

ShopRite LPGA Classic

Presented by Acer

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Galloway, New Jersey, USA

Seaview, A Dolce Hotel

Leona Maguire

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Welcome to the media center for the 2021 ShopRite LPGA Classic presented by Acer. We are joined this afternoon by current Rolex Rankings No. 42 and the undefeated Solheim Cup star, Leona Maguire. Leona, thanks for stopping by today.

LEONA MAGUIRE: Thanks for having me.

Q. We'll start with this event first. You made your pro debut here in 2018 after a historic career at Duke University. Finished in a tie for 15th that year. Had a top 25 last year. Some good finishes, but what does Seaview and the ShopRite tournament mean to you?

LEONA MAGUIRE: Yeah, I think it will always have a special place in his heart. Like you said, it was my first event after I turned pro, and nice to be back here.

This is one of the first courses I've come back to after my rookie year that I've actually been to before and I know the golf course, some the people here. It's kind of like home. It has a linksy feel to it. There are a lot of Irish people in this area.

Yeah, it's just a nice place to come back to year after year.

Q. This is your first LPGA Tour start since the AIG Women's Open. Obviously had your first appearance since the undefeated showing at the Solheim Cup. You had that event in the middle of the break. You put together seven straight top 15 performances before the hiatus. How good of a place is your game in and what have you figured out at the LPGA level to find those results week in and week out?

LEONA MAGUIRE: Yeah, the consistency has been something that I've been very proud of. I think I learned a lot from last year. Made some tweaks at the end of the year. Changed my irons. Went back to graphite shafts. Put on a little bit of distance. Worked on my putting a lot. Sort of and all just coming together quite nicely.

Changed my caddie starting from MEDIHEAL. That's where those top 15s started. Dermot has been a huge help to me as well on the bag keeping me calm and making a few better decisions. It doesn't take much. All these girls are such great players, it doesn't take much to go from a Top 5 to a Top 10 to a Top 40.

I think I've just been saving a few more shots around the greens and not giving away silly mistakes, which has been a big thinking with the consistency.

Q. Back to the Solheim Cup where you went undefeated. You played a big role obviously in Team Europe's victory, and then everyone saw on social media the massive celebrations on your return home to Ireland. Just take us through the festivities, what was it like to get that welcome, and the overall experience to celebrate with friends, family, and fans back home?

LEONA MAGUIRE: Yeah, we had an incredible week at Inverness. It was obviously special for me to be a part of that team. It was something I had dreamed about for a long time, and to get that win, we knew as a team we knew how big of a deal it was, but I don't think I really understood.

I had seen things on Twitter and Instagram and social media of how excited people were back home, but I don't think I fully grasped it. My dad picked me up from the airport in Dublin and stopped by his school on the way down. He's a teacher, and all the kids had prepared poems and dances and songs and all of this, so we stopped for that.

Then I went to bed for a few hours and dad kind of said, yeah, there is something in our local town that evening. I suppose a lot of Olympians and Paralympians had been coming home celebrations like that, so I think it was just another continuation on.

It was fun for me to see how excited everybody was. There hasn't a lot for people to be happy about. I suppose in the last two years sort of rural Ireland has been hit hard



with lockdowns and COVID and all that. It was nice to see people that normally would never watch golf tuned into the Solheim Cup because there was an Irish person involved, and obviously a bonus that you were born.

Yeah, the response was just incredible. Wasn't expecting anything like that. Went through my local town in like a convertible, gold convertible car, and my 94 year old grandmother was in the front waving to everybody. It was fun for me to see her enjoying it so much. It's been a quiet two years for her, so for her to see a lot of people she hadn't seen in a while and everybody sort of congratulating and messaging her. She's on Facebook, she had fun sort of seeing all the messages all around the world were coming from, everybody commenting on things. So that was probably one of the most special things for me.

Q. In those moments it's almost more fun to see the people you're closest to enjoy it. Was that kind of the case?

LEONA MAGUIRE: Yeah, it was so much fun being at Solheim Cup playing in the Solheim Cup, but it was almost just as much fun seeing everybody else enjoy it. The Solheim Cup wasn't about me. It was about whatever I could do for the team. Getting that team win, seeing everybody else, for Beany, the captains, for the rest of my teammates, and then also then coming home and getting -- for everybody else to enjoy as well, it was -- I suppose that is the special thing about Solheim Cup or a Ryder Cup. You're part of something a lot bigger than yourself.

I kind of knew that at that time, but going home I really sort of felt that. Hopefully it's inspired a young generation of Irish players who hopefully someday want to be on the Solheim Cup or even take part in any sport. I don't really care what sport it is, but I think there is a great buzz about the country in general right now about sport and women's sport, and I suppose things like the Solheim Cup and all of that can only help.

Q. You have you come down from that sort when you chase a dream and you reach it, kind of a pinnacle, and then when I win it, it almost takes you to a whole other statusphere. Have you come down? Have you been able to reflect in it at all, or is it one where it's still going to provide some adrenaline for the end of the year?

LEONA MAGUIRE: Yeah, I mean, I would like to think I'll take some confidence from it. It's not something I'll dwell on too much. Obviously it's back to business this week and it's back to regular life on tour.

Nobody cares about the Solheim Cup when I tee it up on

Friday morning. Still have to go out and play golf. You're only as good as your next round. Yeah, I take the confidence from that knowing I can compete with the best golfers in the world. You dream about those moments and you practice for those moments, and you don't know how you are going to deal with that until you actually end up in that situation. Can you hole those putts when you need to? Can you pull off the shots when the moment is right?

Was able to do that at the Solheim Cup, and I suppose it's just a case of bringing that back to regular LPGA events week in and week out and taking all I can from being around so many great players, my teammates, Beany, vice captains. Yeah, it was a big goal of mine to be on the Solheim Cup, but there is still a lot of golf to be checked off the list.

I think that's the good thing about being home. You kind of get brought down to earth quickly being at home. It was nice to be around friends and family. They'll definitely not let me get too big of a head.

Q. First of all, congratulations on your Solheim Cup success.

LEONA MAGUIRE: Thank you.

Q. Sort of similar to what you were saying there, have you found things have changed for you since the Solheim Cup in terms of recognition or even coming to the event this week? Have you found anything different now that you've had that Solheim Cup experience?

LEONA MAGUIRE: Yeah, I mean, I think the response at home was not something I was expecting. I think the fact that so many people watched it that would not normally watch golf, and even when I was out practicing the past few weeks, a lot more people coming up. Usually I can just go practice, and every once in a while someone will come up and recognize me.

There was a lot more people looking for pictures and wanting to talk about the Solheim Cup and things like that. Same when I went to see my coach, Shane, at his golf club. When I was leaving one of the days it took a while to get out of the car park because people were coming over and just so excited and wanted to tell me they watched and how proud they were and get a picture.

Yeah, I went back into my secondary school as well. Seeing everybody, it was seven years since I'd been back there. Yeah, it's not something I was expecting, but at the same time, it's nice to sort of share that experience with everybody, especially seeing as we didn't have all that

support over in Inverness that we potentially could have.

I would imagine quite a few Irish people would've traveled over, so it's nice that they sort of got to share in that a little bit since I got home.

Q. What is the adjustment like going back into just a regular tour event this week? I'm sure Solheim Cup is obviously the pinnacle of team golf, but what's it like coming back for this week?

LEONA MAGUIRE: Yeah, I mean, it's nice to see all the girls again. Haven't seen them in three weeks. Yeah, I mean, it's back to business really. Get back to my routines. This week is a little different. There are more pro-ams than usual.

Yeah, it's nice to come back to a course that I know, get back to my routines. Yeah, try and act as if nothing has changed, because really nothing has changed. Yeah, get back to what I do best. Sort of keep my head down and take care of business that way, sort of quietly and effectively.

Q. Just a quick one for you. How different a player are you to the woman who turned up here in 2018?

LEONA MAGUIRE: Wow, I would like to think I have a bit more experience under my belt since then. It's been three years have gone by pretty quick. Obviously that year and a half on Symetra under my belt, which I learned a lot. And then the last year and a half on LPGA, the same.

The big thing I'll take from Solheim Cup is feeling like I belong out here. Bit by bit this year I felt more and more comfortable every week. I suppose when I was here back in 2018 I was still probably kind of in awe of a lot of the girls out here.

They were the girls I watched on TV, was still watching them on TV. A little bit of probably star struck up and down the range and on the putting green and all that. It's nice to sort of be a little bit more comfortable out here three years on. A lot of familiar faces and same players I play with week in and week out.

My game is also in really good shape leaving college. It was still quite consistent all the rest, but I would like to hope I have a few more shots in my bag than I had three years ago. Putting has improved and added a bit of extra yardage.

I had a local caddie that week as well, and then I have Dermot this week. Yeah, a few things have changed, but a lot is still the same as well at the same time.

Q. Now that your feet are back on the ground or almost back on the ground after that great week at Inverness, what kind of goals do you set for yourself now? Going very well in the Rookie of the Year, Player of the Year standings. Do you set yourself any goals that you can tell us about or are they all secret?

LEONA MAGUIRE: No, I mean, I'd like to finish off the season as strong as I possibly can. The season has been going well so far. If the season ended today I would be still incredibly happy with how -- I couldn't have asked for a better season. Still my rookie year technically.

We've got five events left. Try and put myself in contention in as many of them as I possibly can. A lot of that momentum from Solheim and off the back of the majors, Evian and British Open and all those events. Yeah, I mean, it would be sort of cherry on top to finish off the year with a win.

If I do, great. If not, take all the experiences from this year and bring them into next year. I've never been one to worry about rankings or any of that sort stuff.

I'll just keep sort of playing my golf, trying to do as well as I possibly can, and let Player of the Year and Rookie of the Year and all that sort of look after itself.

Q. Just a couple detail questions. What school does your dad teach at?

LEONA MAGUIRE: Castle Tara National School.

Q. Nice. And then the little town that you said?

LEONA MAGUIRE: Ballyconnell.

Q. Okay. Very nice.

LEONA MAGUIRE: There is only like -- it's a small town. There is one stop light. You go over the bridge and you turn right, and we did like a loop around and then back to the golf club where I grew up playing. There is a hotel and like a little bit of a stage they had set up. We sort of did some chatting and answered questions and stuff like that, and then we had a little bit of food and music after.

Q. Awesome. And last one I have for you: We saw the fist pumps at Solheim. Maybe a little more energy than maybe fans are used to seeing from you. I'm sure it was greatly appreciated. Is that something that -- first of all, where did you learn that from? I had never seen it, and I've seen you since you turned pro. And two, could we see maybe a few more subdued versions of it

out here?

LEONA MAGUIRE: Yeah, I mean, we'll see. I suppose that's something that -- I think my brother tweeted that I'd been practicing them in the mirror all that week. No, it's not something I planned. I think the lack of crowds, European crowds, I guess, at Solheim, we had to be each other's own biggest cheerleaders. I don't know, maybe some of Mel had rubbed off on me at that point.

But, no, it's Solheim Cup. It's a different dynamic to every other week. It's a lot of the fun playing match play. Match play, that one-on-one thing is a bit of a different dynamic. Yeah, who knows. I suppose holing a birdie putt on the 5th hole this week won't be quite the same as doing it at a Solheim Cup, but I'm excited to have crowds back this week hopefully cheering for every shot, which will be nice again.

Yeah, it's just nice when you saw that emotion from Shane Lowry too at the Ryder Cup. Yeah, doesn't come out all that often, but if there is a reason to this week, why not?

Q. I'm sure plenty of people would love to see it on the 54th hole on Sunday.

LEONA MAGUIRE: Absolutely. If I have a putt to be in contention on Sunday, I'm sure there will be a few fist pumps.

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