WILSON: I would say it's -- you know, it's hard to pick back off kind of where I kind of started from last season. Obviously I would love to, but I had a five-month break and I took two months off. I had a bit of a back like injury last year.

So it would be a lot of myself to ask or a lot to ask myself to kind of start where I kind of like kind of finished off last season.

So I don't know. Yeah, right now I haven't really been playing the best and I think it's truly just because I haven't



been playing these courses smart enough. I feel like once I just figure out my course management and how to stick to it and not be so aggressive on the golf course is when you'll start seeing some birdies out there.

But, no, I'm not too worried. I know I have a good team around me. You know I have a good game plan. But it's just a matter of if I stick to it or not. That's kind of on me, so I think it'll turn around soon.

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