

Kia Classic

Friday, March 26, 2021

Carlsbad, California, USA

Park Hyatt Aviara Golf Club

Sophia Popov

Quick Quotes

Q. Sophia, six birdies today. We'll start with the good. What was the one that stood out en route to the 4-under?

SOPHIA POPOV: I think honestly for me the one on 18. I was playing pretty well at that point. I was 2-under for the round and -- but 18 is always one of those holes where you're happy when it's over.

But I hit two good shots on the green and made that putt, and I think that was kind of the -- for me, maybe just solidifying my thoughts that I have on the course and really made myself acknowledge that I'm just playing very good golf right now.

Q. You stumbled on 5 and 6. What happened there?

SOPHIA POPOV: Actually, I hit great shots. My ball spun off the green on No. 5. Really just hit -- I hit a good wedge. I don't know how it ended up there.

Then I kind of made a bad decision between chipping putting and I was a little bit uncommitted so ended up in a three-putt out of the rough.

Then on No. 6 off the fringe I had another three-putt. I think was putting a little bit too aggressive, kind of definitely wanting to go lower and wanting to push myself a little bit to go lower.

So really just two maybe slight mental errors, but I got back quite nicely with the birdie on 7.

Q. I think you shared the lead at one point and solo lead out there at one point. Did you know that at all?

SOPHIA POPOV: No. I never look at leaderboards. I tell Mikey, I don't want to know anything. I'm playing one hole at a time. I kind of know. You feel it because you're going like, okay, I'm 9-under now. I'm sure there are not a lot of people 9-under right now.

So I kind of -- I would've liked to keep it going a little bit

FastScripts
transcript

ASAP text



more. I definitely felt like I could have gotten to 10 or 11 today, but I lost my driver a little bit on the last five holes.

But it's still solid 4-under. I'll take it.

Q. How did the course change a little maybe from just the rain yesterday and playing in the afternoon to this morning?

SOPHIA POPOV: Yeah, I mean, it was -- first of all, it was a lot nicer to play today. It was freezing yesterday. So even on the second hole today Greeny and I were just talking about it. We said, I can take this for another three days for sure. It was calmer and obviously a little bit warmer, so it dried out a little bit, I think, the fairways. I didn't have to hit as many drivers. Had quite a few 3-woods today off the tee.

And the greens are definitely firming up. Balls are taking pretty big bounces and you have to just be good at calculating the bounces, I think. And I think that's going to get even more throughout the weekend.

Q. When you won at AIG it was you and a group of people behind you. You got Inbee Park right there. What's it like when you look at the leaderboard maybe later tonight and you have a Hall of Famer right there that you'll be competing with this weekend?

SOPHIA POPOV: You know, I'm not surprised at all to see her there. I honestly, just -- I think that -- I think she's going to be up there every single week, so just seeing her there is like, yeah, if I can keep up with her I'm doing great. I think she's definitely one of my -- Max and I, my boyfriend, were talking about that. She's one of my golfing idols a little because I love the way she plays. I love her mental game. I think she's an amazing player.

So I'm not surprised to see her up there. It's definitely -- I'm going to have a pretty big job ahead of myself, but then again, I don't want to get ahead of myself and just play one shot at a time. Essentially she has to make the shots too, so we'll see.

Q. Yeah. I would imagine knowing you just competing with her in a group is what you live for.

SOPHIA POPOV: Absolutely. I know when I'm playing



... when all is said, we're done.®

with her I'm playing pretty well. That's always the goal. The goal is to be up there with her.

Q. Does that bring as much of a competitive juice out of you that could be possible?

SOPHIA POPOV: Yeah, for sure. I think the nice thing is that I played with her in Portland last year and she's just a very calm person to be around. I really enjoy it because it almost gets me relaxed. Even though she's out there shooting -- making a lot birdies and shooting low, I think it's something that I'm more comfortable or someone I'm more comfortable playing with because she's very -- she goes about her job very quietly and I like that. I enjoy it.

We have some nice conversations in between, so I quite enjoy it actually.

Q. You've made every cut since taking LPGA membership with five top 25s and a pair of Top 10s this year. Steve asks, for a lot of casual golf fans who tuned into the AIG last year and who don't know you, they might be surprised by your consistently good play. Quite frankly many people assumed you would be a one-hit wonder who don't know you and just tuned in on NBC that one Sunday afternoon. So knowing yourself, what is it that has led to this confidence and great play, and do you feel comfortable in this moment?

SOPHIA POPOV: First of all, that's a little bit heart breaking, people really thought I was a one-hit wonder. No, but I think that I just -- for me personally, I knew that I would -- sorry, I knew that I would need like the one good finish in order to propel me to do what I'm doing now.

I think me inside, for my mental game, it was like the most important thing that had to happen. I was kind of waiting for it and waiting for it, and then I knew, okay, now I broke through. Now I can just go out and kind of do my thing and not have to worry as much.

And I think that a lot of the maybe bad play that I had over the last five or six years was due to just the pressure situations that I was in and always being on the cusp of having the card and flipping back between having it and not having it.

I think that just put me under a lot of pressure and I think I put myself under an incredible amount of pressure. So I think with that being released, that kind of tension, it just helped me a lot to play well. Now I just feel comfortable. I'm having a good time and I think I am just enjoying myself out there a lot.

Q. Was there anything after the win -- we know you're not a one hit wonder, but for that Sunday casual NASCAR fan that turned on NBC, did you have anything in your mind after you won, maybe, I don't know, once the win settled down, I'm going to show everybody it wasn't just the AIG?

SOPHIA POPOV: I think winning came with a little bit of new pressure, too, because I wanted to make sure that people know I didn't just come and I won and after that it was not a lot of good, so --

Q. Not validated.

SOPHIA POPOV: Exactly, not validated. So I think that I actually -- for me, it was just kind of a situation where I said, okay, let's go and pedal to the metal, keep going. Don't try to protect anything that you have. Just your irons are good. Every part of your game is good, so just be aggressive and keep playing just to get through those nerves.

And then I think in Portland the first time I played, just being in a twosome with Inbee was almost relaxing, almost the perfect situation for me to get back into it after the Open, because she's just a really mellow and calm person to play with obviously.

I think that just -- you know, it should have made me really nervous playing with her, but it almost did the opposite. So I don't know. I can't really pinpoint one thing. I think everything has been really solid. Been working really hard. It's kind of all come together.

Q. Yeah. You're mentally strong. I think if you're not as mentally strong Inbee lulls those people to sleep.

SOPHIA POPOV: Yeah, 100%, 100%.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports