USGA Media Center

FAR HILLS, N.J. (May 4, 2016) – Se Ri Pak, whose 1998 U.S. Women's Open victory is a seminal moment in the history of women's golf, has received a special exemption from the United States Golf Association (USGA) into the 71st U.S. Women's Open Championship. The championship will be conducted July 7-10, 2016, at CordeValle in San Martin, Calif.

"Without a doubt, Se Ri Pak's 1998 U.S. Women's Open victory revolutionized women's golf and inspired scores of players from the Republic of Korea and around the world," said Stuart Francis, chairman of the USGA Championship Committee. "The USGA is proud to honor Se Ri in her final season and applaud her historic career. We look forward to celebrating with her when she and the world's best players take on CordeValle in July."

Pak's special exemption into the U.S. Women's Open was extended in honor of her lifelong dedication to the game and the indelible mark left by her success. In March, Pak announced her intention to retire following the 2016 professional season. She plans to return to Korea and serve as an ambassador for the game of golf.

"The U.S. Women's Open has a very special meaning in my career and life," said Pak. "It has opened up the doors for all my dreams to come true. With that, I am very honored and pleased to be given this opportunity to participate for the last time before finishing up my playing career. I have learned so much. I will do all my best to give back the love and support I have received for the future of golf."

In 1998, a 20-year-old Pak outlasted amateur Jenny Chuasiriporn in a dramatic 20-hole playoff at Blackwolf Run in Kohler, Wis., to capture her second major title of the year. Those victories earned her Associated Press Female Athlete of the Year and LPGA Tour Rookie of the Year honors. She went on to win three more major titles and earned induction into the World Golf Hall of Fame in 2007.

Beyond her on-course success, Pak's accomplishments resonated in her home country and sparked a cultural phenomenon. When Pak won the 1998 U.S. Women's Open, she was the only Korean player on the LPGA Tour. Since then, countrywomen Birdie Kim (2005), Inbee Park (2008, 2013), Eun-Hee Ji (2009), So Yeon Ryu (2011), Na Yeon Choi (2012) and In Gee Chun (2015) have joined Pak as U.S. Women's Open champions. Many of today's current stars from Korea name Pak as their inspiration for taking up the game of golf.

"When I was watching [the 1998 U.S. Women's Open on] TV, my dream was – I just want to be there," said Choi following her 2012 U.S. Women's Open victory, coincidentally also at Blackwolf Run. "And 14 years later I'm here right now, and I made it. My dreams come true. It's an amazing day today, and I really appreciate what Se Ri did and all the Korean players, for what they did. There's really no way I can be here without them."

Considered the world's premier women's golf championship, the U.S. Women's Open is one of 13 national championships conducted annually by the USGA. The championship was first conducted in 1946 and its winners include players such as Betsy Rawls, Babe Didrikson Zaharias, Mickey Wright, Hollis Stacy, Annika Sorenstam, Juli Inkster and Michelle Wie.

More information about the U.S. Women's Open before, during and after the 2016 championship is available at usga.org/womensopen. A variety of ticket options are available for purchase at2016uswomensopen.com.

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