

# U.S. Women's Open

Tuesday, July 4, 2023

Pebble Beach, California, USA

Pebble Beach Golf Links

## Rose Zhang

### Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Good morning. Please join me in welcoming Rose Zhang. I know it's been a while since then in your golf life, but can you take me back to being here in the fall with Stanford and the 63.

ROSE ZHANG: It was super incredible. That was the first woman's collegiate event that was ever played here at Pebble. It was just a super exciting week for everyone.

All the teams were super excited. We were in the lodge. They had accommodations for us, so that was really cool.

That week was just a week of pure excitement. We had a bunch of dinners. At one point we were registering for our fall quarterfinal classes, so that was really exciting for us when we were just trying to figure out the school system.

But that 63 as well, it came as a blur. It was the second round, and I was preparing myself to just be able to hit fairways and greens because that's what you have to do here.

The greens are tiny, and one of the caddies in our group actually kept all my stats for the round, and I apparently hit 18 greens. It was a little bit windy that day, so everything really did -- it really does help when you are out here and being able to hit greens and giving yourself a lot of good birdie opportunities.

So that's basically what I did. I was able to shoot a low number. I was making a lot of great putts. Yeah, it was just a pretty dreamy week.

**Q. Fast forward eight months later, how have you changed? How has your golf changed to get to this moment?**

ROSE ZHANG: One, I'm not an amateur anymore. I'm a professional, and that changes a lot of things, but in the past month it's been very crazy, hectic, but I've been enjoying every moment.

There's a lot more attention, a lot more media, but it's kind

of expected when you are doing well and when you are the rookie trying to go out here and play the best you can.

So I've just been taking everything in my stride. I had a full collegiate season, two seasons, and playing the last two events as a professional. A lot of experience came out of those events, and I really felt that my game was ready for the next level, so here I am.

THE MODERATOR: We're going to open it up to questions.

**Q. Your professional career so far has exceeded a lot of expectations. Has it exceeded your expectations?**

ROSE ZHANG: It certainly has. I would have never expected myself to be in this position. Just being able to be in contention has been incredible, feeling-wise, and I feel like my game has been on par with a lot of the professionals and the veterans out here, but, yeah, it's not something that I anticipated, and I have just felt like these positions have just been, I guess, in a way it has helped me to really realize that I have a lot of potential and I can become better, get better, but I'm always just someone to try to put my foot forward and improve even more.

So I have never really thought about results-wise how I would end up, but I assumed that the transition was going to be a lot more difficult for sure.

**Q. A second one for me. How is this golf course and this setup different from the one you shot 63?**

ROSE ZHANG: It is a USGA kind of setup golf course, and it's a major championship. The tee boxes are going to be a little further back. I've been playing a couple tees that were further than what I had at the Carmel Cup.

You have longer irons in, and I think the greens are going to be a lot more firmer and quicker, assuming what the weather is going to be doing.

By the time it comes to Thursday we are going to be having some quick greens, so that's definitely going to change up a lot of how we're playing this week and how



we're going to use numbers and figure out bounces.

**Q. One, what were a couple of the highlights from the round here as far as birdie putts he made? Obviously you didn't have up and downs, so what were the highlights?**

ROSE ZHANG: Yeah, it's been a year, so it's been a little bit more difficult to recollect all the shots that I've hit.

One I remember I hit a really incredible shot on 18. I was able to hit my second shot to the front of the green, and then have a little putt up, 2-putt, for a birdie. That was the final closer for me to shoot a 63.

And then there were a couple of holes where I felt like were very difficult par holes with the wind picking up that day. I birdied 7. Hit a really flight probably down wedge shot and hit it right next to the hole, so that allowed me to get a little easy birdie.

On 8 the winds were picking up, but we had to lay up in front of the ledge, so I hit a really good shot there.

From there I hit around a 6-iron from what I remember, and it went probably 30 feet away from the hole, but at that time it was just a very difficult shot. Especially with that ledge having so much wind, and it was one of the purer shots I hit on the day.

Even the pars were incredible, so that allowed me to steady my round and keep making birdies without any bloodshed.

**Q. It's funny you say it's hard to remember, but it's got to be one of the more special rounds of your life really given where it was and the record.**

ROSE ZHANG: Oh, 100%. Like I said, I feel like that round in particular was a little bit of a blur just because I was so auto-pilot. I had David. He is a local caddie here on my bag, but one funny dynamic caddies have in this event is they can't talk to you. They're not allowed to give you advice because only your coach and assistant coach are allowed to you.

So he was just on my bag and we were just walking, talking about other things non-golf related. Yeah, that entire event I didn't even know that I hit 18 greens. Now that I remember, I didn't take a wedge out. It really helped that that was the stat, and you really have to do that at Pebble out here just because the greens are so small, and the rough is thick, especially this week. They've grown it out, and you are going to have some really bad lies.

So fully coming prepared to what's to be expected out here, but that week was certainly one of the best golf rounds that I have ever played.

**Q. You said two weeks ago you didn't feel like you gave your game something how would you assess where your game is heading into this week?**

ROSE ZHANG: I was able to practice a little bit more than I have been before KPMG, so at least I have a little bit of repetition in me. At the same time I had a pretty horrible travel couple of days in the beginning of the week last week, and I've just been trying to take care of my body a little bit more.

I've been sitting for around eight to ten hours in the time that I was there at the airport and in the hotel, hopping on, I guess, Ubers and hopping on flights. But I was able to go home for a little bit and get a little massage, was able to practice at my home course, and spent three, four hours there. It was really nice to catch up with friends that I practiced with and grew up with and at the same time work on my game a little more.

**Q. Given how well you played down that final stretch at KPMG, does that change at all how you approach this week, your goals for what would be a good week for you?**

ROSE ZHANG: Yeah. Well, in order to be in contention and play well, you have to make the cut first, right? So that is the first goal (laughing).

Then, you know, if I make it, if I play well, we'll just continue from there. So it's the same mindset as what I had at KPMG. Not any expectations on how I finish, but I certainly do have expectations on how I should perform and how I should play the sport.

**Q. We talked when you were at Stanford a couple of times. How did that prepare you for this smooth transition? In what ways did Stanford make this transition as smooth as it has been?**

ROSE ZHANG: It was essential. There are so many different components. First and foremost, I think one thing to address is NIL and how college athletes are able to be compensated and have sponsorships, have agencies that represent them, and they can create their own brand and company.

That changes the entire dynamic because it allowed me to not only just take advantage of becoming really -- have good relationships with a lot of different companies, but at the same time I can kind of tap into the real professional

world before I even do get into this area.

I was able to sign with Excel. Kevin has been life-saving in my entire process of playing professional events and navigating my schedule, and that has allowed me to really not think about a lot of things off the golf course because I had all my work done in college and all those relationships were already connected and we're developing more and more and just building more on that.

In addition, you know, my teammates have always kept me grounded. They have always just been with me, inspired me to push myself to even greater heights. They really humble me. They've just been great supporters, but at the same time they're, like, you're not that great. You're just a regular student, and you're also our teammate, so shut up and do your own thing (laughing).

It's been really, really cool to be around the people that I am around at Stanford.

**Q. One other thing. Why have you clicked so well with Michelle Wie and in what specific ways has she helped to guide you?**

ROSE ZHANG: In a sense, she's just an incredible person. Very personable. Very easy-going, and I think that immediately just allowed our dynamic to be very natural. I think on her part that's just been amazing. You know, as an amateur golfer, as a younger golfer, it is easy to just stay back and just say, hey, you're an amazing idol. You're a model for so many younger generations, and I watched you on TV ever since.

But for her to reach out and be that kind and give that advice that she's given me, that just allows everything to be so much easier, free-flowing. And she's a Stanford alum, so we have a lot of common ground in that area. We talk about all the activities that are on campus and what she's done in her years, what I've been doing, and that allows just for so much more natural connection.

She's incredible. This is her last stretch, but I'm really honored to be able to just be a part of it. I'm going to be playing with her this afternoon, so it will be cool to see her in her element in the final last couple days.

I'm super excited for what she's doing to come because she has a lot of big things ahead of her. Not just from golf. That inspires me.

**Q. You mentioned earlier that you're working to improve your game to reach your potential. How do you feel your game needs to improve in order to reach that potential?**

ROSE ZHANG: There are a couple things. Just being more strategic with where I should be placing the ball. As a professional you do need to learn how to conserve your energy. So grinding week in being week out, is very tiring and you kind of need to understand, hey, put the ball in the right places so you don't have to be grinding week in, week out.

But on top of that, we can always work on wedge game, can always work on short game, bunker, putting. Putting is a huge, huge thing. And being able to put out ball next to the hole rather than always grinding for a four- or five-footer for par a part of that conservation of energy.

This is just a couple things that a professional has to do to be able to be more consistent.

The schedule is pretty overbearing, so you're going to be to be working a lot in between. So being more efficient is very important.

**Q. What's your favorite hole out here and why?**

ROSE ZHANG: Favorite hole? I would say the iconic 7th hole obviously, but, I actually think No. 3 -- wait, sorry. No. 4. No. 4 is just such a pretty hole, and I love that hole so much.

I actually -- it was in the Carmel Cup but we saw dog trying to chase a seal for like a good 40 minutes, and especially on 4, 5, and 6, that's where everyone is waiting for a lot of shots. There is a lot of wait time there.

So we were just watching an owner screaming at its dog and just trying to get that dog to come back. So a lot of good memories on that hole. It helps that I was birdieing, so...

**Q. Tomorrow you're playing a practice round with Kelly and Sadie. What does it mean to you to be able to share with your former teammates as they prepare the play in their first U.S. Open?**

ROSE ZHANG: It's so incredible. I actually played with them yesterday, too. Played with them, yesterday and also played with an upcoming rising junior star, Angela Zhang. It's been really cool just to be with them. The dynamic has been, as it has as you been, there is no change in anything.

They're stellar players. I can see their games being so amazing, so solid, and I'm excited for what they're going to do this week. We've been cracking jokes the entire time just talking about our life dynamics and a lot of different



things.

So it's just been a very easygoing kind of practice round, and we been getting our work in as well.

**Q. You're also playing with Annika. Anything you hope to take from that experience?**

ROSE ZHANG: Oh, 100%. Annika has always been such a great role model for younger generations, for even the golfers out here on how they should work to invest in their life after golf. She's been such a pivotal person for the entire game.

I think that just being able to talk to her, walk inside the ropes with her, kind of just gain some sort of advice, being alongside her you can learn a lot. I remember back in ANA junior inspiration she would have these little talking sessions with the juniors, and I was able to really ask her one question, which was: How do you prevent burnout essentially and how do you prevent yourself from losing your identity in the game?

She's always said to smell the roses, and that's one of my favorite lines. Even to this day. So she's just such a great person to talk to when it comes to the long longevity of her career.

**Q. It would seem the attention has snowballed from maybe start of the year through Augusta and NAAs and winning, et cetera. Have you found yourself comfortable with the attention, and how have you been received by the LPGA players who see all this attention heaped on you?**

ROSE ZHANG: Yeah, I would say -- I mean, comfort would be a little bit of a stretch. Still very new. I will say I'm just taking everything in my stride. I've been having a great time, and I feel like the platform that I've been given has been really, really incredible. So I haven't been taking anything for granted, and apart from the LPGA pros, I just received so much support.

Everyone in the locker rooms have been super kind to me. There is absolutely no bad blood there. I've just been really thankful that they've welcomed me to the tour. Everyone -- they've just been saying welcome, congratulations, and I'm excited to just spend time with you for the rest of the season.

That really provides me a lot of comfort because everyone is just so great and I've really appreciated their support and just genuine appreciation for what I've been doing.

So it's been really cool.

**Q. And then on expectations, the word you used was better, anticipation as you're getting ready to turn pro, surely you thought about what could happen. What were you anticipating? Maybe a worst-case, best-case scenario?**

ROSE ZHANG: Okay, worst-case scenario would probably be me not knowing how to play golf and shooting in the 80s my pro debut. And then -- or maybe duffing a shot, being the worst shot of all-time. That's kind of what I was thinking worst-case scenario.

But in general, never really thought about a best-case scenario. More so just try to hit the ball. Like just get it up in the air, hit it in the fairway, on the green, and do your own thing.

I genuinely have not thought about what place I should finish. Even though I was an amateur and played a lot of professional events and I've made cuts, et cetera, it's still different once you're on tour.

You have to adjust to the tour life. You have to adjust to media, different obligations. So being able to figure out what I should be doing inside the ropes, definitely adds a different dynamic to when you're playing. That's why I haven't expected much out of me in terms of what I should be playing or how I should perform.

**Q. Kind of going off that, you mentioned earlier that you felt like the transition to the pro game hasn't been as difficult as you expected. What has factored into that? Why has it been? Is it something you done in the leadup or more of just the circumstances?**

ROSE ZHANG: There is a lot of things, like I said before, NIL, Kevin, Excel. They've been great for helping me transition over just because they have a lot of LPGA Tour players on their team and they've been around this before.

The transition from me getting a caddie has been really, really smooth, and Gilly and I have been working really well together thus far. That obviously helps a lot with his years of experience on tour. He's been on tour for around 26 years. That definitely helps when you're just a starting rookie.

And on top of that, I realize that just the transition from college. I've always already put that in my mind that professional golf is going to be very difficult, so with that kind of mindset, later on when I actually did come over to the professional world, I already prepared myself for all scenarios of just being able to grind, not having the greatest luck, and that puts me in a position where I can

expect everything.

When things come out good, I just roll with it. So all those factors really help me.

THE MODERATOR: Rose, thanks for your time, good luck this week.

ROSE ZHANG: Thank you.

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