



Women and Golf
Case Study

Inspiring More Women and Girls.

Golfing great Annika Sorenstam won 10 major championships, shot a 59 and even competed in a men's tournament. She continues to be a high-profile figure in golf, notably supporting women, girls and health activity. Check out this Q&A on her views around growing the women's game...



For any woman with designs on working within the golf industry, can you explain your journey from successful golfer to businesswoman?

“I stopped playing in 2008. A little before that, I was preparing for the next chapter. I chose to end my playing career, I was getting married and wanted to start a family. I also felt I had achieved everything I wanted to and I wanted to try something else. But I didn’t want to leave the game. I felt like I owed the game a little bit and I wanted to share my knowledge and all the things that I have been lucky to experience, whether it is playing or interacting with people. I went from hitting balls and practising every day to more talking about it, sharing thoughts and meeting people, inspiring young girls and creating initiatives to help develop their lives. I’ve enjoyed it a lot. It’s rewarding to give back and say ‘thank you’ for what the game has given me.”

Annika, from being one of the world’s greatest golfers – an eight-time LPGA Player of the Year who won 72 LPGA tournaments during your 16-year professional career – you are still working hard within golf. What do you say to women and girls to encourage them into the sport?

Annika: “Golf is a great game, one you can play all your life, and with your family. It’s great for your health, being outside, is fun to play and you can meet people and develop a network. I also stress that women belong in the game. I think a lot of women feel like they might not hit the ball far enough or are not good enough from a skill level. But it doesn’t mean they can’t contribute to the game in different ways, even if playing is not their route. If you like the game, there are a lot of other things you can do to be part of the game and inspire others.”

You remain a global figure to look up to, with your ANNIKA Foundation, which you started in 2007, focusing on supporting girls’ and women’s golf globally. How much satisfaction do you take from inspiring girls and women into golf?

“We’ve now been around for over 10 years. We started the Foundation to inspire the next generation, to fulfil their dreams with playing opportunities around the world and now we have seven global tournaments and grassroots initiatives to inspire them to pick up a club or continue to play. It’s been fun, I love sharing the passion I have for the game and knowledge I have. It wasn’t that long ago I was in their shoes, so there is always a lot to learn, things you might be scared of trying. It’s about making sure these girls are equipped with what they need for the next chapter in their lives, but also to encourage and inspire them.”

The Women in Golf Charter was launched by The R&A in May 2018. How important is this initiative?

“I think we’re at a time now when we have to start really thinking about how we can increase participation, whether it is playing or just getting young girls into golf. I think the timing is right. I do think we have to change a little bit of the culture, the way we think and go about things. How do we create an environment at golf clubs that is attractive for women and girls? It’s about having role models too, but also the way you do it. Golf is an older sport with a lot of tradition and history. We need to find a balance in that, also embracing the future in today’s society. In some countries, you may only see 10–15% of females playing the game, but perhaps 40% in other countries, so the goal is to increase it – whether that is through tournaments, different initiatives or club activities, we have to try it all, but it has to be more gender equal in places.”

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You are also a Golf & Health Project ambassador, attending and supporting the events in London in October 2018 where a global consensus backed golf in the race to tackle physical inactivity. How excited were you to be in the UK?

"It was great to be in London. I'm really honoured to be an ambassador of the Golf & Health Project and it was great to share the facts and data showing why golf should be known more for its health benefits. It was an interesting experience going there, visiting the House of Parliament, meeting some ministers and sharing the passion for the game from my perspective, but also hearing it from the research of other people about why golf has so many benefits."

How important is to have people like yourself talking about golf's health benefits, notably trying to reach women and girls?

"It's very important to have people from different walks of life and different backgrounds supporting this work. I like to think I bring expertise from a player's perspective, a global perspective and a young ladies' perspective, which are all important demographics of the game.

"We all know that we need to get more girls and women into the sport and I've always been a believer that health is important in well-being. Through initiatives such as the ANNIKA Foundation, we stress the importance of living a healthy, active lifestyle. It's important to document it, especially with the data we now have, and hopefully communicate that message to potential players, facilities, the golf industry and health professionals as well."



From left to right: Dr Andrew Murray, Professor Fiona Bull, Steve Brine MP, Annika Sorenstam, Martin Slumbers, Craig Tracey MP

What can the industry do to promote golf's health benefits more?

"I do think golf facilities could start thinking about how they can become a place where people want to be, want to hang out, to bring families, more women and girls, so it becomes a little more gender equal than maybe in the past. Maybe the facility has a gym or other activities, ensure people can do different things. These are not changes that are going to cost a lot of money, it's changing the culture and making it more inclusive.

"Golf sometimes has a little bit of a negative stigma, in that the first thing that comes to people's minds is it is expensive, maybe difficult or hard to get into. But it's really not in the scheme of things. Now you have other benefits, like health. Tests have shown that if you play golf a lot of people live up to five years longer than people who don't play golf. What is more important than being healthy? I think we should take time for golf. Together with the researchers and doctors, we're trying to tell the policy makers, 'hey, pay attention to golf. It should be part of your programmes, golf should be on top of your list as it is benefitting health.'"

Background: The Women in Golf Charter

The R&A unveiled the Women in Golf Charter on 29 May 2018 in London as part of the organisation's global drive to increase the number of women and girls participating in golf and to encourage more opportunities for women to work within the golf industry.

For more information, visit www.randa.org/en/theranda/initiatives/womenandgirls

