

U.S. Women's Open

Tuesday, July 4, 2023

Pebble Beach, California, USA

Pebble Beach Golf Links

Annika Sorenstam

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Please join me in welcoming three-time Women's Open champion Annika Sorenstam. What does it mean to you to be back here at Pebble Beach for another Women's Open?

ANNIKA SORENSTAM: Thank you for dragging me back. Look at this. What can I say? It's awesome to be here. Thank you very much for that special exemption. I didn't really know if I was going to come or not.

This is really a big test, as you know, for women's golf, but most of it is about the historic opportunity to come here and to showcase women's golf is just really, really special. It's such an iconic place.

I just think I've been lucky to play here a few times and have great memories, and now playing practice rounds with several players that we call Annika alumni -- yesterday I played with this young lady from Taiwan. She won 2019 ANNIKA Invitational in China, and today playing with some of the college players, it's just coming full circle and having a lot of fun out there and just enjoying this spectacular place.

Q. You know the course; what are your thoughts on the course in general and how does it look different this week for a U.S. Open?

ANNIKA SORENSTAM: Well, today, this afternoon especially, it's a beautiful day. There's hardly any wind, great conditions. The course is in excellent shape. It's a tough golf course. The rough is thick, and for me, it's quite a long golf course.

But just walking around here, I think the camera literally came out on every hole. It's a photo op here, photo op there with family and friends coming around and watching, and I've enjoyed every step.

Q. Last night you were one of 39 U.S. Women's Open champions at the reunion. Talk about what it was like

being with those women.

ANNIKA SORENSTAM: Yeah, it was really neat. I've seen some of these women the last year and a half because I've played a little bit, so it's been kind of a reunion the whole time, but to see 39 of the champions to gather together and to get a chance to catch up and talk, great food, great wine, and for the USGA to put this together, to fly everybody in and for Pebble Beach to host down there at the beach club, it doesn't get much better than that.

Ended up with Heather Daly-Donofrio asking different players to share the stories of their wins, whether it was 1960, 1970, '80, '90, whatever it was. Just to listen to them and the stories -- some of the stories went a little far beyond that which was fun to listen, and I hope that we can continue that tradition.

Q. I was wondering if you could talk about the test that you think players will face this week in terms of who it favors. Who do you like in terms of their game performing really well here?

ANNIKA SORENSTAM: I mean, today is very benign. Today I'm sure some of the players don't think it's that long because they hit it quite a long ways.

I played with Madelene Sagstrom, and she hits the ball beautifully, and for her she had a lot of shorter irons in.

It's all about hitting the fairway. If you start -- I guess if you miss the fairway, you can still maybe advantage it, but around the greens there's some really nasty lies, especially around the bunker edges. You might not even have a stance. I would say it puts a premium on your iron shots, and of course if the wind picks up here you need to be able to keep the ball low, have a little more ball control.

But the greens are small. They're super small. The patience that we always talk about at the majors is going to play an extra big role here because five yards here and five yards there, when you start hitting 7-iron and 9-irons in, it makes it a little tougher.



I would say bottom line, I'd say somebody who's a good ball striker will do well here. I think it's going to be really a true, fair test. The weather looks nice, so I think we're going to have a good winner this week.

Q. I know this tournament hasn't actually started yet, but where do you think this week will rank in terms of importance for the women's game, especially among events you've been a part of?

ANNIKA SORENSTAM: Yeah, I mean, that's one of the reasons why I'm here, because I think it's really special. I'm sure other players have said the same thing, but I think when we get a chance to tee it up on these iconic, historic pedigree courses, it elevates the event in so many ways.

We're out there filming, and like this is where Tom Watson chipped in, and -- I mean, I've always said that, you know, women like history, too, and maybe we can start to make history on some of these courses that other people fly around the world to play.

I think people are going to be drawn here to see how the ladies play at this course. It's such a magnificent facility.

But there's no doubt that by having events like this takes us to a different notch. I know that they're talking about increasing the purse. And it's already, what, \$2 million for the winner. That on its own is a milestone, but just adding the tournament on this venue just adds to it.

Q. As you mentioned, a lot of people are curious how the women will play Pebble because they've seen the men play it not only every year in the AT&T, but six U.S. Opens. How do you think it's a different test for women? It seems like a good fit, not crazy long, the small greens, the wind. What do you see as the different in this tournament versus the men's Opens that have been here?

ANNIKA SORENSTAM: Yeah, I've watched the men a few times here. It's just you have to have good control. Standing on No. 7 today was really no wind, and you've heard in the past that some of the men hit like 5-irons. It's like, how is that even possible? They'd fly it in the Pacific if they did it today.

It just tells you the conditions can change, so you need to know your distances really well, and you have to trust them, and you have to be accurate. I think it tests everything that you would ask of a major just because it's important off the tee. I mean, even if you hit the fairway it's not a gimme, and then you hit the green it's not a gimme. If you miss it you're like, okay I got to make par. You can have some really difficult lies.

The bunkers are great, good condition. I give them five stars so far.

Q. You've seen a lot of players come on to the Tour with a lot of hype, whether it's Michelle or Lexi or Lydia. What do you think about Rose, her game, her temperament, and what she might bring to the women's game?

ANNIKA SORENSTAM: I think she's already brought quite a bit of things to the game. To come out the way she did. But just look at her amateur career. She has done so well.

I really don't know her game very, very well. I've watched her a few times, and she played in the ANNIKA Invitational. We gave her the Annika Award presented by Stifel twice. I've spent some time with her.

But to go out there as really a dominant amateur, to win NCAAs, to win at Augusta, she has just literally won everything you can win, so the pressure is there, everybody is looking at her, and then to go out and win her first event on the LPGA, it just doesn't get much better than that.

I think the attention is there, well deserved, and I think she's going to bring a lot to the game, there's no doubt.

It's always fun when you get new players, new talent to come out, somebody else to watch. She raises the level of everybody, right, and it's good for the game.

Q. Just curious what Will's speech was to try to convince you to play.

ANNIKA SORENSTAM: Yeah, no, he's quite a persuasive young man. He has literally walked every step that I've walked this week. He's been on the range. He's helped Callaway creating content. He's sending photos back to our content lady. Will is double duty this week.

Michael was walking the course on Sunday; he was my caddie then. We played in a player-caddie competition at The Hay, and if his professional was a little better he probably would've done even better. He finished I think fourth or fifth amongst the caddies, and we finished third as a team.

So he's having the best week ever. He's delighted to be here and trying to pump me up. I played with Anya, this young lady from Ireland, and she hit it really close the last three holes. He goes, come on, mom, you can do it. I said, I will do my best, buddy.

Yeah, he's pushing me. Doesn't like that I'm not doing maybe what they were doing. But I said, hey, the tournament doesn't start until Thursday, so that's when it counts. I've got to rely on my experience.

Q. Just your thoughts on your pairing with Michelle, obviously In Gee, as well. This is a big week for both you and Michelle, and what that means to you.

ANNIKA SORENSTAM: No, I'm very pleased about the pairing. I think it's going to be great. I haven't played with Michelle in a long time. We're kind of coming to the end of our careers, so to speak, and I guess they were in the end and now we started a little bit and it's coming to another end.

No, I think it's great. Obviously she's done some great things for the game. Now she's being a mom and she's the hostess of a tournament, so there are a lot of similarities there. I look forward to it.

THE MODERATOR: Annika, thank you for your time. Good luck this week.

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