

Hilton Grand Vacations Tournament of Champions

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Lake Nona Golf & Country Club

Lydia Ko

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: All right, very pleased to be joined by defending champion of the Hilton Grand Vacations Tournament of Champions Lydia Ko. Lydia, when you think back on the win here largest year, what do you remember most? What were some of the highlights?

LYDIA KO: Yeah, obviously this is a very special event to start the season. You know, after having a tough year in '23, to win the first tournament back last year I think gave me a lot more confidence and good momentum into a year that I knew was very important for me with the Olympics and majors at St Andrews and some very key locations.

Yeah, the win helped a lot with the confidence and I think it kind of gave me the belief that I could be back in the winner's circle and get into the Hall of Fame. That was kind of the year that it happened to be.

So, yeah, I believe that it all started here. Obviously this being my home club, got a lot of home crowd support.

Just being able to see some of the familiar faces that I've seen with the celebrities at this event these past few years has been great. I've gotten to know a few of them a lot better. It's just a super special one, and I'm excited to be alongside them this week and hopefully start the season off on a high again.

Q. Taking away from there week a little bit, International Crown year; usually doesn't mean much to you. This year with the introduction of the world team, how much are you looking forward to getting to play in Korea with some of the best talents in the world?

LYDIA KO: When the schedule comes out I always highlight the ones I'm planning to play. That was off my list because I had been me, myself, and I the past few years on Tour.

Outside of that I'm actually excited. There is an LPGA



player now that came up from Epson from New Zealand called Fiona Xu, so I am excited that first off I have another fellow Kiwi playing on Tour.

Yeah, I love team play. That's why I love Dow. Unfortunately I haven't really been able to be in that kind of format very much outside of Grant Thornton Invitational and Dow.

When I heard the announcement that there was going to be a world team I was super excited and I would love to be part of it. I think through that kind of week you make a lot of good memories and friendships that last longer and things that you can take from that.

So, yeah, I'm excited. And especially it being played in Korea right after the BMW Ladies Championship, I think it's going to be a great stretch, especially for the fans there who love their golf.

Q. This being your home course, you practice here all the time, do you feel more comfortable compared to other tournaments?

LYDIA KO: Yeah, last year being in contention for the first time in a long time by myself, I was getting nervous, but seeing some of the familiar faces and knowing I've played this golf course quite a lot, I think it helped with the nerves.

I almost took it as me playing on any other Sunday that it wasn't the event, so I think in those kind of situations it's helpful. I was joking with one of the members that maybe I know too much about the golf course, where sometimes if you know less then you know, okay, you just have to hit it here and the greens are like this. Then you can play a lot more simpler.

I think it is an advantage, and it was nice to be able to win at home. Everybody is back to scratch. It's a new year. But the most exciting thing about this tournament this year is that we're playing a couple weeks later so it's going to be a much warmer experience hopefully for all of us.

Yeah, this course is so beautiful and I think it shines when we are in more of the warmer conditions, too.



Q. When you look back at all your successes this past year, what would you say is the coolest moment you've been able to experience because of what you accomplished?

LYDIA KO: Probably just winning the gold and standing on the podium listening to your National Anthem. I've been on the podium before. It's heartwarming just even hearing other people's National Anthem and knowing what we all went through just to qualify to represent our countries, and then be one of three medalists.

I wasn't sure if I was ever going to experience or listen to my own National Anthem. To hear that, it's pretty special. I think it's a feeling that you can't really -- no other situation can replicate that.

So that was probably one of the more special memories I'm going to take on not only as a golfer, but a human me.

Q. How can this tournament and a good result here in the first event of the year springboard you to a successful season?

LYDIA KO: Yeah, I've had seasons where I play well but I don't necessarily start well. Then I've had a good middle part of the season and then good end.

So I've kind of done it all in the sense it's good starts, good at different points. Obviously last year I played well. Won here and played well the week after in Bradenton, so it was a really good kick start to 2024.

And as much as it's small differences, I think winning and not winning, there is a huge confidence matter that goes on. Even if you play well, if you don't win I think always the doubts creep in my mind.

I feel like now after the year that I had last year and coming off from one of my worst years in two three, I think I have the belief that even if I don't play well for a span of a few week I don't need to get do down on myself because I know what direction I'm going and I have full confidence in my team.

I just believe that I can overcome my lulls, so I feel like I'm a much stronger player in that sense, and hopefully I do get off to a good start.

I'm not going to let that reflect on how I'm going to approach the rest of the season.

Q. After last year's incredible season, how do you reset your goals and objectives for this season?

LYDIA KO: Yeah, after winning the AIG Women's Open at St Andrews I said I would love to do the Korea grand slam. It's hard winning five majors. It's hard winning one major championship. To win five and all be different ones, it takes a very small group of people that have done it. I think last person that has done it is Inbee Park to my knowledge.

Yeah, if I could be alongside that small group it would be pretty amazing. I got to spend a little bit of time with Juli Inkster last year and she said she won her first U.S. Women's Open after she had her kids.

I was like, wow, is that how far I need to wait? I think she was 39 when she won. I was like, I can't wait 12 years, Juli. I mean, U.S. Women's Open is probably the tournament that we as players all want to win and dream of winning at the end of that Sunday.

I think because I still have the drive and the motivation to play the best golf I can while I'm playing, I think it doesn't matter what happened last year. I still know I've got a lot more things to do and achieve and get better at.

Q. What are you doing this season to prioritize that, trying to get those last two major victories that you need?

LYDIA KO: To be honest, even when I was going into the season I was trying to see which tournaments I wanted to play. I think I started off, okay, I'll play ten and then I'll play 15 and then I'll play 20.

Now I think I'm playing like -- thinking of playing like just under 25, like 22 or 23. So I think the goal was I want to peak at the majors. Sometimes I think, okay, you work hard and just play the majors.

For me I think it's always good to have some sort of the momentum, whether it's playing the week before or at least having some sort of play. So when I was kind of structuring my schedule around that I started adding more events. Obviously the International Crown was a cool surprise as well.

Yeah, I think when you're at that tournament week trying not to make a big deal out of it, which was kind of the case for me at St Andrews. I had one of the best and biggest weeks of my career at the Olympics and I just thought there is no way I can outdo that.

I think I just played freely, just enjoyed being in town and spending time with my family. I played some good golf on top of that, so I think that's going to be the mindset during



the week of. Having a really good structured schedule to make sure that I'm refreshed but at the same time coming in with good rhythm into the majors.

Q. Following some of your success last season you pointed to the inspiration you drew from other athletes, from Mardy Fish to Simone Biles. Should we be aware of anybody you've been watching this week?

LYDIA KO: I mean, I was talking about Mardy with my caddie, Paul, yesterday. I think that's really the cool thing about this event, right? You meet so many different people from different industries that have had so much success from a fellow member here, Charles Woodson, so actors like Don Cheadle; it's his first time playing.

It's really cool to meet them because sometimes even though we might be the same athletes at one point, you kind of get stuck in your own world. So to hear their stories, I was in so inspired by Mardy's documentary that he did. I think he said at that point he said he hasn't watched it yet, and I was surprised. But it at the same time you understand.

It's sometimes hard to talk about yourself but he obviously did it to help other people and it was so relatable to me.

Same for Simone Biles with what happened with Tokyo and the year she's had to be on the podium winning gold again in Paris.

Yeah, it's very inspirational. I think their documentaries are something I'm going to look and watch again. I watched the Federer documentary as well. I'm normally kind of an animation person, so it's opposite to what I normally watch.

It's just been really cool to hear their stories and just know we're not that much different in ways. Hopefully I too can inspire other people that are maybe in my shoes later on.

Q. Speaking of sharing stories and hearing other people's stories, this is the LPGA's 75th anniversary season. What's the significance of that to you? And maybe those that have gone before you, what's the most significant story you've been able to hear from a Founder or somebody?

LYDIA KO: Yeah, next week is our Founders Championship in Bradenton. That week obviously highlights our Founders, but week in, week out, we're all out there with the spirit of the Founders. We're reminded during player meeting. And even our Pioneers that have come between our Founders and the generations today.

We're grateful now to play in some of the most historic

venues and play for some of the biggest prize money that women's golf has ever seen, like what Jeeno won \$4 million at the CME Group Tour Championship last year.

We're part of the history. If it wasn't for those Founders that sometimes struggled to go on golf courses and for them to get paid to what it has changed to now, it wouldn't have been possible without them. So we're obviously very grateful for the kind of pathway that they paved for us.

I think that's kind of got to be the mindset that us players kind of take for even when we retire and are in their shoes one day. The generations are going and I believe it's not the last year the LPGA is going to be around. Soon we're going to celebrate the 100th year and the 150th year. I'm not alive at that time; just trying to calculate.

But I've been excited to see the growth that we've had on Tour, and me being part of CME Group and seeing them and so many of our other partners support women's golf and have belief and just support women's sport has been really cool to be a part of that.

I think it's our duty to have the spirit of the Founders and leave the Tour a better place than when we found it.

Q. Are there any particular Founders or even just maybe those Pioneers that you had a particularly close relationship with?

LYDIA KO: I got to meet a few in my early years on Tour, mostly out when we played in Phoenix. Marilyn Smith being one. She was I think one of the most sweetest people I've ever met in my life. Always holding our hands, and I feel like when I held her hand I was blessed right away.

You know, just she was a blessing and obviously I didn't get to meet all 13 of them. The few that had come over the years, they were all like Marilyn. You know, because of those 13 ladies, that's why we're here.

So she was always a special one. I think whenever I saw her I felt like a warmth that ran through me. I think that was just who she was. When we go to our tournaments we see Meg Mallon and Beth Daniels and Nancy Lopez, also another one of the sweetest human beings on earth.

Just seeing them and them supporting me. I remember when I won either the British or the Olympics, I think Meg had told Beth that I was going to win and like just make sure because -- to watch because I was going to win one of them.

Just having that kind of support is just crazy because they



literally are some of the best female golfers and athletes and have played the game in general. To have that kind of support and being in text range and get the warmest hugs when I see them, it's amazing.

I think that's the beauty of golf in general, is that it brings a lot of generations together. I think that it's so cool to be in this kind of an environment that sets that up for us.

Q. I loved what you said about Marilynn. That was beautiful. I wanted to drill down a little bit from how you got from ten tournaments from 20 plus and how long of a time span that was. Did you feel after such an incredible year last year and then the offseason that there was a, well, maybe I do want to be obviously a little bit smaller for 2025?

LYDIA KO: Yeah, I think it was initially ten because I was like, okay, I'm in the five majors. I've got to play the Hilton Grand Vacations Tournament of Champions, and then I've got to play this one because I love it here. I love the course in Cincinnati. Or Excel (?) Runs Mizuho, so I got to play that one.

Just my few favorites. Then, okay, it's about ten. Then I was like, okay, I still need to play this for this reason and then got to 15. Then I was like, why am I not playing this? This makes so much more sense. Then I added in and it was 20.

Then I was like, well, if I'm making the trip to Korea I might as well -- Asia, I might as well play Korea. And then International Crown. What's a better leadup than playing the week before in Tampa at Annika's event at CME?

So wow, my schedule has just gotten a lot more colorful over the past few weeks. But I think it's great. Internally I know that I want to play to the best of my abilities while I'm still doing this and I don't want to half do it.

Some people said you achieved it all. Why do you still want to do it? I still feel like there is so much golf ahead and things that I want to improve on as a golfer.

So, yeah, it's not the end. I'm still going to be playing the Asia Swing and play a lot of the domestic events. Yeah, I'm excited. It's a new year, but the Olympics was a huge thing just for me. Now I know it doesn't matter how much of a lull I get into, I know I can overcome it. There will always be good days on the other side.

Q. If I could ask one more. How would you describe your feelings about being left out of team competition all these years? How frustrating was it for you? Were you jealous? Is that a good word for it? How would

you describe is it?

LYDIA KO: I was pretty annoyed, especially being a person that loves being in that team environment. I loved that as an amateur playing on the National Team or provincial events. That's why I love even the Grant Thornton and Dow. Even though it's a two-person team, still having a partner is such a cool feeling. I love match play on top of that.

I haven't really had the opportunity to play many match play events properly since Lorena's event. Not getting into these other team match play tournaments I felt very left out. I think internally I may have criticized the tournaments because I just wanted to play so much. It wasn't about the event, but it was like my own frustration.

But when I did see it and potentially if I make it on the team would be part of the team, I'm super excited about it. I think golf, we're coming to a place where it needs to become more and more unified, and bringing the best players together and showcasing that and I think this is obviously a great step in that direction, too.

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