

Chick-fil-A Charity Championship hosted by Nancy Lopez  
Eagles Landing Country Club  
Atlanta, Ga.  
May 12, 2005  
Pre-tournament interviews

### AN INTERVIEW WITH NANCY LOPEZ

THE MODERATOR: Nancy, thanks for coming in and speaking with us. We appreciate your time. This is a special week for you as you are the host of the event. Can you talk a little bit about that?

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NANCY LOPEZ: Well, being a part of this event for the past few years with CHICK-FIL-A being the major sponsor, it's been an honor for me. I think they do such a great job with this event. Torrey and her staff, they work so hard to make it one of the best tournaments on the LPGA TOUR.

As you know, there is 92 of 100 players out of the top hundred players here. And that goes to tell you that this is a great event, a great golf course.

I think the players really feel very welcomed here and that's why they keep coming back.

Q. With Chick-fil-A stepping down, would you still like to be affiliated with the tournament?

NANCY LOPEZ: I hope so. We will have to see. We hope to get another major sponsor, or the title sponsor, if they would like to keep my name on the event. I would love to still be a part of it, sure.

Q. Can you talk about Annika tying your record of five consecutive wins in tournaments played?

NANCY LOPEZ: Well, I know when Annika tied the five in a row, she is such a great player -- you always, I think as a professional athlete, you want to keep some record that you performed at one time in your career, and I guess when she didn't win the sixth -- you know, I wasn't rooting against her. But I got a sweet message from my husband on my cell phone, he had been watching the event. He said, well honey, you can breathe easy. Annika didn't beat your record. And that was sweet for him to do that. But she is such a great player.

I think if she would have beat that record of five in a row, it would have made me sad, because I couldn't share that same record with her.

But I think I kind of teased everybody, and when I do say this, I think my five in a row was better because I was a rookie and I was a baby. She is more mature when she won her five in a row. But I think five in a row is five in a row. It was a exciting time in my career to be able to win five tournaments in a row. And the 5th being in Rochester New York, which is one of my favorite places to play.

I remember the day it happened, the playing, the pressure, the crowds. There were some many people there to see if I could win five in a row. Beating Jane Blalock on that final day. I mean, there is just a lot of great memories of that event. To win five in a row is a great task.

Like I said, if anybody would have beat it, Annika could have because she is just a great player.

Q. She did it over a number of months and you did it over six weeks. What do you think is easier?

NANCY LOPEZ: I don't know. It would be pretty tough to do it the way she did it, too, because she played, then not played, then played. That's pretty hard. I was on a roll. I was playing well, and I just kept playing.

But to do it the way she did it was I think very tough to be able to play, and then not play, and then come back and win whenever she played.

Q. So you are happy that you still have a piece of the record?

NANCY LOPEZ: I'm definitely glad. I'm glad my name is right there with Annika's.

Q. You recently said that Annika is better than Tiger. You still feel that way?

NANCY LOPEZ: She is such a great player. I think just being around her and watching her hit the ball. What she has done physically to herself to be able to get in that kind of shape. The way she hits the ball. I watched her in Phoenix because I was playing Golf Channel. So crisp, so solid. Every shot is perfect. As I watched her I remember the days when I used to hit it like that. It's such a wonderful feeling to be able to play that kind of golf.

But she is just outstanding, and I hope our players work harder to be able to try to beat her. They are going to have to get a little stronger, and golf is really easy for her. You see it when you are watching her play. She may not win every week. But she is definitely dominating our TOUR.

Q. Can you compare yourself in your prime and Annika in her prime? Are you disappointed that you did not get to play her while you were in your prime?

NANCY LOPEZ: I wish I could have played against Annika in my prime. I really do. It would have been fun, really fun. And I wish I would have had that opportunity to play against her for sure.

Q. Do you think the Grand Slam is a realistic goal for her?

NANCY LOPEZ: If anybody can do it, I think she can, yes. The only thing that can stop her from winning the Grand Slam would be a golf course she didn't like playing. There are just some golf courses that don't suit your game. She will be going to a new golf course, the LPGA championship. And, of course, to the U.S. Open. I don't know if she has played there before. There are some golf courses that just don't suit your game. But I don't think there is anything else that can stop her from winning the Grand Slam.

Q. Can you compare her domination versus yours?

NANCY LOPEZ: I think there are more players that could win when I was dominating the Tour at that time, or I was winning a lot of events. I don't know if I can say dominating, but winning as many events as I did win. I think there are more players that could win.

Now, I think there is a few less players that can win every week. You know who those players are.

I think it kind of started out like that when I first came out here, you can name the winner of the tournament. And then when I start playing well, everybody else started to play better. And now with Annika, the players are just going to have to step up to beat her.

Cristie Kerr is playing great. And she is the only one right now that comes to my mind that can get out there and maybe play against Annika. She is very intimidating, I think, because the players know how great she is. I think she can definitely intimidate them at this time.

But I think as the players keep working and growing and working on their games, and maybe getting stronger, they know what they have to do to beat her. Because, you know, they always say, well, you don't play against the other player. But you are going to have to. You are going to have to get better than Annika to beat her.

Q. The depth of the Tour is great now, but are you talking about the upper echelon of players?

NANCY LOPEZ: I think so, yes. Because you had Carner, and you had Judy Rankin, and you had Amy Alcott, Beth Daniel. You had all of those players that were playing during my time, and they were all great players.

Q. Can you look at your career and Annika's career until now and what do you think the legacies are?

NANCY LOPEZ: Just ask my husband that question. He studies all of our stats, how many tournaments we've played, how many wins we had, how many third places we had. He did this not very long ago.

He was trying to tell me who had the best record at one time before Annika ever came into the picture. He woke me up one night, and he always had kidney stones back a few years ago, and he woke me up and he said, honey, do you know who the best player in the LPGA Tour is? And I was like why did you wake me up? And I looked at him and he said -- I said, no, I don't know honey. And he said, Patty Sheehan.

I said, you mean you woke me up to tell me that Patty Sheehan is better than me. He said, but your second. He will probably be able to answer that question.

It's so hard to compare. Because I think even when you look at Kathy Whitworth, and how she was such a great player, and won all of those events, you know, what kind of equipment was she playing with?

Now you go to me. I was never into equipment. I just played with whatever I thought I played well with. Whatever went straight.

Now the girls have trainers. Everybody's club is made for them. I wish I would have done that. I think I could have been a little bit better because I would have paid more attention to all of that and I didn't.

I'm sure Annika, everything is made for her. All of the players. A lot of them have sports psychologists. They need those to think, whatever, when they are on the golf course.

I remember not having a lob-wedge in my bag and have my sand wedge do what a lob-wedge does. There is a lot of different comparisons. It's hard to compare.

Not taking anything away from Annika, because she is just a machine. She is an awesome athlete. She deserves the credits that she has not gotten over the last few years. She is a great athlete and a great golfer. Sometimes I feel like we were always kind of pushed to the side because of the men. Because there were days even when Karrie Webb shot her -- I don't know what score it was, 61, the same day Tiger shot his, nobody even knew that Karrie shot 61 that day. That's a great round. I know she wasn't hitting irons into the par-5s.

So when you compare, it's very hard to do that. I think you just have to look at that and see how great that player was at that time and give her all of that credit for that time.

Q. What was Ray's methodology? How did he come up with Patty?

NANCY LOPEZ: I think you went by how many tournaments you played in, how much money you won during that time. He told me the other day that I had 48 wins, 49 seconds, and like 100 and something thirds. He went through all of that. Then he told me how many Patty did. And Pat Bradley. He just went through all of these stats. He has them at home. He was reading off all of this stuff to me because he loves to do that. And now being Solheim Cup team captain, he's watching these players. Just going through these players, and telling me what they are doing and what their scoring average was, and it's very interesting to see what he finds out.

I think because he was in baseball, he is into all of the stats stuff more than I would be as a golfer.

Q. Will he help you with the captain picks?

NANCY LOPEZ: Well, he told me last night it's going to be tough when you have to pick 11 and 12. Because he is watching Beth Daniel and Pat Hurst. Players are moving up, and the ones that are moving out, so he is watching all of that for me.

Q. How is your team shaping up so far?

NANCY LOPEZ: I think my team is doing great. They are playing very well. A lot of the American players are now finishing in the Top-10. We were struggling a little bit last year with that. But they are definitely finishing Top-10 now, Top-20. I love it. They are beating a lot of people out there and that's good. Every week it changes, the points do. I love watching it. It's a lot of fun. I try to call the players and congratulate them when they play well. Hopefully, I call them, boost them on, great playing, keep going. It's fun to do that. And I feel like I have a connection with the players, you know, by calling them and talking to them and letting them know how I care how they are doing. Even 15 in points, motivating that person to play well. It's really going to come down to 11 and 12, who is playing well that last month and a half, that are really hot, and that I need to have on my team. And hopefully, too, somebody with some good experience.

Q. Can you talk about Ty leaving? He has been commissioner for seven years.

NANCY LOPEZ: I'm sad to see Ty leave. There were many times that I always talked to him a lot. And sometimes I know he wasn't always glad to hear me talk to him, but I know that he loves the LPGA. I know when he was with the LPGA before he was commissioner, he always cared about us. I think in his position as commissioner, he always wanted to do the right job and the best job.

But, you know, it's not always the commissioner, it's the players. They have to do their job to. They have to promote their Tour. They have to promote themselves. Because the LPGA can't sell the LPGA Tour unless the players sell themselves.

Every commissioner we have had has always worked very hard to try to do the very best for our Tour. I think the most important thing is to always have good quality events. Big purses, of course. But I would like to see a few more tournaments on the Tour again, the amount that we have now and just the Tour growing in tournaments.

I know it's hard because the economy is very tough and a lot of the tours are suffering because of that. But I think he has done a great job. It will be sad to see him go. I hope they take

their time to pick the next commissioner so that person will take us forward to a bigger and better Tour than we are now.

Q. The past two number-one players in the world have been kind of solitary figures. Can you talk about that and if that matters?

NANCY LOPEZ: Well, you know we had a summit meeting a few years ago. I think it's very important. I mean, I'm always there for the players if they want to talk about anything. And any way that I can encourage them, because I think first of all as women athletes, we will always struggle to be better than the men, even though I feel we are sometimes better than the men. But it's always been like that, since I can remember playing amateur golf, and being not able to play on some golf courses because I was a woman. I could only play at a certain times.

So we have to really promote ourselves. We have to go that extra mile, we have to sign one more autograph. We have to be able to promote our Tour, to make people want to come to watch us.

We have great players. They can play the game. But you've got to be open to your fans. You've got to promote yourself which helps promote your Tour. You have to sign those autographs, even when you have a bad day. It's not the fan's fault that you played bad.

Q. So the LPGA cannot have an aloof superstar?

NANCY LOPEZ: No, I think that we need to have super stars that don't act like super stars, that act like they are great players, but yet they are still the same as everybody else.

I don't like athletes that think they are better than somebody because they play better golf.

My career has been wonderful because I made so many friends. I'm fulfilled in my career because I have promoted my Tour the best way that I could. I have so many friends because of it. It's opened many doors for me business-wise with people. And I think just doing what you can for your sponsors. If you win a tournament, I think you should do a press conference for that tournament as defending champion. You should, they gave you that money. Here is a sponsor. They don't have to have a tournament for the LPGA. They don't. So they could all be gone, and we could be without a job if we don't go out there and go to the parties and do what we have to do to promote our Tour. It's so important. And until everybody does that, we won't grow bigger and better, and that's what we need to do.

Q. What do you think of all the young golfers?

NANCY LOPEZ: I think that a lot of them have talked to me. I try, when I sit down with them, just to let them know that it's important to give of themselves and not take. Give a little bit. You can take a little bit, but you need to give back to your Tour.

So I always try to give that message to them when I talk to them. And not that I want to be a know-it-all. I just want them to know what made me successful, and what made me better. Sure, I felt like I played some great golf, but I played better because of the fans, because I had so many people watching me it encouraged me. And when I played bad, and I signed autographs, it encouraged me, because they were there to make me feel better. They weren't there to make me feel worse. I'm just trying to let them know from my experience, how great an experience it was, whether I played good or bad. Whether I went through a divorce, or whatever I was going through in my life, my fans were always there to encourage me, and that's what makes me better than just playing good golf. It was exciting. The press has always been really good to me. They have always written kind things. I mean, I appreciate that very much.

Q. So you think some players should take a page out of Natalie Gulbis' book?

NANCY LOPEZ: Well, Natalie Gulbis gives of herself. When they ask her to do things, she says yes, and that's important.

Many years, you know, being one of the top players, I was asked to do many things when some other top players didn't do it. I think it's just important for the top players to do whatever they can for the Tour, to promote it. But also to say thank you to the players that are higher up on the money list. That's the way we can encourage those players to be better players. The top players should always encourage the ones that aren't playing as well, because they are the ones that do the Monday Pro-Ams, the Tuesday Pro-Ams. We need each other. All of the sponsors don't always want 144th on the money list, but we still need them. They are good people. They have personality. And they go out there and they play in the Pro-Ams on Monday and Tuesday. I know they play to make money to get through that week. They are good girls. They are friendly. They do promote our Tour.

Q. And sex appeal?

NANCY LOPEZ: Sex appeal, Jan Stephenson was our big sex appeal a few years ago. I think, you know, I have always liked Jan. I think what she did, the golf ball pictures and stuff like that, I thought it was great for the Tour. I was never against it. I never wanted to see anybody with no clothes on though. I like to have some coverage because I want us to be known as the Ladies Professional Golf Association and lady is very important to me.

Q. Is it ok to sell sex a little bit?

NANCY LOPEZ: I think that's okay. But you still have to play good golf. If you have sex appeal, and you can't play the game, I don't think that you are going to get too far with that.

Q. Can you talk about the future of the event? Do you think it will maintain a healthy existence?

NANCY LOPEZ: Well, I hope so. I think that Chick-fil-A has brought this tournament to a great place in women's golf on our Tour. You know to have a title sponsor, the tournament is here for them. Whatever they want to do with it. To entertain the people that work for them, to bring people in to provide entertainment for people that live in the area. I think there is a lot of positive things with this event. It's definitely one of the best tournaments on the LPGA Tour, and like I said, Torrey, and her staff, have worked very hard. It's just a great event. It would be sad if it wasn't here anymore. It deserves to be here in this area still. And here at Eagle's Landing because the players like to play here.

Q. Friday is Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>. Do you have any superstitions?

NANCY LOPEZ: I have a lot of superstitions. Friday the 13th is not one of them though. In golf I think there is a lot of golfers that are superstitious. I will never pick up a tee that's not mine. If I think it's not mine, I won't even pick it up. If I'm playing with somebody, and they are playing really bad, I will never walk behind them. I will not walk in their footsteps. If there is a bridge this small, I will walk to the side. I don't like to walk where they walked. If they are having a bad day, and that's just bad, so I don't want to walk in their footsteps.

If I am playing really good one day, I eat the same thing that morning that I ate the morning before. But little things like that, I'm a little superstitious, yes.

Q. Nancy we touched on you being Solheim Cup captain this coming September, I know you have an announcement that you would like to make regarding that?

NANCY LOPEZ: Yes, we chose this week to make announcement for my assistant captain for the Solheim Cup, and I am proud to say that I have chosen Rosie Jones to be my assistant captain. She deserves to be my assistant captain if she doesn't play. Right now, I believe, she is fourth on the point list. She has been the heart and soul of the Solheim Cup in the past few years. She is a great player. She has had trouble with her neck and her back, or back here, and if she can't play, then she will be my assistant captain. But she is playing so well right now. I think that she is going to do a great job on the team.

If she does play, I have named a second assistant captain, which will be Donna Caponi. Donna is a great friend of mine, very enthusiastic about LPGA golf. I think she did a great job also. She loves the players and I think that they all respect her very much.

So if I don't have Rosie, it's going to be Donna Caponi.

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