

NW Arkansas Championship

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Pinnacle Country Club

Gaby Lopez

Press Conference



Walmart
NW ARKANSAS
CHAMPIONSHIP
PRESENTED BY **P&G**

THE MODERATOR: All right, welcome inside the media center here at the Walmart NW Arkansas Championship presented by P&G. I am pleased to be joined by Miss Gaby Lopez here, an LPGA winner herself.

Welcome back to another homeland for you in this community that has embraced you since you were a student here. What's it like to be back at this event for you?

GABY LOPEZ: Thanks, Megan. Of course Arkansas just has a very special place in my heart. It's just super exciting to be back for another year. Feels forever since my first time I played, but at the same time it feels like the first time.

I'm super excited. I love the community. Everyone loves it. Everyone is so welcome. Everyone speaks very highly in the LPGA, within the players of this event, what it means for everyone to reconnect to their host families, and just the support we get here is unbelievable.

Q. What's your favorite part about returning to this community?

GABY LOPEZ: For sure just seeing all the faces and getting to meet new faces. You know, just coming back to all the people that supported me when I was in college, and how it means to them also to represent the Razorbacks community out here.

It's a dream come true. I still get chills for the first time I played the event as an amateur. This was my first stage for the LPGA and getting taste of what it was as an amateur. I think the LPGA gives amazing opportunities to these young women to kind of feel what it's going to be like in the future if this is what they really truly want.

It was for me for sure. So I look back and I'm super grateful for the opportunity when I started dreaming big. Here I am today as a professional player, and still pursuing my childhood dream.

Q. Is this your first time being back in this community

since the Olympics?

GABY LOPEZ: Right.

Q. I feel like the community here, the email I received, hopefully the ones you've received were super supportive of your Olympic journey as well. What's it mean to represent them on a global stage like the Olympic Games as well?

GABY LOPEZ: I just feel this golf is getting bigger and bigger. The stages we get to play are just amazing, the opportunities we're getting on TV and coverage are not only inspiring U.S. or local communities or countries, but global sport now.

It's been amazing. Yeah, the community has been amazing to me, my host family, Jen and Doug. I get to go get back as well to the University of Arkansas, the women's golf team. I love to spend a couple minutes with them during practice and kind of telling them what I did. Yesterday I played the practice round with Maria Marin, which is an amazing Colombian young player. You know, very excited for her to be here this week.

But, yeah, it's just reconnecting and bringing the memories back long time ago from now. Still kind of feels like very, very close.

Q. Just what would you say are your hopes for this week?

GABY LOPEZ: Well, of course I've always dreamt of the win here. It will be a dream come true. At the same time, over the past couple years in my career I learned that sometimes the more you want it sometimes the more away it goes from you.

Yeah, just sticking to my game plan, enjoying, and just having this grateful attitude out there on the golf course because it's probably the place that I love the most playing on the LPGA, and I have so much feelings about this place, and memories.

So to me, just having that attitude all week, it's already a win for me.

Q. You mentioned playing with other young golfers

... when all is said, we're done.®



and at the University of Arkansas talking to the women's golf team there. What would you say to inspire a young high school, middle school girl who is looking to get into golfing?

GABY LOPEZ: For sure. I would say that amateur players and professional players are not very different. I didn't feel a transition that drastically when I turned pro. Just the fact that I felt and I already was acting as a professional while I was in college, while I was in high school. I feel that when you feel like you're a professional player because you're doing the small things right, when you're committed, when you don't have distractions with your phone during practice, you put your phone away, when you set times and you're practicing your short game, your putting, and everything very specifically and you have a practice plan and you act as a professional player, you feel like win.

I would say don't wait until the LPGA comes. Don't wait until Epson Tour comes. You can already start acting as a professional while you're 18, 20 years old.

Q. I just had a question. I noticed you playing with Maria yesterday. Saw you guys going out. How did that come about and was there anything that you learned from her or hope that she learned from you?

GABY LOPEZ: Yeah, for sure. Actually my brother works with her, so they have a good team around Maria. I think they're doing a good job with managing the expectations on the course and the media and the distractions that come along.

So my brother, he was like, hey, would you like to play with her? I was like, of course. I would be honored to do it again. When I was in college I did it with Stacy.

Yeah, we got to text back also with Shauna, the head coach. She said, hey, would you like to do it? I said, of course. Just kind of doing it for 12 holes yesterday, I think what I learned from her is this innocence that comes with golf. Not expecting and getting surprised by hitting a good golf shot or hitting it close or just being amazed by what we do every day.

Sounds very powerful and magical when we take it for granted, we do it for so many years, so many weeks in a row. Yeah, I think that kind of came with me.

I'm really hoping she just comes out there. I said to her, hey, just go play fearless golf. There is nothing to lose right now. You have done amazing as a rookie freshman in college, and I think she's mature. It's just going step by step and getting surprised every week with her golf game and mentality and how she handles herself on the golf

course.

I think she'll do just fine.

Q. Two questions: How important do you think having this event in the backyard of Arkansas is important for the college program?

GABY LOPEZ: Oh, I think it's huge. Just the fact that you get the chance of playing an LPGA, having the opportunity if you're the best player on the team year after year. It also is motivation. But it's very strong recruitment tool for the team I guess.

Not every university has the pleasure and opportunity to compete against the best of the best in the world. As an amateur you're always trying to see where the biggest stage or best stage for you to kind of see where you're at and what can you improve, what can you practice.

So, yeah, I feel that as a player, it just comes with how big you can dream, how much you can see yourself in these stages more and more until you can hold the trophy.

I think it's a really powerful tool. I'm forever thankful for the University of Arkansas to have given me this for three years when I was in college.

Q. Then I don't know if you saw the news of Ally announcing her retirement at the end this year. You have had arcs in terms of age, number of titles, how long you've been out here. Did that take you by surprise? What was the reaction?

GABY LOPEZ: I've talked to Ally the past couple years, and she's someone very admirable in her career in how she handles herself on and off the golf course. She's very strong in her opinions about how she is as a woman.

I think sometimes we get caught in the role that on the LPGA bubble sometimes we think we are golfer trying to play the role of a woman; we are women trying to play the role of golfers.

To me, that's exactly her. You know, she has very defined her plan how she always wanted to kind of reach her top potential. She's done it. She's an amazing player. I'm going to miss her. Yeah, I've played with her since I was 13, 14 years old.

Her career is very admirable. The way she played this year, yeah, surprising that you can walk away from the game when you're probably playing the best golf of your life.

At the same time, I think that freed her up. Yeah, I think -- I don't know when is my time, but, yeah, it's probably going to come sooner than later.

Q. Obviously talked about it, Gaby, being able to be a role model in this community and mentor young players. Also just being a role model the Latina community in general with it being Hispanic Heritage Month. What does that mean to you to be somebody that people look up to and some people want to emulate on and other the golf course?

GABY LOPEZ: Yeah, you know, the Latina community here in Arkansas and the U.S. is getting stronger and stronger. Seeing these Latinas having top roles in companies and sports and all these different platforms in order to inspire the younger generations, it's a blessing.

To me it's a big responsibility because I feel that that's how I got inspired. Just having that spark, I think Maria said it last week, when you see someone that looks like you and that acts like you do it, it becomes much easier for you to dream you can do it. That was what Lorena was for me.

Yeah, I'm forever grateful for the opportunity to do my best and still inspire someone else. Yeah, I feel it's a blessing.

Q. For you to be able to mentor in such a direct way with the University of Arkansas, with the young Latinas playing to the University of Arkansas like you did, what does that mean to you?

GABY LOPEZ: Yeah, it's amazing. You know, I was the first Latina into the University of Arkansas golf program. Emily Tubert was the one that kind of held my hand and dragged me into the program.

I was able to bring another friend and then just kind of more men and women, just girls and boys starting to come to the University of Arkansas. So it's amazing how from not knowing where Arkansas was on the map, now it's a big hub for the Latina community, yeah, in order to play golf.

Also from Spain, we have a couple girls from there, so it's just really amazing how this little town can give so much to just dare you dream big and give you every single tool you need in order to be successful.

Q. Obviously played great in Cincinnati last week. I know that's a result that you've been waiting for for a little bit. How do you take that and build on it this week?

GABY LOPEZ: Yeah, I feel that I've played probably the

most solid golf of my career. This year has been a little frustrating because I've made so many cuts, I've been very close to have good weeks, and I have not been able to close them.

And you know, last week was great. I think what I've taken from that week to take it on, is just trying to be more loose out there. Not trying to control how I'm playing, my position, not trying to control the rankings.

At the end of the day, it's just me literally just being a little kinder to myself and trying to be okay with unperfect golf. Sometimes when you're playing so good you want everything to click and everything to be perfect.

But, yeah, it's a matter of being okay with missing, being okay with having those nerves as well.

So, yeah, I think I'm making more peace with things I didn't used to make peace with.

Q. I just want to follow up really quick. Fascinating what you were saying about a women playing golf. What about the goals right now, the big goals you're still chasing as a player? I guess have you thought about how you'll know when it's your time?

GABY LOPEZ: Well, honestly, I talked to my husband and I was a little pressured about just not knowing where I was, -- when I wanted to say good-bye to the game. I'm not close to saying good-bye to the game by the way.

But just I think to me, just having a plan makes me feel more at peace, even if that plan changes. Having at least two full years more on the LPGA 100%, and then reevaluate.

To be honest, it will be a dream come true if I close my career in LA 2028. I feel that would be very -- is a stage where I can honor my career, honor the amount of years and hours I put into my life, into the game, and trying to do it one more time. That would be amazing.

I'm not sure if that plan is going to be written or set in stone. It could change. But potentially just having a star and having like a guide and a path, but still having goals, having, yeah, just something to work for and still motivate yourself.

If you still play your golf and you kind of determine golf to -- when you want to retire, you can get in a bad stretch and so easily say good-bye to the game in the wrong time.

Being able to have something to work for, motivate yourself, and have my team around me exactly on the

same page, it's very important, because everyone has helped me to get where I am and everyone needs to get notice of what it looks like. Yeah, it gives me goosebumps just thinking of that stage of being a good-bye for me.

Q. So the 17 hole-out here is known to be the loudest hole in golf. What is it like to hear the calling of the Hogs as you're walking up. Does to motivate you?

GABY LOPEZ: It's something I look forward all year long. You know, when I was in college you get all the people, all these cheers and roars. It's not only you playing, but feels like everyone is playing at the same time.

The community, they love -- doesn't matter your nationality, where you're from, they love the Razorbacks and the Hog community. It makes you feel part of something bigger than yourself.

I think that makes you very proud to keep on having that red shirt and calling the Hogs every year with all your heart.

Q. Kind of following up on this from the community aspect, with this tournament, when we travel across the country there are some tournaments that are in big markets. This tournament here, it's its 18th year. It's the biggest thing that's going on here, right? The community embraces it. What's it like coming to tournaments like this? Not only this is your home, college home, but from an LPGA player to see the community just really embrace events like these in smaller markets?

GABY LOPEZ: It's unbelievable. We faced as a tour places where probably the members are not very happy to have shut their golf course for two weeks and probably don't want us back there sometimes.

But it's really amazing how this community, pretty much the whole community stops for more than a week to get prepared to face all the challenges that comes with organization, with the volunteers, with people that are not even on the golf course. Just restaurants, everyone is looking forward to this week and having us.

That's why I think the LPGA players and staff and everyone loves to come back. Because we feel welcome. Because we feel like we are want to be seen. We wanted to present a stage where women's golf can be at its peak, right?

So just having the opportunity and that feeling behind just makes you come and play and do your best.

Yeah, keep on doing what we're doing.

Q. One last one. You talked about playing with Maria yesterday, mentoring her. She's playing here this week and then playing at Blessings next week. These next two weeks, Northwest Arkansas will be on the national stage. Shauna does a great job taking the players out here. How much does it mean to see the future generation of Hogs, right, playing or being out here and then preparing themselves to play a college event next week also on national TV?

GABY LOPEZ: Right. Like I said, the University of Arkansas has gone to big stages and keep getting bigger and bigger. It's crazy to think that Mr. Tyson is also doing an amazing job at Blessings with the renovations and the changes they've done to the golf course in order to be on national TV.

The commitment he has to both women's and men's teams, it's unbelievable. Shauna and Mike can say it as well. It's really cool to have the support of big people, big entrepreneurs, big companies, to showcase what the young talent has to offer.

And they do have a lot to offer. You'll see what Maria is capable of. She's an amazing ball hitter. Carries herself very smoothly, very nice on the golf course.

So, yeah, I think it's very exciting to be part of the Razorback community these days.

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