

U.S. Women's Open

Wednesday, June 1, 2022

Southern Pines, North Carolina, USA

Pine Needles Lodge and Golf Club

John Bodenhamer

Shannon Rouillard

Jon Podany

Press Conference



just the U.S. Women's Open.

Really the legends of the game have all competed and won here on this beautiful Donald Ross magnificent masterpiece of a golf course that was started in 1927 and expertly renovated in 2017 by Kyle Franz.

We'd be remiss if we didn't mention one of those names I just brought up, Annika. We're thrilled to have her in our field. We're honored to have her as a past champion or as a current champion, our Senior Women's Open champion where she earned her place in this field last year at Brooklawn Country Club.

We're also excited to have 29 amateurs in this field. That's really important for the USGA. It's a true testament to the openness of our championships, including this one, and the strength of the amateur game.

Last evening we had a wonderful reception for all of our amateurs, and our special guest was 2005 U.S Women's Amateur champion Morgan Pressel. She gave some great pointers to the players who asked her some questions about their future, and it was really a wonderful night.

I think many of you may remember that Morgan first came to national prominence when she qualified for the 2001 U.S. Women's Open right here at Pine Needles as a 12 year old. Think about that, as a 12 year old. Pretty amazing.

Now full circle, she's come back and she's on NBC's broadcast team this week. So we have a member of the USGA family in the broadcast booth, and Morgan is a great friend.

I'd also like to just point out something you all know but it is really important to the USGA, and that is our partnership with ProMedica, our new partner. I think it's just so important -- you'll hear a little bit about what's different this year from Shannon in a moment about the golf course, but it's certainly different with ProMedica as a partner in all good ways.

I think the commitment that they have to elevating this

THE MODERATOR: Good afternoon, everyone. It's my pleasure to welcome everyone to Pine Needles for the 77th U.S. Open Championship presented by ProMedica. We are thrilled to be here today.

Joining us for today's press conference I'm pleased to welcome chief championships officer John Bodenhamer, senior director of championships Shannon Rouillard, and chief commercial officer, Jon Podany.

John Bodenhamer I'm going to let you start off with a few comments.

JOHN BODENHAMER: Thank you, Julia, and welcome, everyone. We're really, really, and I mean that sincerely, excited to have you with us as the celebration of the 77th U.S. Women's Open begins now.

It feels good to be back to pretty much normal. We're excited about that. It's really great to be back at Pine Needles for a record fourth U.S. Women's Open.

And before I do anything else I'd like to extend the USGA's heartfelt gratitude to everybody here at Pine Needles. From the Bell family to Kelly Miller and Haresh Tharani, partners that oversee this great place, and the entire staff.

They have welcomed the USGA not just this year but for years and decades, and it feels like a homecoming every time we come back to Pine Needles. The hospitality is amazing. So thank you.

When you think about Pine Needles, at least we do, we like to think of this place as history speaking for itself. You think about what's happened here over the years with Cristie Kerr and Karrie Webb and Annika Sorenstam winning here, and the list would go on, as well, but that's



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championship and the women's game is just a perfect synergy between the USGA and ProMedica, and we want to thank our partners, and they are true partners the way we think about how we elevate this championship, and we will go forward, and we thank them for their support and their friendship and partnership.

You've no doubt seen some of the signage around the parking lot this week. That's intentional, some of the billboards leading in and you'll see on-site. We like to think of this championship as the one. What we mean by that is the one that every young golfer dreams of winning.

That's kind of an old metric for us, as you think about I know growing up as a young boy competing many years ago, that as I played at home each night in the summer, like many young people do. That last putt as the shadows were getting longer was always to win one championship: The U.S. Open.

We want this championship to inspire young boys and girls as they play at home at night or they play in the summer months or wherever they do for that last putt to be to win the U.S. Women's Open, and we want this championship, like all of our others, to be inspirational as they compete for a national championship on the biggest stages.

And we really mean that, not only for a record setting purse of \$10 million, but those venues are pretty special. We like to think of them as the cathedrals of the game.

I think that says it all. That's a coined term by a member of our team, Jason Gore. You think about where we're going in the future, not only Pine Needles this year and the great place this is -- and you talk to the players, they all love it -- but places like Pebble Beach and Riviera and Oakmont and Oakland Hills and Merion and Inverness.

So these great players will be able to make their own history like Jack and Tom and Tiger did at Pebble, and Ben Hogan and Bob Jones did at Merion.

They're going to make those memories at the game's greatest places as we go into the future, and really proud of that.

Along the way we'll have ProMedica by our side, and we have a renewed purpose as we work together to really elevate this championship and create -- when you think about it, \$10 million purse on those venues and what that will mean as we really create life-changing opportunities for the players that compete in and win this championship.

We can't wait, all of us, and we've been talking about it for months, to see this championship unfold as we get into the

week.

You'll hear more about that from Shannon and John in a minute.

Before we go any further, I would really like to speak briefly about a new championship that we'll conduct this year. We did want to share with you something exciting today. That's about our new U.S. Adaptive Open Championship.

We do have a special guest with us that will be in the field in a few weeks at Pinehurst No. 6, July 18 through 20, Amy Bockerstette is here.

Many of you remember Amy and her I Got This Foundation. Amy is good buddies with somebody we know and very close to Gary Woodland. Amy and Gary talk a lot and Amy is an inspiration to all of us. She'll be with us in July. Amy, thank you for being with us.

Today I think we really would like to just share with you something special about the Adaptive Open. It is a national championship for those players who just happen to have a disability, and we're grateful to our friends at Pinehurst, very special relationship there, for hosting what will be an amazing event that will really inspire, help grow the game, create more adaptive competitions, and really build a bridge to hopefully what will be golf in Paralympics.

We're thrilled to add this championship to our schedule, and today we'd like to unveil the new trophies for this championship, so here they are.

These aren't just trophies, they're like this championship, they're different. This championship is different in so many wonderful ways, the way we've created it. We brought the adaptive community in, the AGAs to help us create this, the USOPC.

You'll receive a fact sheet about these trophies in a minute, but let me just share a couple things with you. They're not only beautiful, but there was some intention behind them. They are different. They were created in a way that -- in a special way to think about this community. The handles and how players that might only have one limb could handle them and the stems on them and the lightweightness of them and how our champions, men and women, would lift them in great glory as they win.

But even more to the point, Lauren Thomas-Cross, somebody very special to us, had great -- really created the vision behind the men's trophy was Lauren's. She happens to be someone with Usher Syndrome, which is a vision and hearing impaired syndrome, and she was the one that created the men's trophy.

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It was really particularly meaningful for us to have somebody of the adaptive community be part of this. We couldn't be more proud of that. That in itself is a message.

I think everything you see on these beautiful trophies have a meaning, and you'll get that fact sheet about them. We think that these trophies, along with this championship, provide great inspiration for this community that just wants to be part of the golf community. The USGA is proud to lift them up.

We hope we see many of you at Pinehurst No. 6 later this summer. With that, I'll turn it over to Shannon to tell you a little bit more about the golf course.

SHANNON ROUILLARD: Thank you, John. Pine Needles is just in absolute fantastic condition. We could not be more pleased with the condition of the golf course heading into Thursday's play tomorrow.

What makes Pine Needles a wonderful test of golf? There's a couple things. First, the strategy and course management that's going to be required to perform well. Players will be rewarded for flirting with trouble, perhaps taking on a bunker that will give them a favorite angle into these putting greens.

Second, the magnificent putting greens. They're in incredible condition, and they're really going to challenge the players this week. Falloffs aside, there's a lot of intricate details, contours in the middle of these greens that the players are really going to need to pay attention to.

And third are the green surrounds. Players are going to encounter a lot of tight lies in these green surrounds, and there will be a premium on getting the ball up-and-down.

What has changed since the 2007 Women's Open versus today's Women's Open? Number one, 11 acres of rough has been removed since the last Women's Open. Native areas have been introduced throughout the golf course to give it a more rugged look and feel. The greens have been converted from bentgrass to Bermudagrass to provide a little firmer surface in terms of the playing conditions.

In addition, the bunkers have all been restored and rebuilt, and for strategic reasons a few bunkers have even been added on a number of holes.

A few key holes I wanted to point out were 2, 14, and 17, par-4s, and par-3s, holes 5 and 13. I think you need to keep your eye on scoring averages on those holes, and they could be very pivotal to the eventual champion.

I was looking over some player comments last night, and Lydia Ko made a comment about it's going to be important to drive the golf ball well. We all know that this course has some additional width, but going back to the comment I made earlier about there being a proper side to be in the fairway to give yourself really the best angle of approach, you could tell she's really started to study the golf course to help her perform well.

I'm going to turn it over to Jon Podany to talk about outside the ropes.

JOHN PODANY: Thank you, Shannon. Let me start by adding my own personal thank you to ProMedica and getting to work with their team over the last six to eight months. It's incredible when you have a partner who shares your vision for what we want to do with championship and the impact we wanted to have on the game, on women's sports.

As John alluded to, the purse, the places we go, the player experience that we deliver, and the purpose of this championship have all been elevated and will continue to be as we go forward.

Very thankful for that.

Another thing that really separates this championship as the one, as John referred to, is the television coverage and streaming coverage and so forth that we have. We have 25 hours of live coverage throughout the week, uninterrupted coverage presented by Rolex.

So if you love women's golf, you're going to have every opportunity to see it in many different ways. That includes seven hours of network coverage on NBC over the weekend. That includes, I think, 12 hours or 14 hours on USA Network of early round, some coverage on Peacock.

We also offer featured group streaming coverage on uswomensopen.com and on the Peacock premium tier and on our on-demand app, and those are both morning and afternoon groups all four days of the championship. So pretty exciting to be able to log in there and follow your favorite groups.

We're televised in 190-plus countries around the world, so as you can imagine, there are many different countries represented in the field here, and fans from all over the world will be able to follow their countrymates as they compete in this championship.

Just more hours of coverage than any other championship. I think we're the only major championship that offers featured group streams throughout the week, so pretty



special experience.

Then of course Golf Channel is here with their Live From coverage on Golf Central starting with four and a half hours of coverage today, and they'll be here through Sunday. So kind of around-the-clock television and digital coverage.

We're also excited about what our partners are helping us do to elevate the fan experience. If you've been out here you know we've got two areas, kind of a fan central area to the left of 18 behind the back of the driving range and also out by 14 green. Cisco is offering a 4D swing experience for fans to be able to go in and see the same cameras you'll see on the television broadcast and get a video copy of your swing right behind the lodge over here.

They also have a virtual hole-in-one contest out by 14. Amex is presenting the fan village out there for food and beverage and a Jumbotron for fans to be able to sit down and watch television coverage while they're here.

We've got the junior experiences in many different ways, including the experience right behind the lodge here, presented by LPGA, USGA Girls Golf.

And then we also have all of our apps and uswomensopen.com coverage, which includes advance statistical information and advanced diagnostics for the players where you can get more statistical coverage than we've ever provided before, and predictive stats and so forth.

Just many different ways for our fans to be able to follow us, and not the least of which is the fans coming on-site. Ticket sales have been incredibly strong. I think we're up about 60 percent versus our three-year average pre-COVID, so that's like 2107 to 2019 before we had to have restrictions on attendance. So very excited. We're already seeing strong attendance thus far this week.

All in all, just very excited about what we have to offer and how we're putting women on the greatest stage, we think, in the women's game, and how we're going to continue to elevate that. Look forward to seeing everybody throughout the week.

Q. You mentioned a lot of amateur players in the field. There are also a number of Epson Tour players or players on developmental tours kind of below that playing for meager modest purses, and in some cases facing tough decisions as they try to chase their dream. If any of them were to have a decent finish you could bankroll them for a year or two. I know there are a lot of good reasons to increase the purse, but do those kind of players enter into the equation when you

think about that kind of thing?

JOHN BODENHAMER: They sure do. I think if you think of this championship you know our DNA is to be open. You earn your way in. We like to think of all of our championships in their category as the ultimate meritocracy.

It doesn't matter your background, doesn't matter the shape of your swing, the clothes on your back, the color of your skin. You get your ball in the hole you can play in a U.S. Open or an amateur championship.

I think we do think of that. There are a lot of great stories about players that have been in those developmental tours that have worked their way up, and we could give you examples over the years both on the men's and women's side, but we do think about that's one of the reasons we wanted to partner with ProMedica to really be able to do that.

Because it is life changing. Absolutely on our radar, yep.

Q. Just in terms of the purse itself, I know the short answer to this question is the sponsors, but have you convinced the sponsors -- how do you get it to a point where it's \$10 million, this high?

JOHN BODENHAMER: Well, I think there's a number of different factors. I think what we're focused on is really elevating everything. You heard John talk about it a little bit, purse is just one component of it. It's the player experience. I would start with the venue.

These players just want to be able to win at the same places that -- where those great moments have happened, and this is one of them. As I mentioned some of the places we're going, and it's no secret, we've put it out there well into the future where we're going and there are reasons. That's just one of them. We want to inspire what's going forward.

It's about the players, because we think if the players say the U.S. Women's Open is the most important event for them to play in and win, then it will be.

But then you think about what the fans will say and the viewers, and then our partners. If all of those activate and the numbers increase, it's just going to be fantastic for everyone.

JOHN PODANY: I think as we had those discussions as I mentioned earlier, there was really kind of a shared vision for what we wanted to do with the championship and to be able to really make a statement and create that wow factor,

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so to speak.

We could have gone to eight and still been the highest major in the game, even seven, and just felt like that wasn't enough, that we wanted to really create the kind of stage that these women deserve and to take it beyond that.

You're going to see increases over the next few years. We're committed to that. So I think just really trying to elevate that along with everything else that John mentioned.

JOHN BODENHAMER: I think another thing I'd throw into that, I mentioned the amateur game before. We do reimburse amateur expenses here, and there are other things that we do just for the players. I think the player experience is something we've really focused on, as Jon said, and I think that's the boat that lifts everything.

SHANNON ROUILLARD: If I can add one more thing, as well, missed cut money. Players that don't make it to the weekend are going to get an \$8,000 check. It's a big increase from even last year, \$4,000.

Q. With Michelle Wie West announcing she's going to step away from the game after this tournament, just kind of reflect on her impact on women's golf and how important that she's going to be devoting for time to diversity and inclusion after she steps away.

JOHN BODENHAMER: I'll start. I think both Shannon and Jon would add, but we're huge fans of Michelle's. Her victory in 2014 was inspirational to all of us. We've known her since she was very young, and she's done some amazing things.

I think she's one of those players that everybody looks to, those young people look to when they make that last putt, seeing Michelle Wie win the U.S. Women's Open a few years ago and just watching her play, her athleticism. I think the diversity part of it, it just increases the inspiration.

I think it's where the game is going, and I think it's just going to be -- whatever she chooses to do, we hope she just remains a big part of the game because whatever she'll contribute back will be positively inspirational.

JON PODANY: I've had a front row seat from a couple different previous roles, where at PGA TOUR when she first played in the Sony Open and then at the LPGA for almost nine years where she was a central part of the LPGA.

I think she's been a great contributor to the game. Happy to have her as a past U.S. Women's Open champion, and

kind of fitting that she's wrapping things up here.

Although there might be a U.S. Women's Open in the future she may want to come back to.

JOHN BODENHAMER: I would say, too, with Michelle, she's a special part of our family. She's a Curtis Cup player from years ago, and a few years ago when we had the Curtis Cup at Quaker Ridge, Michelle took it upon herself to come and spend the day with the players there.

It's not infrequent she and other players do that, but that's the type of person she is, I think she'll continue to be, and we just love that.

Q. In some ways do you feel like this is a little bit of a transition phase where you've got a lot of good younger players coming up, and I wonder if you could talk about the future and the women out here.

SHANNON ROUILLARD: Sure, let's face it, look at all the amateurs that continue to either be exempt or qualify into this championship. This is a 36-hole qualifier that these players need to get through qualifying to get to the championship proper.

We've averaged somewhere in the vicinity of 30 amateurs in this championship over a number of years. I think right there that just speaks to the future of the women's game moving forward.

Q. Shannon, on the course, in 2014 when Pinehurst hosted the Opens, they also did a similar thing of going back to the native topography, and there's an environmental component to that where they saved so many hundreds of millions of gallons of water or whatever. Is there a similar concern here? Was environment part of the decision to get rid of the rough, go back to this sand hill kind of stuff?

SHANNON ROUILLARD: Absolutely. Back in 2007, '96 and '01, this course was filled with Bermuda rough and fertilizer, and let's face it, sustainability is an important aspect of golf course maintenance, and it absolutely played a role in making that conversion.

Q. Any push-back because it won't be as green on television?

SHANNON ROUILLARD: No push-back. We're very happy with where we are heading into Thursday's play tomorrow.

JOHN BODENHAMER: We like a little bit of brown.

JON PODANY: I might just add to that that you're going to see, I'd say, an increasing focus on that from the USGA's standpoint. Our green section has already done a lot of work in the area of water preservation with golf courses on grass strains and better use of native areas and irrigation patterns and things of that nature, saving \$2 billion a year already by reducing the use of water on course by about 20 percent.

We're going to be hyper focused on that going forward and really significantly increase the impact of that. More to come.

Q. Annika yesterday mentioned she went and visited with the grounds crew, the maintenance staff, which is made up of Women in Turf members. Can you talk a little bit about what's going on on the course this week?

SHANNON ROUILLARD: Absolutely. Last year at Olympic Club there were about 50 or 60 Women in Turf that came out to Olympic Club to be on the grounds crew. There are about 30 Women in Turf this week that are here to help prepare the golf course each and every morning for the best players in the world.

They are just over the moon. We've started to develop a relationship. They've come up to me this week and said, hi, Shannon, how's it going, so great to be here, so excited. The women are out there cutting holes for us, cutting holes for these players all week long. They're a smiling face. They are, like I said, really, really excited to be here and to be a part of this championship.

Hopefully it'll continue for years to come.

Q. John, you mentioned as we all know sort of the history and the connections that this place has to this tournament and the game of women's golf in general. As you go to some of these higher profile courses and those things, is there always a place for Pine Needles in this sort of event, or is that something that kind of has to play out over the years?

JOHN BODENHAMER: Oh, I absolutely think there's a place for Pine Needles. We're really grateful for, as I said early on, the relationship we've had with Pine Needles. Ms. Bell, the Bell family, it's -- I could tell you stories. Judy Bell and Ms. Bell, it goes way back.

There's a lot of -- they embrace the game and all that's good about the game. It's more than just a championship for us here.

The players can speak to it. They love this golf course.

We're hearing that. Great golf courses produce great champions. How do you argue what's come about here?

Yes, we think there's absolutely a place for Pine Needles in the future. I think a lot of that, most of that will be up to what Pine Needles sees in their future.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you all for being here today and hope you enjoy the rest of the week.

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