

NW Arkansas Championship

Thursday, September 23, 2021

Rogers, Arkansas, USA

Pinnacle Country Club

Maria Fassi

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: All right, everyone, welcome inside the Walmart NW Arkansas Championship Presented by P&G virtual media center.

This feels like I feel like one of your busiest weeks of the year. I know you've had a lot of activities going on, but what's it like to be returning to Walmart this year. I had asked Gaby especially with the COVID situation the differences between the two years.

MARIA FASSI: I mean, always very happy to play this event. It's definitely my favorite of the year. We get to come back home. For me this year it's actually home, home, so it's even for special in that regard.

Of course like you were saying before, last year we weren't able to have fans out, so they've been waiting for a couple years to have us back. I know from a lot of people they're thrilled that we're back, that they can come out and watch and support. So I know the roars for the Razorbacks are going to be even louder this year, which is always exciting.

Just very happy for the week. It is a pretty hectic week. There is a lot going on. I have a lot going on personally as well with endeavors outside the golf course. Everything is amazing, everything has been a lot fun, and I'm just happy that we're here.

THE MODERATOR: Some things out of the golf course that we were just talking about off camera was your Fassi and Friends event that you had last night at Top Golf. What has the experience of creating this foundation, to be able to see to come into fruition mean to you last night when you were able to put that event on.

MARIA FASSI: I been working very hard -- well, me and an amazing group of people behind me on setting up the foundation, making sure that every little detail was taken care of and we didn't leave anything for chance.

It was amazing. I mean, it was a dream that I've had for like six or seven years now of starting my own foundation to help just kids with special needs and underprivileged

kids come and play the game of golf, and do it together, do it with kids who are maybe more fortunate than others and have each other learn from different experiences that we can all bring to the table.

So it's been a lot work, but I have, like I said before, an amazing group of people behind me that definitely made this happen. Last night was the first event and we raised a lot of money and awareness and people were very excited about what they were doing.

It was pretty cool to see the support of the community, of my own personal sponsors, and this event. They are letting me do a clinic this afternoon as well, so going to have about 50 kids come. There is a lot of good happening this week, so I think I might be more excited about everything that's going outside the golf course than maybe playing.

But just very happy that this is how the week has started. Of course looking forward for Friday though.

THE MODERATOR: You've been to Pinnacle many times, as a lot of Razorback alum have. What's it like to be back at this course and just somewhere you feel comfortable playing and just being able to maybe not take as much time out there practicing because of the comfortability you may have.

MARIA FASSI: Yes, I think it's a huge advantage. Of course this is a fairly straightforward golf course, but I've tried to make it a thing that any time that I'm back home I got to come out here and play 18.

Every time that I come I learn about a different break or maybe I take on a different line that's more successful than the ones I been doing in the past. I hit a shot that haven't hit before.

So I feel like having this golf course basically in my backyard is definitely a huge advantage and gets me comfortable with other shots maybe that we wouldn't really be able to hit in the two days we have of practice rounds.

So, yeah, very happy. Course is looking good, as good as always. I like the event in September. The weather has been perfect. The greens are rolling great. I think it's going to be a very fun next three days for us.



THE MODERATOR: You say the weather has been perfect. I did not plan for some of the wind and the cold because I expected some hotter temperatures. Other than that, I think it's perfect. I think we have some questions down here.

Q. (Regarding the foundation.)

MARIA FASSI: Yes, I have a cousin who is my age and we grew up together and tried to do as many things as we could together. She has brain paralysis and is mute and deaf, so a lot of the things that maybe me as a younger kid would try to do with her we couldn't do or whatnot.

Few years back she came and watched me play a golf tournament in Mexico, and she wanted to learn how to play the game and she's like, This is something that can bring us even closer together. She set her head to it and she's now been playing golf for six years.

It's been very inspiring to see her transition and how she's overcome so many different things that she's had to do to be able to play the game and stuff. So it's cool to see how her playing has also impacted the community around her and the people at the golf course where she practices.

I know it's done a lot of good for her, for others, for her family. So that was kind of the reason why I wanted to do something similar, because I know how many kids maybe want to play the game and feel like they're not welcome or they don't have the opportunity to do it.

I just wanted to make sure that everybody feels like they have a spot at the Maria Fassi Foundation and with the Fassi's Friends clinic to come, have fun, enjoy themselves, and while they're at it, just play some golf as well.

Q. (No microphone.)

MARIA FASSI: Like I was saying before, we have an amazing group of people behind the scenes that take care of everything. We've partnered with the First Tee, and they've been an amazing support system as well.

They have a bunch of coaches and the facility as well to where we can have our clinics and make sure that all the kids are being taken care of and that they feel they belong there and they're included.

So I'm not super worried about that. I am personally going to try to be there as much as I can. Of course with our schedules that's maybe not a possibility all the time, but it's definitely going to be something that if I have a chance I'm 100% going to be there and show up for the kids.

Q. (No microphone.)

MARIA FASSI: That's one of the many goals and dreams that we have with the foundation. We want to make sure that not only they have a place to practice and get to know other people and other kids, but also a place to compete. I think that's a lot of fun, and they don't really get to do anything like that.

So I want to make sure we have a pretty inclusive event, and it's something that we are planning down the road and hopefully we can make it happen.

Q. Congrats on the start of your foundation. I wanted to ask if this was something that you knew before you started your LPGA career that you wanted to do this early? Because I know a lot of players don't really get into this until the latter part of their career. Also, how much Lorena influenced you in this regard.

MARIA FASSI: I've always, like I said, been dreaming about the foundation for like six years now. It was definitely something that I knew was going to do. I didn't really every set a timeline for when to do it, but I feel like maybe even me not being as successful on tour as I had anticipated or as much as I would've liked to see my game be, made me realize that I was maybe lacking on a lot of the other things.

The foundation was going to give me that purpose that maybe I was missing on the golf course, so I think that's why I decided to maybe start it at maybe such an early time in my career. This is only my third season on tour and I'm already starting with a foundation. There is a lot going on to make it happen. There is a lot of work, and maybe it could be said that I should be focusing on golf or whatever.

I know personally I needed just something bigger than myself to play for, and I know now I have that extra motivation to raise awareness and of course money for the kids that are going to be part of the clinic.

I think it could be very, very good for my career, because I am definitely happier than I've ever been, and I have a bigger purpose than I ever have.

Q. I wondered if last night's event at Top Golf gave you a jolt of energy going into the week?

MARIA FASSI: For sure. I mean, I got to meet a lot of very cool kids and their families and got to know a little bit more about their stories. I mean, just seeing them hit a golf shot and the joy that that brings to them, I mean, I wish everybody had the opportunity to witness that. It's so

special.

We call them kids with special needs because they really are special. They really bring something different than maybe most of us can bring to the table. It was so cool to see some of the other younger kids interact with them and have fun and high five.

It is very special and refreshing, and at this time and day where we don't really ever see a lot of happy things happening anymore. So it was definitely very refreshing, and I got emotional a few times. It was an amazing night. I was very happy to be able to kind of put that together and see how it turned out.

THE MODERATOR: As we begin to wrap it up here, you talk in the new DriveOn spot that we were able to launch today that will go into the Golf Channel broadcast about the choice to be fearless. With everything you've been doing with the foundation, what you were able to do last night, how important is it to still choose to be fearless as you continue through the rest of the season, as you continue with your career, and growing this foundation?

MARIA FASSI: I mean, it's everything. I think it kind of ties back to the last question on why I started it so early. I saw an opportunity and I took it. I mean, I feel like we -- like I was saying in the DriveOn, we always just focus so much on the that or the what ifs or what could happen and we forget about just doing it and figuring out what to do next.

I think just being fearless and staying true to yourself is key. I try to do it as much as I can in my personal life. I know for me it brings the best in me, so I'm going to make sure that I stay on top of that. If it brings the best of me, it's going to do it personally and also on the golf course.

Maybe I'm going to see the success I want on the golf course, but most importantly just enjoying myself out here and making sure I impact many people and that my presence is noted.

THE MODERATOR: With that, thank you for your time today and congratulations on the successful event.

MARIA FASSI: Thank you.

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