

# Kang Pumped For Women's PGA Repeat

By Neal Kotlarek

**O**nly a year ago, Danielle Kang entered the KPMG Women's PGA Championship with something to prove. Following a remarkable amateur career that included two U.S. Women's Amateur Championship titles, the San Franciscan found herself winless on the LPGA Tour after six years of playing as a professional. Considering the fact that Kang had been touted for superstardom since childhood, this was not the way the script was meant to be written.

Any and all thoughts of doubt in Kang's mind regarding her golf game were erased over four magical days in July at Olympia Fields, when she fired rounds of 69-66-68-68-271 on the North Course to win both her first major championship and her first professional title by one stroke over Canada's Brooke Henderson.



In many ways, the 18th hole affirmed all of the time and effort she had put into her game over her lifetime. First, she watched Henderson precede her with a birdie on the par-5 final hole to tie for the lead. A par would put Kang in a playoff while a birdie would secure the victory. After ripping a three-wood approach shot onto the green, she needed two putts to win her first title. A testy two-footer found the bottom of the cup as Kang became the first player to birdie the 72nd hole to win the title by a single stroke since Meg Mallon performed that feat back in 1991, when it was the LPGA Championship.

Reached at her home in late January just prior to starting her 2018 schedule, Kang recalled the circumstances, and what led up to the triumph, vividly.

"I was not hitting the ball very well going into the tournament," Kang said. "Then Thursday (the first day of the WPGA) happened. And I kept playing well for the entire tournament going into the last hole. I didn't think about needing par to tie. All I thought about was birdie."

Immediately after she made the winning putt, Kang was greeted on the 18th green by her mother who hadn't been able to observe either of Danielle's U.S. Women's Amateur victories. Following that greeting, Bo Wie, mother of fellow LPGA veteran Michelle, also embraced her. How close is Michelle to Danielle? Wie's Twitter account following Kang's victory simply read: "She's a MAJOR WINNER Y'ALL!!!!!!!!!!!!!!"

Like Wie, who qualified for the U.S. Women's Amateur Public



Links Championship at 10 and won the Hawaii Women's Amateur at 11, Kang was a child prodigy who qualified for the U.S. Women's Open as a 14-year-old.

"I had only played golf for a year before I qualified," Kang reflected. "My brother signed me up!"

After winning the 2010 and 2011 U.S. Women's Amateur and the 2011 North and South Women's Amateur at Pinehurst, Kang turned pro in 2012 and made 13 cuts in 19 events to finish fifth in the rookie of the year competition. The next four years were made more difficult by several injuries and the death of her father K.S. Kang in 2013. He had caddied for her during both U.S. Women's Amateur Championships.

Kang earned a career record \$505,316 in 2016 and made 23 cuts in 27 events, including three top 10 finishes. While she missed nine cuts in 2017, her victory at Olympia Fields and five other top 10 finishes placed Kang 17th on the money list for the season at \$1,005,983. A second career highlight was qualifying for the Solheim Cup team and posting a 3-1 record to help lead the U.S. squad to a resounding 16½-11½ victory over Europe. Kang even got to play two of the matches paired with pal Wie.

"That experience was absolutely great," Kang said. The fan vibe and the team vibe made the event special. The fans rooting on the U.S. team wore red, white and blue and cheered us on every hole. I've never experienced anything like that before."

While Kang said that making the team and playing for coach and LPGA legend Juli Inkster were a thrill, she hadn't actually made the Solheim Cup experience a career goal. "I never thought of it," she said. "Of course, I wanted to qualify for the team as that meant that I played well to get to the matches. But I didn't specifically aspire to play in the matches. Once I got in, I was obviously excited to play for my country."

At 5-foot-6, Kang is challenged to keep up with bombers like Maude-Aimee Leblanc, averaging 283.4 yards this season, and Lexi Thompson (277.3). Kang averaged 248.7 yards in 2017 and is at 259.0 yards so far this year.

"I want to be longer," she said. "I'm always looking at ball speed and distance. A lot of people get caught up in distance, but I truly believe that accuracy is the key to success on the tour." Supporting the belief is her 79.8 percent fairways hit statistic in 2017, 18th on the tour.

Kang looks forward to defending her KPMG Women's PGA Championship crown when the event returns to Chicago June 26-July 1 at Kemper Lakes Golf Club in Kildeer. Designed by Dick Nugent and Ken Killian, the private north suburban course has been ranked as one of the top 100 layouts in America and previously hosted the 1989 PGA Championship won by Payne Stewart and the 1992 Women's Amateur Championship, where Vicki Goetze, now an LPGA executive, came from behind to beat Annika Sorenstam.



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The course for the third women's major of the year will look very familiar to gallery members who played it as a public course when it opened. Local designer Rick Jacobson performed a three-year bunker renovation which increased challenge and aesthetics.

Kang has never played at Kemper Lakes before but is not concerned about her unfamiliarity with the 7,345-yard track.

"I actually don't like to play a course prior to the tournament," Kang said. "I enjoy the surprise of seeing a course for

the first time in practice sessions where I can focus on the mission at hand."

Expected to join Kang in the field taking on Kemper Lakes is Kris Tamulis, who grew up in a golf family in Lapeer, Mich., and moved to Florida as a 7-year-old. She played college golf at Florida State and joined the LPGA Tour in 2005.

"I've been blessed," Tamulis said on a winter promotional visit to Chicago. "I've enjoyed a nice career and continue to have lots of fun out there." Tamulis captured the 2015 Yokohama Tire LPGA Classic, shooting 71-68-67 in the first three rounds before finishing with a sizzling 65

to defeat Austin Ernst and Yani Tseng by a stroke at 17-under. Her winner's share was a check for \$195,000.

"Everyone asks me if that tournament was the highlight of my career," Tamulis said. "It wasn't, actually. In fact, the best moments of my career occur at random times when I meet someone at a pro-am or at some kind of social gathering and touch their lives in some way. I talked to my Mom a while ago and she told me she ran into a woman I had played with in a pro-am. The woman told my Mom how much fun we had together. That kind of story makes me really proud and happy."

Tamulis said she looks forward to playing at Kemper Lakes and has heard "great things" about the course. In four tournaments this year, she made the cut three times and has one top 10 finish. "I can't wait to come to Chicago," she said. "I know the tournament is going to be spectacular."

In mid-April, the PGA of America announced a number of affordable ticket packages designed to create excitement at the tournament and bring families to Kemper Lakes. The "Family Four Pack" is \$69 plus tax and includes two flex tickets good for any day of the event and two already complimentary junior tickets (juniors under 17 are

free if accompanied with a ticketed adult). The packages, available Tuesday-Sunday, include four concession meal vouchers.

The "Upgrade Your Weekend" Ticket Package is \$99 plus tax per day and offers easy main entrance access to the tournament with one on-site VIP parking pass and grounds tickets for two on either Saturday or Sunday. Both the Family and Upgrade packages are available for a limited time only and quantities are limited.

Other ticket offerings include a \$35 flex ticket for any one day of the championship and \$79 for a weekly grounds ticket. Active duty, retirees, active reserve and National

Guard veterans and their accompanying guest (limit one) receive complimentary daily grounds tickets upon presentation of a military ID at the tournament's Will Call office. More information is available at [www.KPMGWomensPGA.com](http://www.KPMGWomensPGA.com).

"We are thrilled to be able to offer fans in the Chicagoland area these new ticket options in addition to our standard championship grounds tickets," said championship director Jackie Endsley. "These new options will give fans the opportunity to elevate their championship experience with affordable ways to entertain friends, clients and family at a major golf championship."

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