

Golf Insider

Fulfilling finish

Kerr finally wins a major at U.S. Women's Open

By ALAN TAYS
Cox News Service

Southern Pines, N.C.
By now, most golf fans know the story of Cristie Kerr losing 50 pounds and becoming a top player on the LPGA Tour.

On Sunday at Pine Needles Lodge & Golf Club, Kerr shed another heavy burden — her claim to the (dubious) distinction of being the best American player never to win a major.

Kerr, 29, of Miami, grabbed the lead Sunday morning by wrapping up her third-round 66 (the best round of the week), then tacked on a one-under 70 in the fourth round to win the U.S. Women's Open by two shots.

"I just knew I was going to win," Kerr said. "I know that's kind of odd to say, but I just knew it. I knew since the last time I came here, years and years ago, that the next time I came here that it was going to be my week."

Kerr outlasted the other four star with a claim to the no-majors title — Mexico's Lorena Ochoa. Ochoa, ranked No. 1 in the world, started the final round one behind Kerr and finished two back. First-round leader Angela Park birdied No. 18 to tie for second.

The third player in the final threesome, Morgan Pressel, played her final five holes in five over and shot 77, eight shots behind.

Kerr and Ochoa were tied at four under when they came to the 14th hole, a 426-yard par-4 that had given up only three birdies in the final round.

Kerr had bogeyed it in the second and third rounds. This time she made birdie, hitting a 190-yard 4-iron to 20 feet and making the putt to take a one-shot lead she never relinquished.

Ochoa had made an eagle on the 14th in the first round, improbably holing a 5-wood from a fairway bunker. On Sunday, the hole had no more magic to offer. Ochoa failed to reach the green in two and settled for a par.

Ochoa's tee ball deserted her on the back nine. After hitting 6-of-7 fairways on the front, she missed 6-of-7 — including the final five — on the back.



BRUCE A. BENNETT / Cox News Service

Playing in her 42nd major, Cristie Kerr, shown above in a 2004 tournament in West Palm Beach, Fla., won the U.S. Women's Open by two shots Sunday at Southern Pines, N.C.

"The 17th hole was probably the one that cost me — that driver, that tee shot," she said.

Ochoa's drive at the 17th found the left-side fairway bunker. She tried to reach the green with a 5-wood but topped the shot, sending it only about 70 yards forward into the rough.

Ochoa's resulting bogey gave Kerr a two-shot cushion going to the final hole.

Leaving without the trophy didn't faze Ochoa. "No, I'm doing OK," she said. "I've been in worse places. It hurts, but I just did everything I could. I tried really hard every day, every shot. It just didn't happen for me."

It did for Kerr, more than a decade after she was the low amateur at Pine Needles in the 1996 Open. In 2001 she tied for fourth here, 10 shots behind Karrie Webb. She said she felt good vibes from the North Carolina sandhills.

Her tournament didn't get off to a good start, though. On Thursday morning, she felt pain in one of her knees and tried to climb the stairs to the fitness van.

"I about collapsed," she said. "It hurt so bad. I was crying. I didn't think I was going to be able to play."

Advil and ice fixed the problem, which was a flare-up of a long-standing case of tendinitis. Kerr went out and shot even-par 71, three shots off Park's lead.

But Kerr was struggling with her swing. She was coming up and out of her posture, hitting shots to the right. Saturday evening, before a lightning flash scared her off an outdoor interview podium — "Two questions, guys, and I'm bogeying. I'm not kidding," — she said executing her shots properly would make her happier than winning.

Kerr, playing in her 42nd major, found the answer — she didn't say what it was — to her swing problems on the 13th hole, a 190-yard par 3. She parred that, then made her memorable birdie on 14.

Now that she has a major (after 10 top-10 finishes), Kerr has another goal in mind.

"I've put on 7 or 8 pounds from when I was most fit," she said. "I'll attribute it to being married (to Erik Stevens since December) and being on a honeymoon."

"But I'm ready to get focused on my fitness again and working really hard on my golf." It should be easier, now that she's shed her major burden.

IT'S GOOD FOR YOUR GAME

In a divot? You're not in a hole lot of trouble

By T.J. TOMASI
Universal Press Syndicate

Hitting into a divot may be a bad break, but hitting out of one is not as difficult as most golfers expect.

Based on the position of the ball in a divot, there are different shots you can play that require different techniques. If your ball lies in the front of the divot, your goal is to sweep it out with your regular swing. If it's near the back lip, you'll need to modify your swing and punch it out.

Regardless of where the ball lies in the divot, always stand closer to your ball. This sets the club shaft more upright, reducing the chance that your clubhead will catch the edge of the divot.

From the Front:

When your ball is in the front of the divot with nothing between your clubface and the back of the ball, you can take your normal swing. The only modifications are in your setup: Stand so the ball is about an inch forward of where you would normally position it in your stance. This allows you to sweep the ball cleanly, using the divot to direct the path of your club.

If the divot is deep and points left of the target, open your clubface to produce a fade back to the target, then swing down the divot line. If the divot points right of the target, close your clubface slightly to promote a draw back to the target and simply let your swing path follow the divot line.

From the Back:



Although the ball is resting toward the back of the divot in this photo, it isn't too bad because I can get the clubface on the back of the ball. I play the ball 1 inch behind the center of my stance and choose one more club than normal.



I keep more weight on my front leg to pick it clean with a more vertical approach.



My goal is to swing abruptly down on the back of the ball, using an abbreviated follow-through.

THE GOLF DOCTOR

How does one putt? Let me count the ways

When you look at great putters, it almost seems as if their putting style matches their personality: Hard-driving type A personalities like Tiger Woods jam their putts and smash the ball into the cup. Gentle Ben Crenshaw types ease the ball into the hole.

It's a nice theory, but a more accurate one is that great putters can hit all kinds of putts, depending on the situation, and there is no reason why you can't learn to do this also.

There are three ways to make a putt.

1. You can "die" the ball into the cup, so that its last roll barely carries it over the edge as it falls into the cup.

2. You can send the ball into the cup at the optimum speed, so that the ball contacts the backside of the metal cup about halfway down.

3. You can "firm" the ball into the cup, where every putt is played as a straight one and the ball strikes the dirt on the back of the

hole, just above the metal cup.

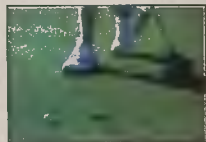
Die Speed

One advantage of the dying putt is that there are three "entrances" your slowly moving ball can use to fall into the cup — the front of the cup and the two sides. Another advantage is that if you miss, your ball always finishes next to the hole.

But there are some disadvantages. With a slight miscalculation, the dying putt won't get to the cup. And because of the putt's slow speed, the break is increased and the ball is easily knocked off line by the imperfections in the green.

Firm Speed

The advantages of the firm putt are that it eliminates the break and, because of its speed, it stays on line despite imperfections on the green. The disadvantages are that the size of the hole is effectively reduced because the ball is



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The type of putt you use often depends on the circumstances of the shot. moving too fast to sneak in the sides of the cup.

Optimum Speed

For the optimum speed putt, the hole is its true size, the break and imperfections are minimized, the ball always gets there, and if it rolls by the hole, you get information about your next putt by watching the break.

The optimum-speed putt really doesn't have disadvantages except that optimum is always hard to figure out.

Bottom line: Your choice depends on the circumstances. Generally, you should jam the up-hillers, die the down-hillers and put the optimum-speed stroke on flat putts. — T.J. Tomasi

SCHEDULE

All Times EDT
PGA TOUR
AT&T National
• Site: Bethesda, Md.
• Schedule: Thursday-Sunday
• Course: Congressional Country Club, Blue Course (7,255 yards, par 70)
• Purse: \$6 million.
• TV: Golf Channel (Thursday-Friday, 3-6 p.m., 8:30-11:30 p.m.) and CBS (Saturday-Sunday, 1-2:30 p.m., 3-6 p.m.)

U.S. GOLF ASSOCIATION
U.S. Senior Open
• Site: Haven, Wis.
• Schedule: Thursday-Sunday
• Course: Whistling Straits, Straits Course (7,068 yards, par 72)
• Purse: \$2.6 million.
• TV: ESPN (Thursday-Friday, 2-6 p.m.) and NBC (Saturday-Sunday, 3-6 p.m.)

PGA EUROPEAN TOUR
European Open
• Site: Straffan, Ireland.
• Schedule: Thursday-Sunday
• Course: The K Club, Snuffitt Course (7,313 yards, par 72)
• Purse: \$4.84 million.
• TV: Golf Channel (Thursday-Friday, 10 a.m.-1 p.m.; Saturday, 10 a.m.-1 p.m.; Sunday, 10 a.m.-1 p.m., 7-9 p.m.)

NATIONWIDE TOUR
Legend Financial Group Classic
• Site: Highland Heights, Ohio
• Schedule: Thursday-Sunday
• Course: StoneWater Golf Club (7,045 yards, par 71)
• Purse: \$525,000. Winner's share: \$94,500.
• TV: None.

LPGA TOUR
• Next event: Jamie Farr Owens Corning Classic, July 12-15, Highland Meadows Golf Club, Sylvania, Ohio.

LEADERS

WORLD RANKINGS	
1. Tiger Woods	19.86
2. Phil Mickelson	8.84
3. Jim Furyk	8.46
4. Adam Scott	6.93
5. Ernie Els	6.70
6. Vijay Singh	6.19
7. Henrik Stenson	5.75
8. Geoff Ogilvy	5.57
9. Luke Donald	5.22
10. P. Harrington	4.98
11. Retief Goosen	4.92
12. Sergio Garcia	4.88
13. Rory Sabbatini	4.75
14. Zach Johnson	4.58
15. Angel Cabrera	4.377

MONEY LEADERS PGA TOUR

Player	Money
1. Tiger Woods	\$4,885,427
2. Phil Mickelson	\$4,120,588
3. Vijay Singh	\$3,719,393
4. Zach Johnson	\$2,985,910
5. Rory Sabbatini	\$2,820,390
6. C. Howell III	\$2,521,999
7. Adam Scott	\$2,504,266
8. Jim Furyk	\$2,465,808
9. Scott Verplank	\$2,194,581
10. John Rollins	\$2,177,304

LPGA TOUR

Player	Money
1. Lorena Ochoa	\$1,795,426
2. S. Pettersen	\$1,044,770
3. Cristie Kerr	\$955,180
4. B. Lincicome	\$744,654
5. Paula Creamer	\$729,9489

CHAMPIONS TOUR

Player	Money
1. Jay Haas	\$1,796,158
2. Loren Roberts	\$1,187,047
3. Brad Bryant	\$1,149,748
4. Tom Purtzer	\$915,587
5. Hale Irwin	\$895,451

ASK THE PRO

Don't overthink the 18th hole

Q: I hit most of my tee shots pretty good, except the last one. I don't feel much different on the 18th tee than on the others, but I always screw it up. I check out my swing to make sure I'm ready, then it goes way off line, usually to the right. — Bob R., from the Web

A: Ben Hogan once commented that the downswing was no place to give yourself a lesson, and if there's one time you need to abide by this, it's the last tee shot of the day, a time when it's all too easy to get "more personally involved" in your swing.

Scientific studies show that once the downswing starts, you can't stop (the brain simply doesn't work that fast), and since it physically can't be done, if you try to do something during the downswing, you will no doubt do it at the wrong time and ruin your swing. So stay calm on the 18th tee, take a relaxing breath, remain committed to your plan and don't try to give yourself a lesson while you swing!



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Commentary: Tears can't flow forever for Pressel

By GREG STODA
Cox News Service

Morgan Pressel isn't about to apologize for the tears, because that would mean apologizing for who she is.

She's 19. She's not going to cry forever. She's not going to turn herself into a punch line who weeps every time she's in contention to win an important golf tournament but fails to do so. She's too strong for that, even though she might not look the part right now.

She'll mature. She'll handle defeat better than she handled the one Sunday afternoon in the U.S. Women's Open at Pine Needles Lodge & Country



PRESSEL

club in Southern Pines, N.C., where she fell apart down the stretch ... and then just fell apart.

She pulled her sunglasses off her cap to cover her eyes — as they began to mist? — while double-bogeying the last hole in a miserable conclusion to a miserable back nine, dropping her from contention to a tie for 10th place.

Pressel cried in the embrace of her agent upon finishing, spoke to a United Slates Golf Association interviewer and addressed the media most thor-

oughly only through e-mails with selected South Florida representatives.

Did that make her appear petulant and pouty? Yes, on both counts.

It wasn't the first time Pressel had dissolved in anguish after a loss, and it probably won't be the last. But she'll learn, or she'll never be as good as she aspires to be.

Anger, said 18th century orator Robert Ingersoll, is "a wind which blows out the lamp of the mind." Pressel's too bright not to find her way to understanding that message. She is famously harsh on herself when it comes to demanding excellence, and especially so when involved in a chase for the trophy in a high-profile event.