

### **Annika Sorenstam: Bringing Women's Golf into Full Swing**

Annika Sorenstam is arguably the greatest female golfer in history. She still remains the only woman to shoot 59 in an LPGA tournament. Her professional career in golf spanned 26 years. During those years, she won 90 tournaments around the world and was named player of the year eight times. Besides dominating the sport of golf, Sorenstam serves as an inspiration, leader and role model to girls and all women.

As a young girl in sports, Annika quickly learned that being a female athlete would present unique challenges. When she was 16 years old, she and her sister tried to volunteer as caddies at a European Tour event, but they were both passed over as all the male volunteers were chosen instead. She was also painfully shy and has admitted that she would deliberately three-putt at the end of a tournament just so she wouldn't have to give a victory speech. Both of these experiences are very relatable for girls. Girls often don't feel "seen" and can be extremely self-conscious in social situations where they are in the spotlight. Seeing how Sorenstam has overcome these set-backs in her life is a huge inspiration to young girls and proves that you can achieve anything you set your mind to achieve.

Even after her retirement from professional golf in 2008, Sorenstam continues to be a leader for women and girls in the sport by creating competitive and educational opportunities. Each year she hosts the Annika Invitational in Europe and the United States. This tournament invites 72 of the top junior female players to compete for the prestigious championship and attracts college coaches who are looking to recruit and offer college scholarships to the female athletes. She even hosts an essay competition, like this one, where she asks girls, ages 6-16, to write a letter to other girls telling them why they love golf. Approximately 40 winners are chosen

to then participate in a girls-only inspirational golf clinic with Annika herself! Creating opportunities for young females in the sport isn't the only way Annika Sorenstam is being a leader. In 2021, she helped to close the gender pay gap by co-hosting a tournament for men and women to compete in the same tournament for the same amount of money. This was an extremely pioneering event in a sport that has been dominated by men for centuries and still awards tournament payouts in amounts up to six times for men over women.

Finally, Annika Sorenstam is a true role model and someone I aspire to be like as an adult. I am not a very good golfer and would probably never win a tournament, but I aspire to be the type of kind and giving person that she is. When I was 7 years old, Annika Sorenstam actually came to my Girl Scout meeting! She really impressed me with how patient she was with each girl as she taught us how to properly grip a golf club and putt in a straight line. She told us to never give up on our dreams and always work hard to achieve what others think is impossible. Therefore, my favorite female sports pioneer will always be Annika Sorenstam, a woman who is a true leader at bringing women's golf into full swing.

