

NW Arkansas Championship

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Rogers, Arkansas, USA

Pinnacle Country Club

Maria Fassi

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: Welcome everyone to the Walmart NW Arkansas Championship presented by P&G.

We've got Arkansas Razorbacks' very own, Maria Fassi. Going back to quarantine, Maria, which feels forever ago, and speaking of Arkansas you won your first professional win here just a few months ago.

First of all, congratulations on that.

MARIA FASSI: Thank you.

THE MODERATOR: That's also where you won your NCAA Championship individual title.

How does it feel to be back here in the state of Arkansas playing this event though?

MARIA FASSI: Yeah, I think this is a very fun week for me of course being able to come back to what I called home for four years. Just seeing some old friends, being able to hang out with former teammates, both Shauna and Mike, the coaches at the UofA.

I love it here. It's a great town. It's a great golf course. The community is amazing. Of course this year is a little bit different. It's weird not seeing the grandstands on 17 and all that stuff, but always super excited to be here.

I love Arkansas and just really excited for this week.

THE MODERATOR: So how early did that start, the text messages from your coaches and friends when they heard that you were going to be here?

MARIA FASSI: Yeah, I mean, we been -- I actually texts with them quite often. I text with the coaches all the time. Just kind of in the weeks prior they were like, Okay, yeah, we got to go dinner here and hang out. So couple cookouts and stuff like that. So I'm excited about that.

I think just kind of takes some stress out of the week and that really helps me.



THE MODERATOR: 2020 has been a whirlwind, but you've had some impressive finishes. Within top 10 at Marathon a few weeks ago and tied 13th at the ISPS Handa Women's Australian Open.

What would you say has been the best or strongest part of your game this year?

MARIA FASSI: I think I'm slowly starting to get more comfortable with the way the tour works, with what works for me both practice-wise, travel-wise. I'm not playing nearly as much golf as I did last year, so I think I'm just kind of starting to get a groove of what feels good for me, what my body needs and wants.

So I think that has been key. My iron play has gone a lot better. My dispersion is tighter so I'm having more birdie opportunities and not missing maybe in some of the places that I was used to missing it maybe.

So, yeah, I think my irons have been getting better, and I think that's where I've seen my most improvement.

THE MODERATOR: Are you looking forward to this course in particular?

MARIA FASSI: Yeah, this is a tough course for me. I never really played good here, so I'm excited for the challenge. I might do something different this week with my bag. I have like 16, 17 clubs usually and just kind of decide what stays and what goes.

We're thinking about leaving driver out of the bag this week, which is of course very rare for me. But I don't think this is a course that I can overpower or really take much advantage with my driver. So we're kind of still looking into that. But it might be something new for me.

But I think I just have to approach the course differently and see how it works for me. But I would say it's in great shape, like it always is, and I'm obviously excited for the challenge.

THE MODERATOR: Questions?

Q. You been a professional now for 15 months, and of course taking 2020 out of the mix for a second



because of everything that's happened, what's been the biggest surprise and hurdle that you've had to overcome transitioning from an exceptional amateur to the professional ranks?

MARIA FASSI: Well, I think one of the biggest things for me has been forgetting about what I did as an amateur, because it really doesn't matter once you're a professional.

You're starting from scratch. That's been a challenge for me because I was used to -- especially my last couple years as an amateur I think that was when I was playing my best and winning a lot of golf tournaments and coming here and struggling was a big shock.

Of course I knew the challenge was going to be different and competing against people who have been out here for ten years or so, like it's definitely a different challenge. But I think kind of putting my professional -- my amateur career behind and just focus on my professional career has I think been one of the hardest things, as silly as that may sound.

Because there is so much expectations. I mean, from myself and my team and of course everybody else around me and media and stuff about how good of an amateur I was and how I should be a pretty good professional, and I think that was just kind of like adding way too much pressure on myself.

So I'm slowly trying to kind of just start to get a feel of what the professional life looks like. It's way different. It's a lot more lonely than of course college golf. But I think I'm slowly getting there. I'm just getting to where I want to be, because I know I can do amazing things out here.

Q. Was there anything that you didn't expect that surprised you a little bit about the professional life? You mentioned the loneliness, the expenses that you have to take care of that college took care of in the past. What of those things really kind of jarred you in your professional debuts?

MARIA FASSI: Yeah, I mean, definitely the travel is different. We went from playing like 12, 15 tournaments a year as an amateur to playing almost 30 as a professional, so that's also different. Just really planning my schedule, knowing, again, like what my body needs and like just listening to how I'm feeling has been key with just planning.

I think our coaches back when I was in college really did all the planning for us and we didn't really have to think much about that. Now I'm able to make those decisions. If they're good, that's great. But if I make a mistake with one of the decisions, then I'm having to pay for it as well.

I think it's just like a trial and error on that area. But I think that the travel definitely has been one of the biggest shocks of turning professional.

Q. You mentioned 17, because I was out there playing yesterday, and 17 is odd not having the stands there. Just in general the week, you, Gaby, Stacy, and the other Arkansas golfers, it's always a big week for you, a busy week for you. How much change is there this week, and does that make it a little bit easier to just go out and play golf without all those responsibilities that you normally have?

MARIA FASSI: Yeah, it definitely makes it easier on us in that department. I personally enjoy it a lot, because we don't really get to play at home any other week. We don't really get to have the big crowds or the fans supporting us as much as they do this week.

So I personally will miss it a lot this year, 17 more than some of the other holes. But just all the little things that we had to do maybe, like the clinics or going and hanging out at the big tent with some people out there, I really personally enjoy that. I get to connect with the fans and just thank them for their support and for all they do for women's golf, but also just for Arkansas.

So I'll miss it this year. And, yeah, definitely takes a little load from us. I can maybe have some more off time, if you will. I really do also enjoy that part and interacting with them, so I'm kind of excited for next year. Hopefully can all be back to how we like it to be.

Q. Just where your game is right now, how important is it for you to try to make the cut this weekend for the first time playing out here and in contention on Sunday possibly?

MARIA FASSI: Yeah, I mean, like I was saying before, I think I'm going to approach the course differently this year. Again, one of the things that I've learned as a professional is that there is not only one way to play golf, and I have to trust that my short game is going to be there, that I don't need driver out here to be successful.

So I think seeing the course a little bit different could really benefit me this week. It might even be a different golf course than what I been playing for the last four, five years. So I think it will be exciting thing to see, and hopefully it works my way and I can make the cut and be in a good position for Sunday.

Q. Historically this event has required you to go really low. I mean, if you look back at the scoring history of these things. There are some pretty astounding

numbers. Do you think that plays into your game given that you have historically been an aggressive player?

MARIA FASSI: Yeah, I mean, I think this is not a golf course where hitting it far or being aggressive is really something that pays off, because there is not really many opportunities to do that.

So I don't think, again, like trying to go and overpower this golf course is really the play. We've seen historically, yeah, we go very low on this course, but we've also seen that most of the winners don't really hit it super far. So it's not like you need distance to be successful here.

I think for me being able to understand that and just being like, Okay, we're going to have to make a bunch of putts but also make no mistakes. Again, you really have to go low this week. I think it's a combination of both.

Yeah, you're going to have to be aggressive and maybe take on some more pins than usual because you have to make those birdies. But at the same time, be patient and not try to just go crazy out there and chase after every pin.

Q. Just how different has the experience been on the LPGA Tour all the way from travel to not playing in front of spectators? And a follow-up to that, what are some of the toughest adjustments you've had to make while playing during the pandemic?

MARIA FASSI: Yeah, it's way different for sure not being able to have spectators out here and just having to adjust maybe to the safety measures that we have to take this year.

From traveling, yeah, I'm kind of trying to limit the amount of flights I take just to as well keep myself healthy and try and keep my team as well kind of just around me and just trying to do our part, I guess, on not spreading it and trying to go out and get the virus either.

So it's been weird because I like to go out. I like to go out for dinner. I like to share airbnbs with some other players, and not being able to do that this year. So that's kind of something that it's different, it's weird. And then like just it's weird in the clubhouse everybody is just kind of sitting six feet apart, at different tables, and just talking from afar.

It's just a whole different thing that we're just kind of having to slowly get used to. I mean, I'm just happy that we're back out here. I was not having a lot of fun during the quarantine with the period where we couldn't really play, so I'm just thankful that our sponsors and the LPGA and U.S. government have provided us with everything we need to

be able to compete.

If for now this is how we have to do it, then so be it. But I think it's a great thing to be able to be out here again. Like I said before, hopefully we can go back to how we like things sooner rather than later.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you Maria, for your time. I do have one last question. What has been some of the stuff that you've been looking forward to, if it's a local restaurant here, apart from friends and seeing coaches?

MARIA FASSI: Yeah, there is great food around here. There is a good like Mexican place just across the street from here. Local Lime. Their steak tacos are amazing. I've had them twice already this week and might have them again tonight.

So that's one of the places that I been looking forward to go to. In Fayetteville there is a barbecue place called Herman's and it's amazing and I'm just excited to go get some of that as well.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you for your time and good luck this week.

MARIA FASSI: Yeah. Thank you, guys.

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