

U.S. Women's Open Championship 2016

Wednesday, July 6, 2016

Se Ri Pak

Press Conference

MODERATOR: Welcome to the 71st U.S. Women's Open Championship here at CordeValle. It's my pleasure to welcome the 1998 U.S. Women's Open champion, Se Ri Pak, into the media center. Se Ri is playing in her 19th U.S. Women's Open this year. Her win at Blackwolf Run 18 years ago was one of the most impactful in the game's history, and inspired a generation of young players from Korea to pick up the game.

It's hard to believe it's been almost two decades since your win at Blackwolf Run. What are some of the memories you had from that victory 18 years ago?

SE RI PAK: It's already 18 years ago. It's amazing. I have such great memories still in my heart because back then, everybody probably realizes that nobody knows where Korea was. Some Asian girls played the LPGA, and holding the trophy was the 1998 U.S. Open champion, everybody was like surprised and we were reacting that way.

But it's really great, I have a lot of -- after winning the U.S. Open, I learned a lot. Starting from that week, I have great success, which is all my career, from the U.S. Open, until one of those -- it's my dreams, actually.

1997 was my first U.S. Open playing, and after I finished the 18 holes I tell my mom, I said, I'd really love to win this event. This is probably one of the biggest in my own goal, if I win the U.S. Open. But right after next year, I mean, I never expect it, but it's happening. And since that is the whole thing, so many things change in my life until here.

So I don't know, I'm still 18 years ago the same person and same -- actually the same conditions, but it's already the 18 years later, I'm sitting here and talk about this is my season, this is my last tournament in the U.S. Open.

I don't know, it's really grateful I'm here. I'm trying to play as best as I could, and trying to enjoy it as much as I could.

MODERATOR: You mentioned that retiring at the end of the year from competitive golf. You've accomplished



so much on the golf course, but what does the next chapter bring for you beyond golf?

SE RI PAK: Well, everybody same question about what I'm going to do after retire. I have planning many areas being as not only players, but I learn a lot from golf, the LPGA, and as a player. As I retire I'm going to be help all the future golfers how to prepare, how to make a balance, how to be a person and player, which is, for me, most of my life is more golf.

I thought I'm doing really great balance, myself, to being as a player and person, but I am a really good player, but I don't think I'm good as person making -- how to make a great balance on it. I still am kind of frustrating as to what the better for me as a golfer or me as a person, Se Ri, still kind of struggling. That's the most hard part for me to be learning.

The last 18, 19 years being on Tour, now I figured out how and what and what's the smart thing to do. So then I'm trying to help regular playing as a Tour, as a dreams, I'm trying to tell them what to do. I'm trying to share my life, having to learn from all my career. So that's my biggest plan for when I go back to Korea, have some school, and help the golf business.

MODERATOR: You said you've learned a lot along the way, and having made that journey yourself, what is one or two pieces of advice that you would give to young Korean players today who are either on the Futures Tour, the LPGA Tour or here at the Women's Open?

SE RI PAK: It's pretty simple. Easy to say, but hard to do, simple is best. Everybody has worked so hard. They put 110 percent of game every single day, every single hour. But you don't have to be put 24/7. Actually I used to be that way. But most important thing is, as far as I know, is you have to really enjoy it. When you enjoy it, better success, I think.

So that's biggest I always tell all my Korean rookie come over from my country and said, I don't really tell them just go ahead work hard. They already do their best. All the thing is make sure after golf, trying to give enough time your personal thing, which you can totally get rest and fresh out of your mind, and next day you come back to the golf course, you're really fresh, you're

ready to go. Instead of you're at the golf course all day, back to hotel, thinking about the golf, you're kind of planning what to do. I mean you already have naturally be that way.

The most important thing is just be out there, play as best as you could. And then off the golf course just do something else. Trying to get a little more relaxed, have some more time, and give yourself some more care about it. So that's pretty easy to say, pretty simple. But I know everybody have a hard time to do it, because I actually have a hard time to do it. So every single day I see the players or rookie from my country, just keep tell, juniors the same thing, try to find the balance is best way to do.

MODERATOR: We've looked back 18 years ago, and look forward to after retirement, but you're playing this week, how are you feeling about your game and what do you think of the course here at CordeValle?

SE RI PAK: Well, my game is not actually a hundred percent solid. But this year announced that I'm going to retire means last time, last moment I'm trying to be not only as a golfer, but trying to be who has really loving golf, myself, through my life, and just last time I trying to look back. Every single week, I see all players every single week, but this is different than any other year. So like I'm going to miss them a lot. So I just want to see them as much as I could, and trying to out here golf course is give a lot of smiles I could.

And I know some fans out there always every week, they said they going to miss me. I am going to miss them, too. But I just trying to have all my time being share, because I have so much love from the fans and LPGA staff and USGA and all players. Just being out here trying to have some great time for myself. So that's another thing to share then.

And the U.S. Open always such a great event. Always come out here, you feel like you are really strong. A lot of like confidence, you built your confidence, I feel like I can do many things in here. But same thing, I'm going to do my best in playing golf. This is my last U.S. Open for my career. And then same thing, you here, I'm trying planning for fairways and greens, most. And then it's such a great golf course. You see the views, golf course, conditions of greens. You just trying to have some -- great playing, how to play, how to make it which way is a better way to miss. It will be the same routines, I'm going through it the same way. But here is such a great golf course, you have to enjoy it, right?

Q. From your unique perspective, besides hard work, how do you describe why so many women from your country have done so well in women's golf?

SE RI PAK: I wasn't really a hundred percent sure how they play such a good career in the U.S., but I know that one thing our country actually has -- our women is mentally really, really strong, I think.

And on the other hand, when we grew up, we actually don't have a great condition to being as a golfer, especially like a golf course. It's pretty hard to go out and play, because always -- there's a lot of private golf course, a lot of like members. And it's pretty hard to go out there like time for free. Like in U.S., it's good anywhere you are, you can go outside yourself, play all day yourself, all day long and practice as much as you could. That's possible. But in Korea it's very, very difficult to do that.

And the second, the range, we always play the net, which is not the same condition as here. So the way we grew up, it's kind of built naturally being a lot of focusing and they practice like imagination, being as a range, set up the golf course. I mean, we don't have a great much like experience as much as here. But when they come out here, just like you're here, like so much open. You go out, you can do anything you want at the golf course. You always be right there, as the player. It's more learning, and they're more focused, they can do more focus on it. And it builds a lot of confidence at the same time. And we just grew up naturally mentally so strong, all put together. Maybe that's why all Korean players out here, even though they're rookie, they're doing really, really great, the learning point as much as, I guess, they could.

Q. I know you have a lot of fans all over the world, especially from Korea. And they do have a lot of high expectations from you. Do you feel pressure at all?

SE RI PAK: Well, of course. Always having a lot of pressure, that's for sure. But I don't know, I do like the pressure because that makes me a lot more stronger. And mentally I'm more probably -- because of the pressure, I think mentally I'm getting more, I guess, tell myself to being handle all the pressure.

Of course I have a lot of experience, the last 19 years, but what is pressure? You have to handle that yourself. This is what I love as the game, the game and the golf. And I love the way I want it, which is best golfer in the world. That's definitely what everybody has in their mind and dreams about it. So the pressure is pretty hard, but you can actually put more possibility to being built my game together. So that is what actually I've done it before, and hopefully that young kids -- of course, it's pretty hard to be under pressure, having pressure and to play at the same time. But hopefully that comes together, and then everybody can have, I don't know, a lot more better players or top players, you know.

Q. Can you give us a sense of how big a deal it would be in South Korea if a golfer wins an Olympic medal compared to a major? If one of your compatriots wins the gold in Rio, how would that compare to winning a major?

SE RI PAK: It's really huge. Our country especially is sports, it's always been such a big events every year, especially the Olympics, though. And now that golf is going to be Olympics, which is this year, 16, and all year long we talk about our country. Every single week we talk about who is going to be playing, how they're going to prepare, and they talk about gold medal. I mean, we have a lot of pressure on it. But that much of our country is really focused on the game of golf. And at the same time Olympics. Even though every day we reading in the newspaper, talk about Olympic.

And then now this week is probably the final day who's going to be the last fill for the Olympics. So it's really such a huge thing. I don't know any other country is the same as us. But our country is taking really, really seriously.

Q. So the people that are in that mix, in the top 15, they're facing maybe more pressure this week to get on that team than they will in Rio?

SE RI PAK: I think that is right now is possible. Not only this week, but they -- last couple months being I knew that because there everybody -- besides Inbee, very tight, three other players. So then every week they are talk about it. The media always talk about who is going to, it's so tight. Each week who plays better. It's really, really having a lot of things talk about Olympics. So all players have a lot of pressure, but at the same time players really excited to be there. So hopefully we have such a great success from the Olympics this year. Everybody wants it. But do our best.

Q. So many young Korean players talk so highly and respectfully about you. When one of them wins, how do you feel? Do you feel like there's a small part of that victory that you helped accomplish?

SE RI PAK: Well, I don't know I can help them for accomplish. But actually I -- well, I'm sure, actually I open door for them. They wasn't sure before they decided to come to the U.S., they wasn't sure they could do all the success. They wasn't sure they could play the LPGA.

But after I came and after I start winning, I have this great success, everybody was thinking, I can do that. Giving a lot of confidence, built confidence for them. So they're here, they make it a dream, they make it possible. So I think I was part of it. But I think that's

really grateful for myself being as watch for all the young kids come out and play golf. They think of the dreams and they're here playing, they're winning, now they're talking about champions. That is really proud of seeing that happening, continue to be happen for the future.

Q. You talked about young golfers from your country striking a balance between their professional golf and life. At what point did you come to that realization that I should perhaps do that, as well, try to find a balance in your own life?

SE RI PAK: Well, I mean, first of all, I'm decided I was young I want to be a golfer. And I'm trying to make my dreams, always kind of imagining, beginning with studying, picking the golf. It's about I'm going to start winning the tournament, next step I'm going to build myself to be a lot more top player, and now I'm trying to be world golf No. 1. Keep making my dreams happening.

And after that I thought I am most lucky person and happiest person in my life. But, however, it wasn't really meant to be, but golf is pretty much everything in my life. It's not really meant to be, I just want to be a great golfer and happy person and great my life, you know. But seems like -- outside it looks like a lot more -- because I have everything. I have career. I making a lot -- people don't think about it. People thinking I'm being such a great success at such a young age. She making a lot of money. Altogether looks really great, but for me personally, I don't think -- I've never been a happy person, ever. I'm always thinking about golf. After winning the golf, that moment after 18 I'm holding the trophy, so happy, because that's just the way I want it.

And then after I walk off the 18, done everything else, back to hotel, I feel like lonely. I mean, so much happening in 18 greens and I'm probably the most great ever person in the world. But to go back to the hotel, I don't know. I mean, it's not really I want it -- I mean, I just want having some fun. But I never had a great time or fun time.

And this I realize it, one of the hands, I don't know what I'm going to do besides golf. I don't have any mind, I don't have any plans. I just want to go out and play week to week, trying to be best golfer in the world, trying to be in a lot of tournaments, that was as big as my goal was. But most biggest thing is, I just want having some fun. But I don't think I never having fun. That's why all of a sudden I have downtime, no reason. I'm trying to prepare myself to be never going to have, never going to have slump. That's why I always every time I'm different, I'm trying to prepare what we're going to become. But it will come, no matter what. It doesn't matter you're preparing, it doesn't matter you're

ready, just anytime, just like second.

I'm person same thing last week this week, same person. Nothing change, same club, same swing, same coach. But all of a sudden, things changing it. A week from now, a week from this week, I've lost it all of a sudden. That point I know I'm going to panic. I don't know what I'm going to do. I mean, I'm trying to really fighting myself to get back to myself as a top player. I can't do that anymore. I work hard. I'm doing more extra time spending -- it's not the answer for it. The answer is I'm not happy. And my game is not there. That's why I said it's -- everybody have probably same time, downtime, happy time, good time, everybody does. But as long as person trying to go out there as they enjoy, probably it's not going to happening. But I don't have that time for myself, that's why I have so much hard time.

But learning the hard way, which that's good, because that's why I'm learning a lot from that. That's why I can tell every players have any time -- I know exactly how they feel. I can tell them what to do. I'm going to share all my feel. I mean, I don't say -- I don't like to think about it, but I think that's grateful to have it, because that's a great experience for me, that I can share all at the same time. So this why I know that the life is really simple. I mean, you do your job, great job, that's great. But I think most important thing is doesn't matter who you are, has to be really enjoy and happy about it. That's why I find the balance, it's not too hard or far from there. Just simple, easy, just regularly every day do things you normally do, you think you're going to be happy.

That's why I tell you now, everybody always ask me what's the -- your advice for young kid, rookie comes on Tour, what's your first advice for them. It's like biggest advice for me was make sure golf and life has to be at even. That is always my answer for it.

Q. How did you know that now was the time to walk away? What's your schedule for the rest of the year?

SE RI PAK: Actually I was planning this three years ago, not like all of a sudden a month ago, you know? Three years I was preparing myself to being a time is probably good time for me being as a player to move on to be not a player and trying to have a second life after my career.

So after I retire, I'm going back to Korea, that's full-time, and trying to into golf business, which is an academy I'm trying to build. It's a lot of young kids, young players, many Asian and Korean players trying to play the U.S. or trying to play golf, I'm trying to help them to be as -- mentoring, actually, I can help as much as I could. That's my biggest goal when I get

back to Korea.

Q. What are your plans for the rest of the year?

SE RI PAK: I think this is, for me, the last tournament in U.S., I think. So now after this I have to prepare for the Olympic team. And after Olympic, I think I'm pretty much done. So this is probably the last for the U.S.

Q. Have you found that happiness that you were seeking as a mentor?

SE RI PAK: Pardon me?

Q. The happiness that you were looking for, have you now found it as a mentor?

SE RI PAK: Yes. Yes. It's not too hard. I mean, I find it's not too difficult to find happiness in mentoring. So it's kind of sharing, sharing for whoever, friends or family or players. I mean, that's just what is the biggest. Your mind, you just have to share something, happiness, sadness, difficulties. You're seeing everybody, every day, same routine, same day, that's actually make it most hard part. But at the same time, we can share it together, that actually make it helping at the same time, too.

Q. Did you know Ok-Hee Ku, and do you ever think why the Korean golf boom started after you and not after her win? It wasn't a major, but she won a tournament over here?

SE RI PAK: Right. Well, I think because way back then -- even 20 years ago, first time I won the U.S. Open, still our country's golf is really -- it's like special sports, which is not like regularly sports they talk about. This why everybody isn't really pay attention on it. And there is not the media was covering for golf. And it just really hard back then. That's why nobody knows and nobody even find out and no articles coming out. Just a huge thing. That's why my country's golf is so much far back behind it.

But after I win the U.S. Open, and things change, because like more coverage, which is they are talk about golf, and more media golf. And now we have like, I mean, TV broadcasting. Back then Ok-Hee Ku was here, there is nothing around it.

And in '98, of course, SVS, the first one, they coverage in golf. That's why our country golf impact is so big, because everything happening, nobody know about golf. A lot of people doesn't know much golf and no coverage. But you see the first big full-time coverage in Korea, and everybody is watching on TV because golf? And now they winning tournament like in world? And then there's the biggest huge events in the world. And then Korean, young age, and things changing. So after that is why that's the last 20 years, which is for our country golf is so much grow.

Q. Ok-Hee Ku sadly passed away a couple of years ago.

SE RI PAK: Yes.

Q. But how would you describe her? Was she a bit of a mentor to you?

SE RI PAK: Oh, definitely, yes. Without her, I don't think I'm here. And at the same time, all Korean golfers not going to be there. So she's the one actually built the KLPGA for a couple other players together. That's why she's making for us a future, so definitely she's actually my mentoring. And of course -- all history probably she's No. 1 in being as a golfer, as a mentoring, and for me, yes, she's my hero, yes.

MODERATOR: 8:11 a.m. off the 10th tee on Thursday.
Best of luck this week.

SE RI PAK: Thanks.