

ShopRite LPGA Classic

Presented by Acer

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Galloway, New Jersey, USA
Seaview, A Dolce Hotel

Meaghan Francella

Denise Francella

Press Conference



(DriveOn video shown)

DENISE: Wow.

LEIA SCHWARTZ: Meaghan, I wish I was there to give a hug after seeing that again. The story is so beautiful, you and Denise and your relationship and just really how it's developed after the past few months.

So Meaghan, to start with you, obviously we've been really excited to share your story for a while now. How does it feel to see everything come together and be shared with the world?

MEAGHAN FRANCELLA: Yeah, it's just an honor to be part of the DriveOn campaign because I've seen all the -- seen every story come out and it's just been so nice to just have it released finally.

I've been holding it in and we've been going obviously back and forth with edits. It's just really nice to see it come together. The team did an amazing job. I can't thank everybody enough for capturing my story and our journey through everything.

LEIA SCHWARTZ: And Denise, what's it been like for you, just seeing the support for your story and for Meaghan as well?

DENISE: It's been unbelievable. I mean, I've watched that about ten times today and every time I've cried and I see something different.

The people from the LPGA that have just supported her, it's been incredible. I'm just so grateful.

Thank you for telling the story.

LEIA SCHWARTZ: Thank you for letting us tell it really. Roberta always likes to say a DriveOn story is an act of trust, and we just really want to say thank you for trusting us with this.

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LEIA SCHWARTZ: This morning we launched our latest DriveOn piece featuring former LPGA Tour player and current LPGA professional Meaghan Francella.

I'm so excited to be joined here by Meaghan, who's teeing it up in this week's ShopRite LPGA Classic presented by Acer, her mom, Denise, and also Roberta Bowman.

Before we get too far, I'm going to let Roberta give us an introduction.

ROBERTA BOWMAN: Hello, everyone. For those of you who may not be familiar with DriveOn, it is the LPGA's platform for telling the stories of our players. Since we launched DriveOn in 2019, we have told somewhere between 30 and 40 of these stories. Usually we condense them down to about 30 seconds.

That was just impossible in Meaghan's case. This is the rare exception where we took just a few more minutes to share the complexity and the many layers of interest that is Meaghan Francella's DriveOn story.

Because the story itself changed. We thought it was going to be a story about resilience and about discovering your passion as a teacher and about the amazing opportunity she has later to compete once again in one of the LPGA's major tournaments.

It is that, but it's so much more. You know, sometimes when you tell a story life gets in the way, and that's what happened in this case.

So this is also a story about perspective and wisdom. It's a story about strength and vulnerability. It's a story about loyalty and love.

Leia, roll the tape.



Meaghan, the preparation to get back to the KPMG Women's PGA and everything that happened the past few months and teeing it up this week at the ShopRite LPGA Classic presented by Acer, how has your perspective changed?

MEAGHAN FRANCELLA: I just want to go out there and have some fun. I spent a lot of time preparing for this week and also getting really for KPMG.

It came up fast, like real fast. Before I knew it it's like, oh, when you are going to Atlantic City? Oh, God, three days from now.

So my perspective is definitely different. I am just really excited to play golf. I don't know if I've ever felt this excited to get back and play again. It's really fun to see everybody. You know, when we were driving in my mom is like, wow, this is exciting. We're doing this again.

I'm like, whoa, whoa, whoa relax. This is a couple times this year, and we'll see what happens for next year.

Yeah, I'm really excited to get back. I think the DriveOn story just says it all. The support that I have had getting prepared for this week has been incredible. My lesson book has been pretty full and I'm trying to fit people in, and they're like, don't worry about it. You have to practice.

And just my friends are all texting me this week and just saying, you know, we can't wait to see you play this week. Group of people from work have made t-shirts for this week with my face on it, so that should be funny.

But, yeah, I'm just really happy. I think that is probably the best thing I can say.

LEIA SCHWARTZ: Definitely excited to see pictures of everyone with the shirts and your face on it.

MEAGHAN FRANCELLA: Yeah.

LEIA SCHWARTZ: Denise, I know we talked about we have another supplemental piece on our LPGA Women's Network which goes a little bit more into the journey with you and Meaghan, especially the past few months, and you spoke about how excited you were to have those car rides again and the work you put in to be able to be back on site with Meaghan.

What does it mean to be here and see her inside the ropes again?

DENISE FRANCELLA: Yesterday I walked nine holes and it was so surreal. I can't believe we have gotten to this

point. I never thought I'd ever see her play again and I've gotten this opportunity to see her play.

It's been my goal when I was sick, when she found out she was playing the KPMG was to get better so that I could come. Things just worked out. I was able to get fewer chemo and my surgery got moved up, radiation got moved up.

So this is what I worked toward and it's the best feeling to watch her play golf. I loved watching -- I think I went to every basketball practice in high school. I just love watching her play, and to see her back here and playing happy golf. She's having fun playing, so it's so special for me.

ROBERTA BOWMAN: Can we just pause on that for a moment? I want to give a shout out to KPMG Women's PGA as well as the ShopRite LPGA Classic presented by Acer.

But for them, we wouldn't be here today having this conversation, this vision and this dream of Meaghan playing competitive golf again at a major no less. It's really because of that incredible opportunity.

So, you know, we have got the best partners in the world at the LPGA. I just wanted to recognize that as well.

DENISE FRANCELLA: Most definitely.

LEIA SCHWARTZ: So speaking of our partners, this week we're at the ShopRite LPGA Classic presented by Acer.

Meaghan, you told me this week is like a hometown event for you. Why is that and what kind of support are you expecting? You mentioned the shirts with your face on it.

MEAGHAN FRANCELLA: Yeah, this has always been one of the closest events we played to my house in Port Chester, and we used to have a lot of people come down and drive down from there. You know, couple people from Port Chester are casino lovers, so they would come stay at that time hotel and gamble a little bit and come out to the tee times. Couple straight flushes here and there maybe to top off the week.

But I have sent out a number of tickets this week to not only my former students at the Dormie Network and Hidden Creek down the street, but a lot of my Philadelphia cricket members are coming.

I think I sent over 60 tickets out to people and I know I'm missing a few because people have bought tickets on their own as well. So I know I'll definitely have a lot support

here, which is great.

Obviously my mom is here, which is fun.

And then just a lot of students are coming to see me play, which will be exciting for them. They're all so excited. It just makes me feel good that I'm doing something that is making them happy, too. That's really kind of what this all is about.

LEIA SCHWARTZ: Definitely. I think for your journey and our LPGA professionals, too, being able to have that experience with you inside the ropes and your students seeing that you've done this, you can do it, and being able to bring that perspective back, too, is really important.

So Roberta, back to you. You produced a lot of these DriveOn stories, and always say that you learn something from each of our LPGA players and their personal stories. What have you learned from this piece?

ROBERTA BOWMAN: Fundamentally this is a love story. It's a love story between mother and daughter. It's a love story with the incredible network of support that Meaghan has had with her friends on the LPGA Tour.

I actually couldn't keep track of how many Hall of Famers were in those pictures, but they are generous, caring women. Meaghan has earned that friendship and support.

It's a love story of what Meaghan has done to stay in the game of golf. Frankly there is nothing she hasn't done from picking the range at Westchester to obviously caddieing, playing on tour, organizing the amateur golf association and now finding her love of teaching.

It's clear to me Meaghan loves golf, and what we learned from this process is golf loves Meaghan, too.

MEAGHAN FRANCELLA: Webby had said the only job I didn't do in the golf business was superintendent. (Laughter.)

ROBERTA BOWMAN: You're still young, Meaghan.

MEAGHAN FRANCELLA: There is still time.

Q. Good to be with all of you today. Meaghan, good to talk with you again. We talked last week. When I heard this story in its full detail I really felt like I had to get on. Congratulations, and I think you have a future after teaching as a writer. I hope you embrace that at some point.

MEAGHAN FRANCELLA: Thank you.

Q. Denise, just curious, seeing the numbers of women who are friendly with Meaghan and offered help to you during your time of need, what does that mean to you, that Meaghan can mobilize all these people to make sure you're okay?

DENISE FRANCELLA: I know I was so glad and so lucky that she had the support. They've been life -- well, it's been a journey since she's been on the LPGA, and they've been so supportive of everything she's done, whether she's down in Florida and playing, but when this all happened they just reached out.

I am just so glad she wasn't alone. I didn't realize how hard it hit her until I really saw the video, so I'm so grateful. And there were so many. It wasn't one, it wasn't two; there were so many.

We are so lucky she has the support of LPGA and all the friends that are lifelong friends. Very grateful.

Q. Meaghan, how have you accumulated such a following over the years? Even this week and at the KPMG you'll have a lot of fans there, too. What does that all mean to you?

MEAGHAN FRANCELLA: Yeah, I mean, it's -- you know, I build relationships. It's just something I love to do, and I just try to surround myself with really good people, nice people.

I feel like I have a really good core group of friends that are just great people. I mean, I'm staying with Missy who caddies for Brittany Lincicome this week. Missy and I have stayed together for a long time. It's like the band is back together we keep saying.

They keep making fun of me. Like it's nothing strange. It's just -- I like to be around good people, and the support that I had at my last job, at the Dormie Network, was incredible. I can't even explain it.

And the support that I have from the cricket members are incredible as well. Only in the short time that I've been there I feel like I've known everybody there for a while. Just a testament to Jim Smith, the director of golf there. He really -- I mean, Joe, you know, Jim very well, but he puts an incredible staff together and he wants good people on staff surrounded by good people.

I feel like I'm just really fortunate to be part of that team, so just really excited for the week. You know, everybody is coming out. Jim will be here Friday with John, our director of instruction. So it'll be nice to see everybody.

Q. Just another question about your history at the ShopRite. What's been the best part of it for you on the course, off the course, and what's it like to be back?

MEAGHAN FRANCELLA: I mean, just like I said, it's so close to home so it felt like a home event. The golf course is easy to walk, thank God for me this week because I'm a little out of walking shape with playing.

So I just -- the golf course suits my game nice nicely. It's not super long, which is great for me. I hit it -- been hitting it pretty straight lately, which is good.

The greens are perfect. You hit them in the middle of the green, you can have a 15-foot putt all day and you attack where you can.

I feel like my game is in a really good spot. Probably better than it's been in a long time, even when I stopped playing. I played with a couple people that I know over the last few weeks that knew me when I played and they were like, God, you're hitting it better than you did when you stopped playing.

I'm like, I know. It's amazing what happens when the pressure is off. I stopped playing because I didn't want to play for my paycheck anymore and I wanted some more stability. I have that now, so the pressure is off almost.

I mean, I'm not saying I'm not going to be nervous this week because I'm going to be. It's just you have a different kind of pressure this week. It's more I want to do well for everybody else. I want to show them that I can still play. I know I can still play. It's now just a matter of just getting out of my own way.

Q. So there is no expectations, just playing well for yourself and your friends and mom?

MEAGHAN FRANCELLA: I mean, there is expectations. I don't think I would enter a tournament unless I felt like I could actually win or play well.

So the expectation level is there. I mean, John from cricket, has been saying to me, this comeback is going to be a good story. It's going to be a good story. He's just been planting that in my head for the last month. Getting me out to play at 6:00 at night when I've been teaching for ten hours, maybe tired. He's like, let's go play nine holes.

My coach Tom Patri has been texting me. For the last couple weeks I've driven down to see him. He said, just go out there and have fun. He goes, don't have any

expectations, but he goes, I expect you to have a good showing at these two events you play in.

So it's in there. The fire is still there. I can tell you that. I mean, I still get frustrated if I don't hit a shot the way I know I can. The expectation level is definitely different, but still there if that makes any sense.

Q. Right. And Denise, how do you feel about all that? What do you expect from Meaghan this week?

DENISE FRANCELLA: I hope I see a lot of smiles out there. I just love seeing her play happy golf. You know, at the end of her tournament time she wasn't enjoying it as much as I know she loves golf.

You can see from the whole DriveOn that golf has been such a part of her game. Just to see her go out and enjoy herself is going to be the greatest gift for me, to see her have fun again, you know, and love what she is doing.

MEAGHAN FRANCELLA: This is Denise's Super Bowl, okay?

DENISE FRANCELLA: I never thought I would get to see this again.

MEAGHAN FRANCELLA: She's more excited than anybody else. I can tell you that.

DENISE FRANCELLA: I'm trying to contain it though.

MEAGHAN FRANCELLA: She's on strict rules this week. Mom, relax.

Q. That's great. Denise, thank you. So happy for you and your recovery. And Meaghan, good luck this week.

MEAGHAN FRANCELLA: Thanks, John.

Q. I hope you bring some great stories back to the cricket club.

MEAGHAN FRANCELLA: Thank you.

DENISE FRANCELLA: Thank you.

LEIA SCHWARTZ: I believe we have some people on site that would like to ask questions as well. Megan?

Q. First I heard shirts, are we wearing shirts? What's the deal with the shirts?

MEAGHAN FRANCELLA: I actually live with three guys.



20 years old, 23, and 24, so I'm in a frat house. These guys have been -- I've known them for a month now and these guys have been unbelievable, just supportive.

They're like we're making shirts. We're coming down, we're making shirts. Well, it got word that people were making shirts. Members wanted shirts, and then I have a group from the LPGA Ams coming down from Canada and Arkansas to KPMG. They call themselves Ar-Canada and they rented an airbnb for KPMG to come down and they want shirts.

So I don't know how many shirts we have, but they used the baby picture, the five, six year old picture from the DriveOn, the first frame in the DriveOn. So that's on the front of the shirt with Francella like '87, because I think I was five in that picture with hashtag DriveOn in the back. You will see them in full force out here, yeah.

Q. Denise, just wondering, you said you loved watching basketball practice and you're under strict rules this week. What type of parent were you back in the day watching her play?

DENISE FRANCELLA: Oh, no, I was good. I was good. No, I would always be in the back. I did a lot of praying in the back.

But everyone at practices, I just loved watching her play. I mean, I was a phys ed teacher, coach, and I was at the high school she was at, so I was able to watch all the practices.

I just got such joy from that. That was hard for me when she stopped playing because I didn't get to see her play anymore. So that's when this come up. I just got goosebumps. To see her play is such a gift. I'm just so excited. So I'm going to be very good. You'll see me on my little scooter. She got me a scooter.

I'll be in the back and now I'm going to enjoy it. I don't think I have to pray this week. I'm just going to enjoy.

Q. Meaghan, what is it about golf? Like Karrie was in here, you mentioned the superintendent joke that she made. What is it about golf? Some people when you step away from the tour, given up the game up totally, put the clubs away, but you wanted to stay involved. What is it about golf that keeps you coming back?

MEAGHAN FRANCELLA: I mean, I never got pushed as a kid. My parents never pushed me at all. My mom, she's downplaying a little bit, but my mom was a very successful college and basketball and lacrosse player, and she knows what it takes to get to a high level. She actually coached

me a little bit more in basketball, and she was kind of a role model for me in that respect.

I don't think I've ever said that in front of her.

DENISE FRANCELLA: No.

MEAGHAN FRANCELLA: But it's very hands off, so I think I just was able to fall in love with it instead of it being work. Just you want to go to the course? We'll take you to the course. You want to go to the tournament? We'll take you to the tournament. It wasn't anything that was pushed on me.

I think that's why I love it so much. I teach a few juniors now and I have a girl that I teach who's just shot 79 for the first time. She's never broke a 90 or 80 and did it in the first -- first go-round she did both.

I was just talking to her dad I said, just be dad. Don't gets over the top on this. Just be dad and let her have fun. If she wants to go to the golf course, take her. That's why I think I love it so much. It was never forced on me. A lot of girls I played with in junior golf don't play golf anymore.

So I think that's part of why I love it so much. And also I got to travel the world with my best friends in the world, and it's just -- I just feel super fortunate.

So I think that's why I love it so much. And I love to help people, which I'm sure that anybody that knows me, they know that. Now I get to help people. I don't think there is anything better than when I'm teaching somebody that couldn't get the ball in the air for the first ten minutes of the lesson and then they're hitting it up in the air and going wow, wow, how did you do that?

I'm like, you did that. It's just empowering people to see what they can do. The that's why I love it so much. It just gives me such joy in what I do, especially now.

Q. What do you think the support you got sort of says about sports? I mean, professional sports it's about winning and losing, and in the end really about the relationships you build along the way. They came out to support you and your mom. I mean, just what do you think that says about sports and competing and sort of the relationships you develop with people along the way?

MEAGHAN FRANCELLA: I mean, obviously we want to beat each other every week, but at the end of the day we're still human beings and still people. The support that I have had has been -- I mean, I can't even explain it. Kris Tamulis texts my mom almost every day.

DENISE FRANCELLA: She's been wonderful.

MEAGHAN FRANCELLA: Stacy called me one day and she's like, how are you doing? I'm like, I'm good. She's like, you're not. You're not okay. I was like, I know.

So just the support we've had in general, and then also I've had a ton of ups and downs in my career and everybody close to me has known that and helped me through that.

Just sports just gives you the gift of friendship and just respect. I mean, I feel like everybody out here, we have a ton of respect for each other. I have the greatest friends in the world. I can't ask for anybody better. Tell you that.

DENISE FRANCELLA: Yeah.

Q. I just want to say I appreciate your kindness. From the first I ever met you you've been wonderful.

MEAGHAN FRANCELLA: Thank you.

Q. As a brother of two sisters who are breast cancer survivors, one who's named Denise, your story touches me. I know part of your journey. I want to know if faith and prayer played a role in this remarkable story? If it has, I don't like putting God last because I know that in my family faith and prayer meant the world.

DENISE FRANCELLA: That's the only thing -- that and Meaghan are the only things that got me through. Every time I had a CAT scan or MRI I would say the rosary. When I had radiation it was so tough because I had to keep my arms above my head. I would say the whole rosary. If it went a little longer I said, that was an extra a little bit. Oh, sorry, we did another.

So faith is what got me through. That's been the hardest thing. I couldn't go to mass in the morning, which I love to do. I have to watch it on TV on Sunday and I'm starting to get back now.

My faith has always been a big part of it, so I'm very fortunate. God gave me the best daughter. I was so lucky to get through this. I think that's why I did. I was so strong because of it. I never gave up. I fought, even though it was tough.

But it was --

MEAGHAN FRANCELLA: Like when you tried to drink water.

DENISE FRANCELLA: Yeah. This was my water warden. She was there every step of the way with me, and it was unbelievable.

Q. Are you amazed by the way your life has turned out? Friendships you made 10, 15 years ago return as your main supporters in life?

MEAGHAN FRANCELLA: Yeah, I mean, one of my best friends lives in Nashville. We met when we were 12 at a junior tournament. Courtney (phonetic) and I went through a spurt where we didn't talk for about a year because life was just crazy and then she had a baby, and it's like things never left.

That's how it is. I don't know. We just pick up where we left off. It's like we never stopped talking or anything like that. I'm on a group text with Brittany and Kris and Missy and we talk every day. I mean, it starts at 5:00 a.m. I wake up, I start the text, and it goes until -- we go to bed at 9:30, so it goes until about 9:30 at night.

It's like we picked up where we left off. Never missed a beat. Same things, same routines. Missy and I were on different waves today. Same routine, didn't even have to check in. We just knew what was going on. Just pretty special to be able to do that.

Q. My favorite sentence, part of this piece was the one where you said my mom is the nicest person but the worst patient in the world. Can you tell me -- can you explain that to me?

MEAGHAN FRANCELLA: She was terrible.

DENISE FRANCELLA: I really wasn't.

MEAGHAN FRANCELLA: You were terrible. My aunt Chrissy and I probably talked every day during this whole thing. You know, my mom, like I said, she's the nicest woman in the world, but when it came to doing stuff, water, I would put Post-It notes out every couple house that she would have to drink. I just can't. I'm like, you can. You can do it. We can do this.

Eating was a chore. I do feel bad that I was a little hard on her, but I don't think she would have done what she did if I didn't push her. So yeah, terrible patient. She says she was not, but she was awful. Awful.

Q. You want to defend yourself?

DENISE FRANCELLA: No. (Laughter.) I really wasn't. I asked the nurses and she said, no, you weren't.

MEAGHAN FRANCELLA: That's what we call chemo brain right there.

DENISE FRANCELLA: It was so hard and I love water. I couldn't even look at it. She had them lined up for me. You know what? I really did that push or I wouldn't have -- even she would make my chicken and I could even look at the chicken. She'd say, just take two bites.

So I needed it and I still defend myself as not being a bad patient. Maybe just a little bit. (Laughter.)

THE MODERATOR: All right, that's it from us. Leia?

LEIA SCHWARTZ: As Roberta said, it was a love story. I guess that includes some tough love from the water warden. Definitely a lot of love shared there.

So last question for Meaghan: For a lot of our DriveOn stories we usually end them -- it would be I'm Meaghan Francella and I DriveOn. For this one we had, we DriveOn. Why is that important to you?

MEAGHAN FRANCELLA: Because I wouldn't be here if it wasn't for everybody in my life that supported me. When I first went on tour, Port Chester, New York put on a fund raiser to help me raise money to go out and play so I didn't have to worry about my expenses for a few months.

I went out and won the third tournament of the year because I felt like I had -- financially I was set. I was very fortunate for that. Sally Austin gave me a chance at North Carolina, which is why I included her in that piece.

If I included everybody that helped me that piece would've been an hour long. But there are definitely a lot of people that I would like to thank that weren't in that video.

There are so many people that just gave me a chance and really stuck their neck out for me. Obviously Tom, my coach, is one of those people. Took me in really early on in life. Really helped me develop as a player and a person.

Just so it's not just for me. It's for everybody that really sacrificed for me and for my parents that helped me. I wouldn't be here if it wasn't for them.

And for all the support they gave me throughout this journey. So that's why it's for everybody else. The people that drove down two and a half hours to come watch me play or up to Rochester to watch Locust Hill or Kingsmill or wherever it was. I mean, I had a traveling fan club.

They were -- I was sponsored by Loudmouth and they were wearing Loudmouth clothes. Loudmouth sent them

clothes so they could dress like me.

That's why it's for everybody. I don't believe -- there no I in team and I believe people are brought into your life for a reason, and these people have given me the opportunity to do what I love.

So just want to thank everybody.

DENISE FRANCELLA: Yes, thank you so much.

LEIA SCHWARTZ: I think that's a perfect place to end. I just want to say thank you as well to you, Meaghan, Denise, Roberta, and everyone for joining us today.

Meaghan, good luck this week and at the KPMG Women's PGA Championship. No other way to end than with DriveOn.

MEAGHAN FRANCELLA: DriveOn.

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