

AIG Women's Open

Thursday, 20 August, 2020

Sophia Popov

Press Conference



OLIVIA McMILLAN: Sophia Popov, what an incredible first round from you here at the AIG Women's Open, a 70, only player under par so far. Can you talk to us about your secrets to Royal Troon?

SOPHIA POPOV: I wish I had secrets. I'm not sure what the secrets are except for honestly good shot-making today. Yeah, I definitely don't -- usually I'm pretty humble about my game, but today I honestly just made a lot of really good shots. Especially on the front nine, it was really important with the wind into off the right. It was very tough, and I just picked good spots if I did miss the greens. Other than that, just hit a lot of greens in these conditions, actually.

OLIVIA McMILLAN: You qualified into the championship through the Marathon Classic only two weeks ago. Last week you were back in America playing the Symetra Tour. You only arrived in Scotland on Tuesday, one practice round and here you are. What a preparation.

SOPHIA POPOV: Yeah, you know, sometimes -- a couple people said, why aren't you leaving earlier, you're playing the British, and I said, you know what, honestly for the status I have this year, I need to play Symetra events and I need to make sure I'm doing well with those, and so I didn't want to miss too many events, and I said, all right, I'm just going to -- the British to me is a bonus event essentially. I just said, I'm okay with the one practice round. I knew it was only going to be one. I said links golf is links golf, and the conditions change so much anyways that you have to adjust accordingly.

Yeah, I mean, it's crazy. It's a crazy turnaround going from 117 degrees Fahrenheit last week to this, which is just kind of brutal, cold and a lot of wind, but I think sometimes that also obviously reduces your expectations, and I think that's what it did for me and how I was able to play well.

Q. You have a caddie this week, I guess, you're not solo?

SOPHIA POPOV: No, I'm not pulling my trolley this week.

Q. Who is caddying for you this week?

SOPHIA POPOV: Actually my boyfriend Max. He's a trouper. He came, flew up here to caddie this week.

Q. These are really difficult conditions. How important is it to be on your own this week with all of the elements?

SOPHIA POPOV: I mean, obviously it's really important to have someone there, just to even carry the bag. You have so much stuff with you. I don't even know how many times I layered up and unlayered again. And just to have someone to talk to, it's pretty -- it's brutal out there, so just to be talking about something else and just keeping my mind off things, especially when I was playing well, I just wanted someone to talk to me about something totally different than golf, which was great. That's the biggest asset, I think.

Q. I just want to ask one more. You were winning Cactus Tour events not very long ago and now you're at the top of the leaderboard at a major championship. How long did playing throughout this whole thing, this whole pandemic, help get you to where you are right now?

SOPHIA POPOV: I definitely think it was beneficial just because -- just to keep my head in the game and to keep the competitive juices flowing because it is so easy to come back after three or four months of not playing and just being very nervous and not knowing where your game is at. So I knew how I was hitting it, and then it was all about just being -- strategically just being smart on the golf course again and obviously playing something different than desert golf because I've just been playing desert golf so much, just to get used to irons not flying as far everywhere else but Arizona.

Other than that I felt like I had everything down, and then it was just, okay, pick my yardages and go play and be less nervous overall, I think.

Q. Given the circumstances and the weather, where would this rank among the best rounds that you've played in your career? And secondly, did you think that sort of score was possible when you stood on the first tee this morning in the wind?



SOPHIA POPOV: So it honestly ranks up as one of my best rounds ever to be honest because I shot 9-under last week, which score-wise is obviously a better score, but I shot that in perfect conditions and absolute just regular target golf in Phoenix.

Honestly, to connected it to the second question, when I was on the first tee box this morning, I said, oh, my God, anything -- even remotely close to par today is going to be an incredible round. I said, if I can keep it under 5-over par then this is going to be great, and so yeah, I mean, just with the wind blowing in our faces on No. 1, I honestly didn't think I was going to come off the 18th green shooting 1-under par, so I'm extremely happy.

OLIVIA McMILLAN: Given what you just said about the 5-over par being fantastic and now you've had 1-under, how well does this set you up heading into the rest of the championship because things are really probably going to get tougher with the weather.

SOPHIA POPOV: Yeah, I mean, it's nice to kind of get a little bit of a head start. You never know how things are tomorrow and how brutal the weather is going to be. No one can really prepare me for what's going to come tomorrow. It might go totally sideways.

But I'm prepared for that because honestly this is British golf. Like anything can happen at any point. Someone who's not playing very well today can be shooting really well tomorrow even in brutal conditions. So I think it's just keeping it together and knowing that anything can happen at any point, especially with what's coming tomorrow. I don't even know -- I honestly hope that we can even go out with what they're saying in the forecast.

But you know, these courses can take a lot, and the greens are not fast. So we are going to play in probably even more brutal conditions than today. That's just nice to get ahead of the game, I guess.

OLIVIA McMILLAN: You've spoken a lot about playing a lot of desert golf lately but you are German so I'm sure you have a lot of experience playing in the British weather conditions. Do you feel like that gave you a bit of an advantage or at least you knew what to expect and how to hold on mentally today?

SOPHIA POPOV: Yeah, definitely. I've played probably a total of seven or eight British Girls' and British Ams over the years, and also played a British Open, and Germany doesn't have great weather, to be honest. I do know how to play in tough weather conditions.

But yeah, just had -- I mean, honestly had no practice in it

all this year and last year because over in the States we're kind of used to playing in better conditions, or easier conditions.

I kind of was excited for it because I haven't done it in a while, but I know -- I think I know how to keep the ball low and I know how I'm supposed to be playing out here, so it's kind of nice that I went out and was able to do what I could pick out from my memory bank what shots that I hit a while ago and was able to kind of take those experiences and use them towards this week.

OLIVIA McMILLAN: You've walked off the course and we've gone through a lot of very tough conditions but there was a lot of sunshine today, as well, Scotland is really four seasons in one day today, and you're wearing shorts. I think perhaps you're a bit crazy but maybe that was a bit superstitious.

SOPHIA POPOV: Yeah, I started in rain gear, and then the sun came out, and I'm not going to lie, when you're behind the dunes it can get a little bit warmer, and I think all of us were thinking, it's kind of getting a little bit warmer out here, we took our rain gear off, and then the last four holes or so it started getting so cold. But definitely superstitious, so I said, no, I'm not going to put the rain gear on, it's going to get in the way. I said, all right, as long as I'm warm on the top and I have my gloves on and my hands are warm, I'm going to be okay.

I'm trying to be a little bit more tough again. I got too used to Arizona and my blood thinned out, so I'm trying to toughen up.

OLIVIA McMILLAN: Will the waterproofs be back out tomorrow?

SOPHIA POPOV: Most likely.

OLIVIA McMILLAN: Thank you so much for your time. Well played today, and hopefully we see you again tomorrow.

SOPHIA POPOV: Thank you, guys, very much. Appreciate it.

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