

U.S. Women's Open Championship 2016

Tuesday, July 5, 2016

Brooke Henderson

Press Conference

MODERATOR: It's my pleasure to welcome Brooke Henderson into the media center. Brooke is playing in her 4th U.S. Women's Open this year. She was low amateur in 2014 at Pinehurst and finished tied for 5th last year at Lancashire.

Brooke, you've had a tremendous first half of the season, two victories including a win at your first Major Championship, the KPMG Women's Championship. You're playing your 10th major this week. Do you approach these Major Championships any differently than a week-to-week event?

BROOKE HENDERSON: Yeah, for sure. Major Championships, and especially the U.S. Open, have always been amazing field tournaments coming in. Such a huge stage, and it's such a different atmosphere than just week to week. And I love it.

As you mentioned before, I've played really well in U.S. Women's Open's, and I played really well in Major Championships, because you really got to take a little bit of a different strategy. You really need to stay patient, which is something that I've worked on over the last few years. And I'm really excited for this week. And it's a beautiful golf course and I'm just really excited.

MODERATOR: And you're coming off a victory last week in Portland. Seems like a silly question, but how is the state of your game coming into this week at CordeValle?

BROOKE HENDERSON: I've had two awesome weeks, winning the KPMG, and then just coming off the win just two days ago. My game is in a really good spot. I didn't play as well as I'd like on the weekend down in Portland. I kind of missed a couple of shots and wasn't really hitting the ball quite as solidly. But still able to get the job done, still able to hit good scores, and hoist that trophy up on Sunday, which is all that mattered.

I've worked hard over the last two days to get my ball-striking back to the way it should be, especially going into a major championship on a course where you need to hit it straight and on fairways and greens. I think things are looking really good.



MODERATOR: You've had an excellent record on the West Coast, all three of your victories on the Pacific West Coast. We're here again on the West Coast. Is that a coincidence or is there something that agrees with your game?

BROOKE HENDERSON: Yeah, I just love it here. I love tree-lined courses, and both Portland and Sahalee were very much like that, where you need to hit it very accurate off the tee. And I just like the view of them.

Somebody asked me the other day what I thought about this course, because he mentioned like the Pacific Northwest. And I said it's very much like a tree-lined golf course without the trees. So I'm hoping that I'll be able to continue my streak and go for four out here in the Northwest.

But I think this golf course, you know, it does require strategy. There's lots of opportunities to make birdies, and lots of opportunities just to make par and move on. So I'm hoping to do that.

MODERATOR: Now, having seen the course a few times, where are some crucial stretches or crucial holes that may play a key role in determining the outcome of this championship?

BROOKE HENDERSON: I think the back nine plays a lot tougher than the front nine. I think that's where a lot of things might change, especially on Sunday afternoon. I really love the par-5s around here. I can get close to them or reach a lot of them in two, which is something that I like to think is an advantage over most of the field that I have.

And I think this course sets up really well for my game. You've just got to hit it in the right spots and know where to miss it and then just make lots of birdies.

MODERATOR: I mentioned the par-5s. It should be exciting coming down the 18th on Sunday with potentially a birdie or eagle and the chance to win.

Q. I know you played a lot of hockey as a kid. I wondered if -- of course, that's a team sport. But if you thought there was anything from hockey and what you learned that has translated for your golf

or if playing goalie specifically has had some benefits for you?

BROOKE HENDERSON: Yeah, of course. You know, mentally I became really strong being in nets and kind of being the last resort for your team, and trying to hold them in in big games and coming in with big stops at the right time. Being a goalie, you're either the hero or you're far from it.

So just playing nets for, I guess seven, eight years, I kind of got that mentality and it definitely has helped me mentally on and off the course. Physically strength-wise, carrying around all that heavy gear and skating in practice alongside my forwards and trying to keep up with four times the weight gave me a lot of leg strength which you can see I use in my swings, along with my forearms are pretty strong, because trying to shoot pucks and not trying to grip the stick like a regular forward. I'd block around a trapper, and the stick is actually heavier. Learning to shoot forearms and wrists got a lot stronger. There's definitely been a lot of correlation between the two sports. I love playing both, but golf I seem to have a brighter future in.

Q. You must have had to carry your own equipment, I guess. Your dad, too, played a lot. Has that been something he's been able to help you with or share some of his experience or his approach to things from playing goalie?

BROOKE HENDERSON: Yeah, for sure. My dad played for the University of Toronto for four years. I think they won the national title in Canada for University. And he played for the Ottawa 67's, which is semipro. So he was really good. He was my coach in hockey, in golf, and in life. And he's my sister and I's best friend, as well. We're really close to my dad.

He doesn't have a degree in psychology or degree in how to teach golf or hockey, but he's the best at it. He trained both of us mentally and physically. And he's always there for us, supporting us a hundred percent.

Q. Last year when you won in Portland, you made the decision that eliminated you from being a rookie in 2016. Your two wins and your 11 top-10s now, you would have been running away with the Rookie of the Year award. Any regrets on that?

BROOKE HENDERSON: No, I could never have predicted the season that I had this year. And my lifelong goal and dream was to play on the LPGA Tour every single week.

When I won last year and was granted membership and I had the opportunity to take it right away and play the next week in Alabama, and possibly I didn't, but possibly have a chance to go over to Asia and play those events, it was kind of like a dream come true.

And I wanted that membership and now I'll always have the 2015 LPGA Tour card. It just really meant a lot to me to take it right away.

Of course, it would have been a privilege to win the award this year. But there's so many other great players and other great rookies, that I'll have a chance to do that.

Q. Having already won a major championship now, is there less pressure on you, because you feel like a weight has been lifted or is there more pressure on you now because you feel like you need to repeat?

BROOKE HENDERSON: I haven't really thought about it. I guess less pressure in a way because I'm definitely a lot more confident coming into this week at World Ranking No. 2 and knowing that I've won a major championship before. But that doesn't really mean anything when I tee it up on Thursday. I have to have two solid rounds to make the cut, and then to climb up the leaderboard on the weekend.

And like I said before, I'm really excited for this week, I think it's an amazing opportunity and possibly a chance to do something special, like I did at KPMG. But first things first, I need to hit fairways and I need to hit greens and I need to get off to a fast start on Thursday.

Q. We all know what separates Major Championships from week in, week out events. What separates this tournament among majors?

BROOKE HENDERSON: Yeah, I mean U.S. Opens I think is something that everyone that plays the game of golf wants to play in. And it's really unique in that it gives a lot of opportunities to a lot of people. This is my fourth and I'm only 18. So I was able to qualify. The first one I was 15 and playing in the 2013 U.S. Women's Open. And it was the first cut I made on the LPGA Tour. It was the first time I was on the biggest stage, and I loved it. I couldn't wait to come back.

Q. What did defeating a multiple major winner Lydia Ko at KPMG do for your confidence?

BROOKE HENDERSON: Yeah, Lydia Ko is amazing. She's an inspiration to all of us girls out here, and I think everyone in the world, basically. She's done amazing things in her career and she's only a couple months older than I am. So I think everybody looks up to her and thinks she's an inspiration. And we're just trying to kind of chase after her and she showed us a lot of things that are possible. So just trying to chase after our own dreams.

Q. At what point do you consider her a rival as opposed to just an inspiration, someone you're equal with as opposed to someone you're looking

forward to playing?

BROOKE HENDERSON: Of course I'll always look up to her, I think. That's just the way it is. She'll always have a lot of respect from me. But that doesn't mean I don't want to beat her. That doesn't mean I don't want to go out there and have four solid rounds of golf. And I hope we do have a lot of playoffs together for Major Championship wins, like we did a couple of weeks ago, that means I'm playing really well and that means she's playing really well. So that's what I'm kind of hoping for.

Q. What does it do for you mentally to know that you can win out here now without your "A" game on Sunday?

BROOKE HENDERSON: Yeah, that was pretty big. I won three times on the LPGA Tour, and each one has been a little bit different. I didn't play as well as I'd liked on the weekend, but as you said I was still able to get the job done. I was able to hit good shots when I needed to and get up and down or just do something key at the right moment, which I think is really important. And a win is a win. And I'm very happy about it. And I'm just excited for the next time I get to hoist the trophy.

Q. When you started looking at the world No. 1 ranking and desiring to be No. 1, how much did you look at the player Lydia Ko who held that No. 1 ranking and how much did you look at maybe comparing your game and what you saw in her that maybe you needed to get better at?

BROOKE HENDERSON: I think we both play a little bit different games. We definitely have different strengths, I would say. But overall she's an all around player. And for me to get in a position, I'm still a long way from taking that No. 1 spot over but I'm getting closer every single week.

I'm just trying to focus on the little things that I know will make me better, working on short game, working on a little more consistency, and a little bit more yardage off the tee. I think if I can just kind of continue to chip away at those things and finish well on the weekends and hopefully get a few more tournament wins, a few more tournament top-10s, and just kind of climb my way closer to her, because you can't expect her to -- she's not going anywhere. She's an amazing player and has an awesome mental attitude. I'm just trying to work on the little things in my game to get a little bit better.

Q. Which country do you think has the strongest team in the Olympics, and which player do you think is the strongest and why?

BROOKE HENDERSON: Well, the Olympics are really unique. I think there's only 60 players and a lot of

players from a lot of different countries around the world. But I think anybody teeing it up four days against 60 players can really win.

I know Team Korea, they're going to be very strong. They'll probably have the most players out of any other country.

Team USA.

I'm hoping Team Canada, Alena has been playing really well over the last few weeks, a really good friend of mine. I've had a pretty solid last couple of weeks, too. We're just kind of building our way up to the Olympics. It will be really exciting. And just four solid rounds of golf, anybody can really pull it off.

Q. Like you said, this is your fourth time at this championship and you've looked so poised for the last few years. Was there ever a wide eyed moment that you had here or at maybe another LPGA event where you felt overwhelmed or really excited?

BROOKE HENDERSON: Yeah, for sure. My first pro event was Canadian Open, when I was 14. And that was the first time I was inside the ropes, inside the clubhouse, seeing girls on the range hitting beside me and in the locker room. All of it, I was really star struck. I unfortunately missed the cut.

And then my next opportunity to play on the LPGA Tour was the U.S. Women's Open, when I was 15. I didn't really want to make the same mistake. It was hard for me. I played with Morgan Pressel, a girl I grew up watching and adoring and wanted to be like. I played with her at the third round in the U.S. Women's Open, and again, that was just kind of a dream come true at that point. And just every time out here I kind of have to pinch myself and kind of realize that playing against the best in the world and I'm competing and I'm getting a chance to do a lot of things that people only wish that they could do in their lifetime.

Q. You're still pinching yourself, even now?

BROOKE HENDERSON: Yeah.

MODERATOR: Brooke Henderson, 2:03 at the 10th tee on Thursday. Best of luck.

BROOKE HENDERSON: Thank you.