

# U.S. Women's Open

Wednesday, July 5, 2023

Pebble Beach, California, USA

Pebble Beach Golf Links

**Juli Inkster**

**Karrie Webb**

**Hilary Lunke**

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Good morning. Please join me in welcoming a trio of U.S. Women's Open champions, Hilary Lunke, Karrie Webb, and Juli Inkster.

Thanks so much for being here. Just a brief overview and comment on the reunion this week. I know some of us weren't in the room the other night and we've heard some good stories, but what it means to be here and a little bit about the dinner the other night.

HILARY LUNKE: Yeah, the dream continues for me, I guess. I still pinch myself that I'm a part of all of this, but these are the kind of times -- my normal life right now bears very little resemblance to being a U.S. Open champion, so these are the times when you come and kind of realize the gravity of that took place 20 years ago for me, and just to be a part of this league of women is an honor and a privilege. It's just been dreamy really.

KARRIE WEBB: Yeah, it's been a fantastic few days. The dinner the other night was really special, to have 39 past champions in the room and hearing all the different stories and really catching up with a lot of people I haven't seen Hilary for many years.

Just catching up with people you haven't seen and realizing that we're a very special fraternity of players that have been fortunate enough to win the biggest tournament in golf.

JULI INKSTER: Well, I've been overserved every night, so that's kind of been -- I need to go home and detox for the next week. But it's been great. It took me so long to win a U.S. Open, and then all -- you're reaping the awards afterwards.

I've played the last couple days with Webby and we text and stuff, but we don't really ever get to have time to sit down and talk. I sat next to Hilary at lunch at Cypress

yesterday and had an amazing grilled cheese sandwich with french fries.

The USGA has done a great job to bring us all back together and be as a group, and being able to do these special things together really means a lot.

**Q. Hilary, you mentioned 20 years, big anniversary. What's it been like reliving it because of this milestone anniversary and sharing your Women's Open story with people who might not be as familiar with it?**

HILARY LUNKE: Yeah, it has been neat to relive it in a lot of ways and to be prompted to remember parts about it that I thought maybe I would have forgotten and realized that the memories are still in there.

Yeah, I think as Juli mentioned, when you're standing over those putts, you're not thinking that 20 years from now you're still going to be reaping the benefits of whether or not this ball goes in the hole, and it's times like this that you realize just kind of all that goes along with being a Women's Open champion.

It's been fun. It's been a great trip down memory lane for me and just a reminder of what a special, really special time in my life that was and how much I can still so vividly remember -- in some ways it feels like it happened last week, and then you go play Cypress yesterday and I'm reminded I can barely break 80 now.

In that sense it's a good reminder it was definitely 20 plus years ago.

**Q. Karrie, Minjee reminded us that you reminded her that you were the last one to win back-to-back, but I know last year was extra special for you watching what she did at Pine Needles. What has that relationship been like?**

KARRIE WEBB: It's very special. All the girls that come through my scholarship program I have a really good bond with. But I've known Minjee since she was about 13 or 14, so I've watched her grow into just the wonderful person that she is now, and obviously one of the best players in



the world.

Obviously watching her win last year, and to be able to walk down 18 like I was able to do in 2001, knowing that you're going to win the U.S. Open, it was really cool for me to see her do that.

**Q. I don't think we heard any great stories actually from Monday. What can you share about the best stories, and who would you say were the best story tellers, at least in the sober division?**

KARRIE WEBB: I don't know. We definitely have -- no one is a short storyteller. I think there was a lot of long-winded stories that went on tangents that had nothing to do with winning the U.S. Open. So much so that I don't think we got through all the past champions in the room getting to speak.

But I think one of the special stories was Se Ri Pak was trying to avoid speaking, and I think everyone in the room -- I think there was at least 10 or 11 South Korean players as past champions in the room, and I think everyone in the room knew that Se Ri needed to speak and talk about being the trailblazer that she was. It was really cool to hear her speak.

**Q. You've all been around for a while. What's it mean for the women's game, the increase in prize money that this event has had, and the upgrade in venues that it's had, to be an at iconic place like this? What's that mean in terms of the growth in the game and the respect for the game?**

JULI INKSTER: I think it's huge. I would have loved to be able to play a U.S. Open at Pebble Beach, being from this area. But I think the women deserve this, to be able to play these iconic golf courses and have their games challenged just like the men.

Playing Pebble Beach, the history that has come through here on the men's side with Tom Watson chipping in and Nicklaus and Tiger, it's going to be great to have a woman have those memories, also.

KARRIE WEBB: I agree with Juli. I obviously would have loved to have played a U.S. Open here, but the fact that it's happening, it's better than it not happening, and it is on the rotation now.

I think when casual viewers of golf tune in and see that the U.S. Women's Open is at Pebble Beach, it's like, oh, this is something I need to pay attention to, because even the casual sports or golf fan knows Pebble Beach.

And so the fact that the girls are on stage on this iconic venue -- I just looked at the weather forecast for the weekend, and I'm actually glad I'm not playing (laughter) because I'll just have some popcorn and watch it on TV.

JULI INKSTER: I'm right there with you.

KARRIE WEBB: Yeah, I think it'll be great to see it unfold, and I think Pebble Beach will do what it's always done, and, you know, one of the best players will be on top of the leaderboard at the end of the week.

**Q. The last three majors have been won by women 25 and younger, certainly a youth movement. What does it mean for the future of the game or the health of the game to see those young players succeeding?**

HILARY LUNKE: Well, I think I was 23 or 24 when I won the Open, too, so I can, I guess, sort of speak to that, although it was my only win.

I think it's fantastic for the game, and it's exciting to see that there's so many fantastic young players. Every time I come out here, I'm just amazed actually at the depth of talent now compared to when I was playing in college and high school golf. There's just dozens and dozens of these outstanding players that are going to be featured this week.

I think it's great. I did a little clinic earlier this week for the First Tee, and just seeing so many girls get involved in the game, I think it's awesome.

When I was playing, there were college scholarships that were going unused because there weren't enough girls even interested in the game. I think it's awesome, and it's just going to be all the better for women's sports.

**Q. Juli, as probably our local expert, talk a little bit about the golf course, and what does it take to win here?**

JULI INKSTER: Well, I think this is what's great about Pebble, is from the first tee to the 18th tee you can get a lot of different weather changes, a lot of different -- get out in the ocean and the wind is blowing and then you come in and it's not blowing.

I think it challenges you, all aspects of your game, chipping, putting, driving. You use all the clubs in your bag, which I think is a great representation of a championship.

You're going to have a lot of 3- and 4- and 5-footers on these poa greens that can grow rapidly during the afternoon, and that's going to test your nerves.

But I think it's pretty generous off the tee, but you have to be really precise with your iron game. They're small greens, and you've got to be below the hole. You can have a four-footer right to left and it's going to break six to eight inches.

I think a good iron player -- and I do think, once again, you've got to play the par-5s -- you've got to get to No. 2 and No. 6. Those are birdie holes.

You've got to be ready to play when you start on 1, because 1 through 4 you need to make some birdies because you've got to just hang on on that back side.

**Q. I'd be curious how you guys perceive the attention women's golf is getting right now in an era where it feels like corporates are starting to wake up and share the wealth, if you will. Do you think the LPGA is getting enough eyeballs? And if not, why not?**

JULI INKSTER: Well, I think we're getting more eyeballs as far as corporations. But we still make maybe 10 percent of what the guys make. We're not really even close to what the guys make, especially the lower level tier players, the 100th, 105th player.

A lot of these girls finish the 100th best woman in the world and they've got to get a part-time job. I don't think that's right.

But yeah, we were talking about how much we made in -- I think Webby, what did you say you made in 2000 --

KARRIE WEBB: Well, I said when Minjee won last year, I had two seasons that I made more than that, and I won seven times and six times.

But I also think that when I won in 2001, it was the largest check a woman had ever made, which was \$500,000. Players of eras before me that were no longer playing were saying sort of the same -- it was the same story, and I feel like if the next generation isn't playing for more money, then we've failed during our time.

JULI INKSTER: Exactly.

KARRIE WEBB: I think it's fantastic that the girls are -- I think these checks are -- I mean, \$500,000 was life-changing for me, but I feel like this week, \$2 million, that is seriously life-changing money.

I think the girls deserve it. It's great that the majors have been elevated to this standard.

JULI INKSTER: These ladies work extremely hard. They travel commercial. They rent cars. They stay in private housing. It's a lot of work to be on the LPGA.

As Karrie said, if they were playing for the same money, we've kind of failed at growing the game. Hopefully they will keep growing the game because that's the only way that we're going to get to where we need to be.

**Q. We talk about the tours getting younger and younger, and particularly Webby and Juli, what advice do you give to the young players to have a long career? Juli, I think the first time you told me you were retiring was 22 years ago -- (laughter)**

KARRIE WEBB: And then she just stopped showing up. She actually never resigned.

**Q. What's your tip to them to have a long career?**

JULI INKSTER: Well, I personally think that you've got to have outside interests. It can't be golf 24/7. I see a lot of these players out here, it's golf 24/7. I didn't start until I was 15. I played a lot of different sports, had a lot of outside interests.

When I went home, I hung them up, and I think a lot of these girls don't know how to do that.

With my Inkster Award winners, I try to tell them that it's not all about golf. You've got to rest your body. You've got to rest your mind. You've got to find some outside interests.

It's hard for these young ladies that are coming up to get involved because a lot of them haven't been to college. A lot of them don't have friends outside golf.

They're very mature golf-wise, but they really haven't learned how to live outside of the golf world, and that's what I try to get my Inkster Awards to do.

**Q. We've seen in women's tennis, they've caught up to the men in purse. We've seen national women's soccer catch up and surpass men's soccer in ratings. We just mentioned the venue, the purse. What piece of the pie is missing for women's golf to not catch up to men's golf?**

JULI INKSTER: Well, I can't believe I'm answering all these questions. I do think I would love to see a little more emotion out on the golf course, a little more passion, a little more -- you could tell when Webby was 5-over or 5-under, and you could tell the same with me.

I think a lot of these ladies out here, you can't tell that,

which is not right or wrong. That's just kind of the way they were brought up.

But I would like -- like when I'm watching TV, I like to see people get fired up.

I think maybe show a little more emotion out there.

KARRIE WEBB: I think it's more to do with our broadcast itself. On a week-to-week basis the LPGA is paying -- we're paying to be on TV. Versus for the PGA TOUR, TV stations are paying millions of dollars per week.

I just feel like if we're paying for it, they can cut costs and not put on a great production because they don't have to. They don't have to -- they're getting paid for that, whereas when they're getting paid to do it they want to be the best production they possibly can so more eyeballs watch it.

I think the television partners need to be as excited about women's golf as some of these big corporations are. They're seeing the value of women's golf and putting their money where their mouth is.

I really feel like our broadcast partners really need to partner with us to lift us to where we should be.

JULI INKSTER: Also I think that data -- when you watch a men's tournament, they have stats that are on the TV screen. They have Ball Tracer, which we all -- I find that super entertaining to see where the ball is flying to or how many putts they made from five feet and under for the week or ten feet and under for the week, or what's their ball speed, what are they carrying it.

We don't have -- the LPGA does not have any of that, which I think lifts the viewership when they can -- we're kind of in a data era right now, and I think the more stats you can throw out there on television, I think it makes it interesting for the average golfer who wants to try to be good.

**Q. Juli, since you're the experienced one, one of the great things about this organization is it's been on its own since 1950 with no outside help whatsoever and look what you're playing for. Would you have liked to have seen any help, and I'm not sure you asked for it, from the PGA TOUR in terms of marketing and showcasing? Could they have been help years ago, and do you think it's worth looking at now?**

JULI INKSTER: It's kind of a loaded question. Yes, I think we could have used some help just with TV and media, but on the other hand, I think it's pretty cool that we're an organization that has stood by themselves. And believe

me, it hasn't been easy. We've never really had a nest egg to rely on.

Now that we're building, we do. But I think the PGA and the LPGA could work better together, and I think Jay and Mollie have done a good job where they are working more together, not only them but with PGA of America with Seth, and the R&A. I think they are trying to help the LPGA.

I think the game of golf reaches all boundaries, and to have men and women competing with each other and for each other, I think it just grows the game. I think it's something that is needed more.

KARRIE WEBB: I don't have anything to add.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you for being here today and this week in general -- one more.

**Q. Just a quick golf question. From your point of view, do you make a more lasting memory of winning a U.S. Open based on who you beat or where you win? What do you think carries more punch?**

JULI INKSTER: Venue, I think, means a lot. Really I could care less where I won the U.S. Open. I just wanted to win the U.S. Open.

But if I could say I won the U.S. Open at Pebble Beach or Oakmont or Pine Needles or Prairie Dunes or Pumpkin Ridge -- being an American, winning your national championship, if they had said we're playing the Open at The Hay, I'd have showed up. Just having your name engraved on that trophy, I would go anywhere to play.

HILARY LUNKE: Well, I think in my particular finish, I definitely would say having Annika bogey the 72nd hole is pretty memorable. Actually watching the coverage for the first time ever the other night, I'm like, how did she not win? I can't believe it watching it now, because you're not thinking about that when you're out there playing. You're just golf course. Not necessarily thinking about what everybody else is doing.

Making that final putt, again, just Angela, I saw her last night actually for the first time in a long time, and that's definitely the memory for me.

Like Juli said, you show up wherever they say to play for the U.S. Open. The course isn't necessarily going to be the biggest and best memory of that week, but for me, just the way that my particular championship ended definitely sharing that experience with Kelly Robbins and Angela Stanford is what I take away from it.

KARRIE WEBB: I would agree with both. I think winning at -- I felt like I still had battles on Sunday with two of the greats of the game, Meg Mallon at the Merit Club and Se Ri Pak at Pine Needles.

It really wasn't until midway through the back nine at the Merit Club that I really had control of that tournament, and I really didn't feel like I had it in the bag until I made birdie on 17. Even then, it put me seven ahead.

But I just felt like Pine Needles wasn't a course you could take your foot off the pedal.

I feel like I had two Sunday battles with two of the greats of the game, and I think that's just as memorable to me as where I played.

JULI INKSTER: I can't remember who I beat. I'm kidding.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, guys.

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