

# U.S. Women's Open

Tuesday, July 4, 2023

Pebble Beach, California, USA

Pebble Beach Golf Links

## Michelle Wie West

### Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Please join me in welcoming Michelle Wie West. When we were at the Women's Open a year ago, you knew this was coming, and now we're here. How does it feel to be here at your last one.

MICHELLE WIE WEST: It's crazy. When I made the announcement last year, even still it was like, oh, I'm transitioning out, but I have Pebble. Now I don't have anything in the foreseeable future, so it's definitely an emotional week for me. I just realized everything I'm doing I'm doing for the last time. The putting drills that I'm doing, you'd best believe I'm not going to do another putting drill for the rest of my life if I don't need to.

So all that stuff I'm doing for the last time, the last practice rounds, getting the line, writing in my yardage book. It's a pretty cool feeling, and I feel incredibly blessed. I've been doing a lot of reflecting, and incredibly blessed for the journey that I have and the family that I've built.

It's just a really cool week to be here.

#### **Q. Obviously last night 39 of you got together for a reunion. Talk about what that was like?**

MICHELLE WIE WEST: It was absolutely incredible to see so many familiar faces, but also to meet new ones. There was quite a few champions from the '60s, and to hear their stories about their win, to hear what their prize money was, was definitely eye-opening, and every time you have interactions with the older generation, you just realize that we all have a job because of them, because they were our Founders, because of the women that came before us, because of all the hard work and things that they did to make the Tour better.

It's a big reason why our purse is now \$2 million this year, and it's incredible to hear their stories. There's a lot of funny ones, but there weren't cameras around yesterday. It was a lot of fun. The reunion, it was my first one since 2014, and I had a blast.

#### **Q. You mentioned that you'd been doing a lot of**

**reflecting. In those reflections, what do you think your legacy is?**

MICHELLE WIE WEST: Ooh, I think that one word comes to mind: Bold. Made a lot of bold choices in my career, and I'm proud of it. I'm proud of being fearless at times and just doing what felt right.

I hope that I inspire a lot of other girls to make bold and fearless decisions and choices in their careers, as well.

#### **Q. Speaking of making other girls, Rose was just up here talking about you being a mentor. Do you feel comfortable in that mentor role, and what are you going to do going forward in that regard?**

MICHELLE WIE WEST: We all know she doesn't need any mentors. She's got it. She's incredibly poised and has that inner confidence, that inner silent confidence in her that is just so incredible, and she is a real competitor.

I'm super excited for all the things that she's already accomplished in her few weeks as pro, and very excited to see what's in the future for her.

I'm so excited that she's finishing her Stanford career, as well, as a student. We talked a lot about that. It's hard. It's not an easy feat. I'm very proud of her for making that decision.

#### **Q. Can you assess the overall health of the women's game moving forward, especially given the last three major champions are so young?**

MICHELLE WIE WEST: It's great. I love that all the major champions are so young. That means the next generation is here. They're here, they're powerful, and they're here to stay.

It's been so amazing to see our major championships be held on amazing golf courses, Baltusrol, we have here at Pebble Beach. I've talked a lot about that. Venues make a huge difference in uplifting our Tour, our game, and we need to continually be at this venue.



Last night the USGA announced or they were reminding us what the next couple of sites were, and it's incredible. To be at Pinehurst again, to be at Merion, to be at Chicago Golf Club. These are really, really important, and the buy-ins from the corporations on our Tour, the extended coverage that we have this week, we have ShotLink, as well. That's just investment that organizations or corporations are putting into our game.

It's amazing, and I hope it continues to happen.

**Q. A couple things on what you just said. When it comes to showing respect to the women's game, and I realize these go hand in hand, but what has more value do you think, where you go or how much you play for? Purse or course?**

MICHELLE WIE WEST: They definitely go hand in hand, like you said. I would say playing for bigger purses and not playing on iconic venues is not a sustainable model. I think it's a short-term gain.

I think if you do it right like the USGA is doing right now, you have iconic venues and you increase the purse steadily -- or it could be a huge jump. I wouldn't be mad at that.

But I think if you do it together, I think being on iconic venues is a more sustainable improvement for the Tour, because it increases the media value, and you have to increase media value to attain more money.

It's kind of a chicken-and-egg situation, but I do believe that when you have our women on iconic venues such as Pebble Beach, the fans love it. The fans are the ones that are driving the media value. They love to watch TV and recognize the courses that we play at.

This is why the Masters is one of the best tournaments on the schedule for the men, is because even spectators who have never even been to Augusta before, they've memorized every single shot that Tiger has played there or Phil has played there. They know all the winning shots.

Every year even when you have new players, players that they don't recognize on the screen, they're like, well, they compare to what happened before.

For us, as well, people have seen this golf course for AT&T, for past U.S. Opens, obviously Tiger's iconic win. So fans really start to engage. They start to interact with our Tour more.

I think having our Tour continually be at iconic venues is a more sustainable way to get bigger purses.

**Q. As it relates to Rose, who's getting an awful lot of attention and rightly so by her performance, and I was curious from her standpoint what's it like to have people watching her? There was a lot of people that used to watch you just walk into a room. Was that awkward? How did you deal with it? And do you see any differences -- certainly wouldn't want to compare you, but differences in the attention she's getting and what you went through?**

MICHELLE WIE WEST: Yeah, it was definitely awkward, especially because I went to a normal high school and none of my friends knew what I was doing, so it was weird that we were at dinner and there was a camera there and people were coming up.

But I think that Rose being an NIL athlete, in my opinion I feel like that's helped that transition a little bit. I feel like I was kind of thrown into it all at once, but I was also fortunate that social media was not a thing when I was 14 and there was no world of TikTok. I can't imagine the TikToks that would have come out the week of Sony Open.

It's a different world now, but with NIL I feel like with her doing her own social media thing, I feel like it's kind of easing the transition from what I can see.

But also, she loves her life at Stanford. Every time I talk to her she talks about how much she loves her golf team, how much she loves normal life at Stanford, and I think that's really helping because kind of like what I had, I felt like I had a double persona, a double life. I was one thing out here. I had to act way more maturely than I really was out here because I was playing with older women, and when I went to school I was kind of my old goofy self.

So it really helps, I think, to kind of separate it and treat this as work and then you go back and that's your life.

**Q. You said you were looking forward to Pebble Beach for a year. What are you looking forward to after this is over?**

MICHELLE WIE WEST: Yeah, I haven't really honestly given it much thought. This has consumed so much of my mental space, preparing for this week and kind of looking forward to this week.

It's going to be strange because when I was done with Pine Needles, I was like, oh, but I have Pebble next year. There is no Pebble next year. So it's going to be interesting.

I'm going to put my clubs in the darkest corner of my garage, let it sit there for a little bit. My garden has been



unkempt right now, so I'm going to go back. The cucumbers are really coming in, so I'm definitely going to make some pickles. This is probably not the answer you're looking for.

Just going to keep working, have fun, and I don't really know.

**Q. I'm curious, have you allowed yourself to even think about what that final walk up 18 is going to be like and what you're going to feel, and sort of kind of off the last question, is there anything else outside of golf that you feel like you can kind of channel the competitive drive that you did for so many years that you've found, or is it still something that you're looking for?**

MICHELLE WIE WEST: Yeah, I've definitely thought about the final walk, and gosh, I hope it's in the final group with everyone watching. That would just be so incredible. I've definitely dreamt of it, thought about it, and I can't believe it's only a few days away.

In terms of competitive drive, that's the one thing for sure when I'm not playing that's been kind of the hardest and kind of also at the same time nice, I guess. When you're a professional athlete, the highs are so high, and the lows are so low. Honestly for the past year, I haven't felt that highs of high, but I also haven't felt the lows of low.

It's strange. It's strange to have every day be somewhat mundane. You go out there and you eat three meals, you take care of your daughter, and at night you watch Netflix. It's just every day is okay.

Definitely that's the one thing that I've had to adjust to is the adrenaline part of it. My husband and I definitely have started playing pickleball, which has been fun and very competitive. But, yeah, I kind of channel my competitiveness into other things.

But yeah, it's kind of refreshing and nice for the time being.

**Q. I know Steve asked you about Rose; why do you think you guys have clicked so well beyond the Stanford bond, and what do you think you have to offer? If you could set modesty aside, how have you helped her?**

MICHELLE WIE WEST: I don't know, I don't think I've really helped her at all. She's really done it all on her own. I really hope that I can be a sounding board for her.

To all the younger players out here, I've told them I'm just a phone call or text away. I think a lot of the younger players

get intimidated or scared to reach out, but it's been nice that Rose has definitely asked me questions, and she's asked me to later on help her with her tournament schedule and with like school schedule and match that up.

I just want to be a sounding board for her, and all the girls on the golf team at Stanford. They're all really amazing players. A few of them are here this week. So yeah, just be a sounding board, and whatever they need.

**Q. You're walking away after this week, but you're still involved with the Tour, with your tournament. Talking with Mollie, how do you see your role with the LPGA expanding now that your career is ending?**

MICHELLE WIE WEST: Yeah, I was so honored to be on the player board a few years ago, and I learned a lot about the business side, and very interested in that, obviously having my own tournament now, the Mizuho Americas Open, it's definitely opened my eyes to the other side of things, and it's really cool to make a difference in that way, especially having the 24 juniors in the field, and connecting with them has been amazing.

Yeah, I text with Mollie and call with Mollie a lot. And again, just hoping to be a sounding board for whenever she needs it or whenever anyone on Tour needs it. They all know that I want to help, and I'm just letting them come to me whenever they need.

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

MICHELLE WIE WEST: My favorite hole out here, I've been thinking about this a lot. I think 8 and 9 I think are two of the toughest holes out here, but they're real good holes.

I think all the par-5s out here, depending on the wind situation, but they're true par-5s out here.

Overall every hole is pretty solid out here.

**Q. You've talked about the change that you've seen in women's golf since you first came out. You've been a big catalyst for that change. As you continue your career, elevating women, elevating women's sports, what does it mean to you to be that catalyst and be part of the change that you've seen in your career out here?**

MICHELLE WIE WEST: Yeah, I continue to want to help the Tour grow female sports in general, and do everything in my power to keep empowering the women, closing the pay gap, whether it's in sports and out of sports.



I always feel like the LPGA being founded by 13 women. It's important that we are an organization founded by women. It's extremely important, and we continually have to keep pushing the boundaries, keep sometimes creating uncomfortable situations and pushing through it so that women and corporations can follow along.

I think we have to lead by example, and yeah, I hope I can be a part of that.

**Q. We've heard Lydia Ko say for years she's going to play until she's 30 and that's going to be it. Is this where you expected to be and how you thought your career would come to a close?**

MICHELLE WIE WEST: Yeah, you know, honestly I always said I was going to quit when I have kids. I really, really wanted to play longer. I really wanted to -- especially after having Makenna and her being a girl, I really wanted to play longer. In an ideal world I wish I was still out on Tour and playing. Unfortunately it's just I had to make a hard decision with my body. It is hard. It is hard to be a mom out here. You have to make a lot of sacrifices.

I just had to make a hard medical body decision and also a personal decision. But in an ideal world I would love to be out here and travel with Makenna. Already she has zero interest in playing golf whatsoever. I've tried to go to the range with her, but after Mizuho, after my practice round yesterday, I've truly felt a difference in how she looks at the game, and she wanted to tee off with us the other day and wants to play now.

It's really incredible how she soaks things up. I wish I was out here playing. But we all have to make a hard decision, and that was best for myself and for my family.

**Q. What does the LPGA need right now? What is it lacking?**

MICHELLE WIE WEST: That's a great question. I think the LPGA always, I think it just needs more eyeballs. I think it's getting better, but I think the primetime TV is really helping. We need more articles. When I'm looking on social media, it was sometimes, even during majors, you don't really even know it's a major, whereas if the men are playing in any sort of major, in any elevated event, it's just saturated.

The media is saturated with stories about the known players but also the unknown players and their stories. I feel like of course our known players on Tour are getting coverage, but when an unknown player is shown on the media there's no backstory, there's no story to get people to know the players.

I think media, I think we need more stats. It's incredible that we have ShotLink this week, but our stats are still -- our caddies are writing down our stats and then giving it to the LPGA. We don't have ShotLink. All of that increases to media value.

People want to bet. That's controversial in itself, but people want to do that. We need to be able to engage fans with technology and statistics, especially for our broadcasters. When they say, oh, Jin Young Ko is good. Okay, we need stats that back that up.

When I saw the media post of the KPMG winner having 100 percent greens in regulation, stuff like that needs to get more out there.

And when Jin Young Ko had that crazy 60 greens in a row or something like that, that needs to be more out there. But these statistics, we need to have them readily available.

**Q. You get one mulligan in your career; what is it?**

MICHELLE WIE WEST: I get one mulligan in my career? That's a great question. I never really thought about it, to be honest. Since we're at a USGA event, I really wish I didn't try to go for the green at Cherry Hills on the first hole and made triple. I will not be going for the drivable par-4 this week. Learned my lesson.

Yeah, it's hard. Obviously I wish I had a lot of mulligans. But nothing really comes to mind besides that.

Obviously I'm not saying that I haven't made mistakes in my career. I've made a lot of mistakes in my career. I've made a lot of bad decisions in my career, too. But I think I've learned from them, hopefully, and I think that my story wouldn't be what it was if I hadn't made those mistakes.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you for your time. Good luck this week.

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