

# Gainbridge LPGA

Tuesday, January 11, 2022

Boca Raton, Florida, USA

Boca Rio Golf Club



## Madelene Sagstrom

## Taylor Collins

## Tom Abbott

### Press Conference

JEREMY FRIEDMAN: Thank you everybody for joining. This is Gainbridge LPGA at Boca Rio Media Day. We just wrapped up a news conference there at Boca Rio golf club, Todd Abbott hosted and emceed Media Day, he's our long-time Golf Channel/NBC Sports announcer on the LPGA Tour beat.

Madelene Sagstrom, 2020 champion is with us, and Taylor Collins who is going to be one of our two sponsor exemptions for the tournament.

Taylor and I have known each other for a long time because it all goes back to Big Break. She won Big Break México back in 2013. Taylor has had a big day. The PGA of America announced this morning that she is the 2021 Women's Professional of the year.

She won the South Florida PGA Section PGA Championship last September; the first woman to do it in the tournament's 42-year history. So Taylor is having quite a roll. She is a PGA teaching professional at Coral Ridge Country Club there in Fort Lauderdale and her coach is her long-time coach since she was a kid, Bob Toski there in Fort Lauderdale. You have the news release on the sponsor exemptions in your inboxes.

Mr. Abbott, if you can give a quick recap on Media Day and just talk a little bit about the tournament and just the general excitement down there at Boca Rio today.

TOM ABBOTT: Thanks, Jeremy. Good to see everybody. We are here at Boca Rio and had a good turnout of local media here interested in Taylor's story obviously and hearing from Madelene. The weather cooperated, believe it or not, bit of rain down here today.

So hopefully it's going to be dry for the rest of the day because we are going out and play; not to make anybody feel envious or anything.

But yeah, I mean, just a great feeling here that they are excited to have the LPGA back. You know, the Gainbridge LPGA at Boca Rio was played here as you know two years ago for the first time.

Gainbridge had been great supporters of the LPGA Tour for longer than that period, and Dan Towriss, the CEO of Group 101 is here today. He's a member at Boca Rio and he spoke a little bit about their commitment to this tournament and to some other initiatives that, you know, that are important to him. It was great to hear from him and he's stoked to be part of this again.

We heard from the president of Boca Rio as well, Elliott Wallace, who is obviously really excited that the membership is supporting this event, and they are looking forward to a finish just as exciting as we had a couple years ago with Madelene beating Nasa (Hataoka) right there on the 18th green.

Everything is moving along nicely. It's a pretty small membership here. There's only 150 members at Boca Rio, so they are giving up their golf course for a week in the middle of the season, so it's a big commitment to them, and they are excited about it.

We talked about the sponsor invites. The other sponsor invite that is going to be here this year is Nishtha Madan who some of you may know, she was one of the best amateur players in India and she came across to play college golf in Sacramento, turned pro a couple of years ago and has won four times on the Cactus Tour. So she is going to get an invite to play. It will be her first LPGA Tour start, and as we all know, I think golf in India is about to explode with what happened in the Olympics, and it's a country that I think golf could really go somewhere there. And who knows, Nishtha could may well be a big star in the future for Indian golf. She is going to get her first LPGA start, and we are looking forward to that.

Taylor is on home soil here, about 30 minutes away from home in Fort Lauderdale. I've known Taylor since 2013 when she won Big Break México and got her start playing in the Lorena Ochoa Invitational in the LPGA and has left



the game and has now come back. Just couldn't be happier for her to become The PGA of America Women's Player of the Year.

It's a great achievement, and to win the section here, the first woman to win this section down here in the 42-year history of the event, I think you told me 156 players in the field, six women, and that just is a great achievement. I'm really excited at the fact that I hosted that event and met Taylor for the first time nine years ago, and now we see her here in this LPGA event.

Jeremy, I don't know how you want to do this, you want me to ask questions or open it up? I'm assuming people have some questions to ask.

JEREMY FRIEDMAN: Why don't we start with Taylor and Madelene giving some opening thoughts.

Taylor, talk about your day and winning the PGA Section Championship, Women's Player of the Year; and then Madelene, just about being back at Boca Rio, the site of your first LPGA Tour win; and then Tom, then you can kind of kick it off to questions for everybody.

TOM ABBOTT: Yeah, let's start with Taylor. We talked earlier Taylor about what this means to you. Just kind of recap where you've been since 2013, the struggles you've had and then talk about that win in the PGA Section.

TAYLOR COLLINS: Yeah, thank you, so since 2013, big brick México, I was playing on the Symetra Tour for a little bit, one of the main tours, it was great, and then I started feeling like a lot of pain in my joints. Later on, found out I had rheumatoid arthritis and wasn't really able to golf anymore. So I took a segue from golf and went into the corporate world for a little bit. Just wasn't for me. I was just missing golf. I've been playing since I was three.

And I found the best way for me to get back into it was with PGA of America, getting into coaching. So I started coaching again, figured out that I had the RA. Got on some medications to get it under control and I started playing again in some of the PGA section events.

My goal was to qualify for the PGA National Championship, so in order to do that, you finish in the top, I think 20 in your section, so that was the main goal. I got there that week and my game was just about perfect. It's all I could have really asked for, so I played that week. Everything was just going. I was just riding the wave.

I think after the first day, they told me that I might be the first woman to win. So a little bit of pressure there, but just stuck with it and felt like maybe it was time for it to happen.

Was lucky I was there and felt bigger than me and just rode the wave of the good golf that I was playing and ended up winning the event, which was incredible. Those guys out there are so good.

So it just felt good to know that I still had that competitive sort of play in me. And it's great to be back as like a whole different golfer. I used to try and play on Tour, and it didn't quite work out for me for numerous reasons.

So it's nice to be back and I'm just learning my game as a different golfer now. I don't get to play as much, but I think I'm now like stuck in the box of playing anymore. I'm more like on the outside of it, and so hopefully that will bring something, a new dynamic to my game.

And then I found out maybe like a week or so ago about the women's Player of the Year for The PGA of America in the nation and that was just unreal. I wasn't expecting to get something like that so early on, which is amazing. It's super amazing.

So now I can't wait to see what I can do from here. I would say this is probably my favorite year in golf that I've ever had. Big Break México and National Championship when I was in college and then winning the Section Championship and getting the Player of the Year, those are my favorite things I've ever done. This is my favorite year of golf.

Now I get to go live out my childhood dream of an LPGA event here as like a local girl, which is just incredible. If I could ask for any way for it to happen, it would be how it's happening right now. So I'm really excited, can't wait to play in front of fans and family and my students, and excited, very excited.

TOM ABBOTT: You mentioned involving the kids you're teaching during the tournament here. Make you could share that.

TAYLOR COLLINS: Yes, so I work a lot with junior golfers. They are my favorite to work with. I figure if you can build a passion when they are younger that they will have the drive to want to be better and want to actually be out there and play this game forever.

So what I'm going to do is I'm going to get all my golf balls together and have all my kids mark each golf ball, so they will each have one. And then I'm going to play my rounds with their balls, and then when I'm done I'll give it back to them and it will be kind of like a memento sort of thing.

And then even for me any time I look down at that golf ball, I'm just going to remind myself that I love my job, I love teaching my kids. And hopefully it will help me calm down

and realize, it's not like do-or-die here. I love the job that I have outside of it, but I'm extremely lucky to have the privilege to pursue a passion and a childhood dream and play in this event.

So hopefully it will be great for them, great for me, and I'll still be like -- it will be like routine out there, so excited about that.

TOM ABBOTT: And Madelene, if I could get your opening thoughts being back at Boca Rio. This was a really big week for you, winning for the first time. It was a thrilling finish. I went back and watched the highlights earlier today of your win and when you watch your tee shot at 17, the fact that it almost went in the hole on Sunday when you really needed to step up; you did, and then you made a very tricky putt on 18 left-to-right down the hill.

So if you could just talk a little bit about what it means to be back here and maybe some of your memories from the win two years ago, some things that we may have forgotten or we didn't know.

MADELENE SAGSTROM: Well, last time I left here, I was emotional, so it's nice to be back and kind of get that feeling again. I feel very comfortable. Slightly biased, but it's such a lovely place, and I just have such good memories from here.

I was very nervous when I came here last -- in 2020 to go out and play because it was the first event of the year, my year, and my expectations were very -- I wouldn't say low but I didn't really know where my game was at.

So I came here very nervous and I shot a record, a career record-low round the second day with my 62, and then just continued to put myself in contention and continued to be up there.

So I was very excited about the Sunday, very nervous. I started off with would bogeys and then kind of just let loose, and was trying to enjoy it out there, knowing that I put myself in a situation and hopefully was able to pull it off. I knew where Nasa was standing, and when she missed her putt on 18, I was just so in shock, because I was like, well, what does this mean? Does this mean this is it? Or where is everybody else? I was very confused looking back at the TV footage, too. You can see I'm quite surprised.

But just so many emotions from here. It was such a good week for me, and for my career, so really everything kind of kicked off this week here.

TOM ABBOTT: So yeah, want to open it up for questions.

**Q. You kind of breezed past getting over rheumatoid arthritis. That's kind of a big deal. Can you tell us more details about that?**

TAYLOR COLLINS: Yeah, so when I was still playing, I was experiencing a lot of pain in my joints, mainly in my wrist. I didn't know what was going on. I thought maybe it was tendonitis, I think it was, but it got to the point where I couldn't grip a club anymore.

I probably went through that for about a year or two. I was struggling to pretty much walk. I almost bought a cane to start walking with, so I had to take like a year off of golf. Then finally I was going to get massages in my hands because I couldn't hold anything and the lady was like, you should go get your blood tested, maybe you have rheumatoid arthritis, thinking it was -- like older people would get it and that I was too young.

Turned out that my markers were really high and that's what I had. It was scary, but at the same time it was nice it actually know what was going on.

So I tried a bunch of drugs for like a year or so, and then I finally found one that worked out for me, and then I've just been kind of on and off that for a while now. I have like flare-ups every once in a while where I can't really like hold things, and oddly enough, right before the Section Championship my wrists and my knee were flaring up really bad, and I wasn't able to golf. So I wasn't even sure I was going to play in the event.

So I just rested, got back on my medications because I went off of them because I was feeling good; that was wrong. Got back on them, and it happened to kick in right in time and I was able to play and it was great.

But yeah, it's been tough because it was probably like three years where I didn't know what was going on with me. I've always been like an active person with sports and stuff but I couldn't really do anything for a little while there. It's nice to know what's happening. I got it under control now, and so now I'm trying to figure out like this new life of golf for me, and hopefully it's in the PGA of America and then opportunities like this.

**Q. You know, a lot of times players get so wrapped up in and self-involved that they can't see themselves because they are in the minutia, and it takes doing something like coaching, seeing other players, learning more about the swing in helping others to see more in yourself. Is that something you have experienced and can you share that with us?**

TAYLOR COLLINS: Sure. I think I'm a totally different golfer now. At the time I felt ver much like in a box and it felt like do-or-die when I was playing, and I don't think that was a good mentality for me to have when I was playing.

Ever since I stopped, I realize, like there's still life outside of golf, and it's nice, I still have like a paycheck to go home to outside of golf. I'm able to eat; it's all going to be fine.

Now I feel like I'm not so much in the box and I'm outside the box. We'll kind of see how it works out in this tournament but the other day it was more like if I'm in a playing lesson and I'm the coach, what would I tell myself in this situations. So hopefully that will be something that helps me calm my nerves or maybe I will have better game plans out there and not be as reckless as I used to be.

**Q. If I can, one for Madelene. Now that you're back at Boca Rio, the site of your win, how are you a different person than you were two years ago prior to this event?**

MADELENE SAGSTROM: A little maturity I think. I mean, golf is one of these sports that you'll never finish learning. You'll never -- you'll never be good enough. It's always something that you can continue to improve on, but I think with experience and with playing, you learn so much about yourself and your game and I think that I'm a much more accepting golfer right now. We were just talking about it in the car on the way down here and my boyfriend, you know, there's always more. You want to have a good day of course, but it's so much more to life sometimes than golf.

So I'm just really trying to enjoy my time here and take advantage of it. You know, you only have so much good years. I'm just trying to really make the best out of it right now, and I'm happy to play on the best women's tour, in my opinion, the best tour in the world. We have a lot of fun things ahead and the game is growing, so it's a good time.

**Q. Taylor, how have your role models in the game of golf changed from when you were a player back in college and playing on the Symetra Tour to now that you're a PGA professional?**

TAYLOR COLLINS: When I was playing before, I mean, Bobs to so he, my instructor, he's always been my role model. I love like how he teaches and just how he is as a golfer in general. I was always like more old school of a golfer as well, Ben Hogan, all those guys, that was my type of golf, feel sort of thing.

Now that I'm in PGA of America, I'd say Alan Morin, I was playing on a Challenge Cup team that I qualified for, and he just got inducted into the Hall of Fame. Seeing him do

that, like my goals have completely changed. I want to be like him. I want to be playing in The PGA of America exception events, try and win Player of the Year just overall for men and women, and one day be in the Hall of Fame.

That's like the new goal. I see more like Alan Morin as like how I want to be and who I want to be, which is crazy, because before, you know, it's more like Annika and then be the greatest player in the world on the LPGA Tour.

Now it's more, Alan Morin, even though he's a guy, but yeah.

**Q. And then also, back when you played the LPGA then in 2013, I believe it was, what are your memories from that week? What kind of still sticks out all these years later?**

TAYLOR COLLINS: I'll be honest, it was overwhelming. There was like so much going on. Top 30 in the world is crazy, especially when I'm like aspiring to play on the Tour and you just storm in with the best of them or maybe not in the mix or maybe I could relate to someone. There was no relating while I was out there. They were the best of the best.

I don't remember a lot of it. I feel like it was almost like I blacked out from being overwhelmed by it. But it just shows you how good they are. Yeah, it was a great experience.

I'm most excited about this experience here where the entire field is there. But it is nice to know that I have been kind of in this situation before at the Lorena, and gosh, they are just so good.

**Q. For Madelene, since your win here in 2020, you've had guaranteed status for the full season since that victory, what's been the difference for you playing with that guaranteed status versus battling the finish in the top 80 on the Money List in years past to retain your status for the next year?**

MADELENE SAGSTROM: Well, I think anybody that comes out -- so my rookie year was 2017, so coming out, you really just want to keep your card, and you want to keep playing golf. It's a tough feeling to play under, but at the same time, you also know that everybody is thinking it. Maybe not out loud, but it's still in people's -- in people's minds.

But I think more for me, it's nice that I have that guarantee of course, but I think for me it was more the win, I proved to myself that I'm good enough to be out here. I'm good enough to play against the best players in the world, and



then really from there, I've been working on the consistency, because I see them -- the best players in the world are always up there. They might not have the best week but they keep fighting and they keep climbing the leaderboard.

So the win for me was more I belong out here and I belong on the LPGA Tour.

**Q. Is there anything in particular that you've worked on during the off-season to improve this consistency going into this year?**

MADELENE SAGSTROM: Well, we looked back on my stats and I hit the ball quite far, so I've been trying to up my -- I've been trying to hit a few more fairways, because I know that if I keep the ball in play, I will give myself more opportunities.

So I've been focusing a lot on my driver and also my wedges because I haven't really been the strongest wedge player, and I tend to have a lot of wedges out here. SO that's kind of really been what I've been focusing on. I made a little switch in the middle of last year, switching to AimPoint in my putting, so that kind of brought my putting back on track. So now I'm trying to get on the green faster and closer so I can use my putting again.

**Q. Any particular mechanical changes with your drivers and wedges?**

MADELENE SAGSTROM: I tend to get a little steep and swing a little too far left with the driver particularly, so I'm just trying to get my -- I call it my "Nelly draw." I want to wick my driver like Nelly Korda. Trying to get the little draw with the driver back.

TOM ABBOTT: I think we all want to swing like Nelly, by the way.

**Q. Madelene, I saw your Instagram post about your annual training camp. Can you tell us who is in those photos and what that is?**

MADELENE SAGSTROM: We've been doing it for a few years. I still work with my high school coach, we were 13 and a half years in counting, Hans Larsson, he comes over on the Tour from time to time, but he also works with Robert Karlsson who I used to -- he's my old mentor. We normally get together this time of year and Hans brings his son, Elias (ph). So we have three generations of golfers there, Robert with 25-plus experience on Tour life, and then an amateur golfer that want to get to college, and then me kind of in the middle of it.

So it's really cool just sharing our experiences, going out, challenging ourselves. We all have our strengths and weaknesses, so we are just trying to go through the whole game and compete against each other and try to be the best version of ourselves in each level of the game that we're at.

**Q. And Taylor, just want to clarify one thing and ask one thing. Congratulations, by the way, on your award. Was that your first time playing in a section event when you won in?**

TAYLOR COLLINS: No, I've played in a couple section events and I had -- I had actually played in a section event the day before that, that tournament and I won that one on Monday, and then tournament started on Tuesday.

So I had won my first-ever Section event, which was wild to me and I was just stoked about that, and then the next day, we started the Section Championship and I just happened to keep playing well and won that one, too.

**Q. What was the reaction from all the guys?**

TAYLOR COLLINS: I'd like to say for the most part to me, it was pretty good. The guys that I played with have been really supportive, and the guys I work with are really supportive. So, good.

**Q. I'm not really sold on that, so I guess there's some that -- I guess what would be the controversy?**

TAYLOR COLLINS: The tees, I think, play 85 percent of what they play.

**Q. And did you feel it was set up fairly?**

TAYLOR COLLINS: Yes, I do, just because I can't hit it as far as a guy just in general. It just wouldn't be possible -- well some guys, of course, but just on average. I do happen to be one of the long hitters out there, so it could look unfair sometimes with myself hitting the ball but perhaps not other ladies when they are playing. So it wouldn't be fair to just judge it off the long-ball hitters.

And I think something that's forgotten a lot when you're playing is I'll hit my driver, I'll happen to hit it long and one of the long guys will hit it past me and I might be hitting a pitching wedge and he's hitting a sand wedge, or I'm hitting an 8-iron and he's still hitting a pitching wedge.

So I understand, I guess, all sides of it. It's a tricky one but I'd say it's fair for the most part if I'm honest.

**Q. How far do you hit it?**

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TAYLOR COLLINS: Honestly, right now, anywhere between 240 and 270. I don't play consistently enough to just have an average I guess, but if I'm playing really well, I'm probably like around 260. If I'm a little off, 240, 250.

**Q. For golf fans having the PGA Champions Tour event in Boca in December, this LPGA event and then you have The Honda Classic for the PGA up here in Palm Beach County, how cool is it to have all three of those tours in a two-month span for fans here?**

TAYLOR COLLINS: It's awesome because everyone is going to be craving the golf and it's going to be great to see so many types of golfers out here. It's really cool when you see local people playing it. Even for me, like I go watch the Honda. I love it. My brother is excited to go watch. I have friends that are like getting excited about golf because maybe they are not into golf, but they are friends with you, so they have some sort of connection to it so now they are becoming golf fans.

It's great, my brother is going to bring his girlfriend. She might get into golf now, and who knows, now we've got another golfer in the world, which is awesome. So I think it's fun that it's all together because you can just keep the excitement going.

TOM ABBOTT: Thank you all, I just think this is going to be a really nice week, and the golf course looks to be in great shape. I'll give you a report later but I'm sure there is and there's a lot of support in this area from what I've seen today. Great stories with Taylor and Madelene, as I wrapped up the press conference earlier, I said fine example of the cross-spectrum of our game in that you've got a player who is growing the game in The PGA of America and teaching, and then you've got a player who is on the Tour and entertaining us on Tour.

So two great ambassadors for the game, and I'm just thrilled to see Taylor playing in another LPGA event having hosted Big Break when she won. Thanks everybody, and contact Jeremy with any other questions.

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