

FIR HILLS SERI PAK Championship

Wednesday, March 20, 2024
Palos Verdes Estates, California, USA
Palos Verdes Golf Club

Sophia Popov Caroline Masson Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: All right, welcome back inside the media center here at the Fir Hills Seri Pak Championship.

I'm pleased to be joined by the newest mamas and their return to the LPGA Tour in Sophia Popov and Caroline Masson. Welcome back.

I want to first start with Caro because this is your first event back since giving birth. How excited are you to have this event and to re-debut for 2024?

CAROLINE MASSON: I'm extremely excited. It's been such a fun time off of golf, and obviously having Benton and spending the first few months with him at home.

Yeah, it's always been a goal of mine to come back and travel as a family with my husband who caddies for Nelly. For us to be able to do this, the three of us go on the road and make new memories, start this new adventure together, was really cool.

Obviously it's a little bit of a new perspective starting to play begin. I think it's better than before for sure. I put in a lot of work, so I'm just excited to get out there and hopefully enjoy any golf.

Q. For those that can't see, Benton is off to the right. Heard his mama's voice and made a cooing sound. Sophia, you actually made your debut in Tampa on the Ladies European Tour. What was it like getting back out?

SOPHIA POPOV: A lot of what Caro just said. It was very exciting to have it be a little bit different traveling with Maya, with my mom, and kind of having a whole crew and try to figure out the schedule.

And honestly for me, not spending so much time on the golf course. That was actually great. Sometimes I'm out

here and I'm like, oh, I'll hit a couple more chips and next thing I know I'm like, oh, my God it's 5:00 pm.

So kind of almost makes me leave the golf course earlier, which I think is beneficial to me actually. And I really just enjoyed playing. I saw Maya every now and then, which was kind of cool on the course. Second round was a little bit too long for my liking. Okay, I have to get adjusted to the long rounds again.

Other than that, it was a nice way to get into it. It was a team event and I played with Bronte, who is a long-time friend of mine, so that was very easygoing.

And it was very fun. All in all, kind of cool way to start the season for me.

Q. For both of you, we have a lot of LPGA moms it feels like over the last couple years here. Caro, what has it been like getting back into that competitive mindset and getting ready for another competitive event?

CAROLINE MASSON: Yeah, not easy. I mean, for sure, like I honestly always had so much respect for all the moms on tour. It just doubled or tripled in the last few months. You're not only getting adjusted to having a baby and managing life just with a baby, but to come back on tour and put in all that work, I thought it was really challenging physically to get back into golf shape.

I hadn't really touched a club in a year, so kind of started at what felt like zero. It's been not so easy, but a cool challenge as well. Like I touched on earlier, it's kind of almost refreshing after I think I played for 13 years to get a little bit of a break and get a little bit of a new perspective, appreciation for what we been doing.

It gets repetitive. Year after year you go to the same places. After a while you don't appreciate it as much. So just to build up that excitement and putting in the work and seeing the process and really getting a little bit better every day and every week has been really fun preparing for this.

Q. She talks about perspective. Sophia, for you, we

ASAP . . . when all is said, we're done.®
sports

heard from a lot of moms that come back the tour and play again professionally after taking some time off to give birth and kind of reset. There is a lot of perspective when it comes to playing for my daughter, my son, my child. Do you feel that? Did you feel that a little bit getting to play in front of your little one?

SOPHIA POPOV: Yeah, honestly, it kept reminding me of what's really important. That's important. I love to hear the cooing, the sounds. I really don't care how you play golf, mom, as long as you feed me after the round we're all cool.

Just kind of to what Caro said, it is so hard to get back into playing shape. I would call her after like four months, five months post partum and I'm like, I feel horrible. Like I'm a total noodle. I can't swing the golf club. My body is so out of shape. How am I ever going to be the same again?

I was really nervous. Everything changed, my body, everything. I was like, man, this is what it's like? All these moms already on tour, totally underestimated what it's like to come back, figure out a schedule to play.

But at the same time, when I was playing and saw her, I go...but the actually playing is more fun now because I just see her and after the round, I played fine, great; I didn't play well, doesn't matter.

It's a different perspective. I come off the golf course and will always have fun because I'm always hanging out with her. I won't like go back and be like, what happened on 13? I just won't care anymore. I think that's great. It's just very helpful. It's just very helpful.

Yeah, it's just been nice that way.

Q. Sophia, I know obviously your mom is an athlete; you know what that's like. For you, really you just kind of talked about it, but just how much respect do you have now for the physical challenges of going through all that? I talked to Caro a little bit yesterday, the core is gone. How much do you really respect the ability to come back and play at this level?

SOPHIA POPOV: Yeah, as an example, I was home over the summer. I had just given birth in June. I was watching Wimbledon. I was watching Elina Svitolina come back and she was eight months postpartum and made it to the semifinals. I was sitting on the coach going, there is no way at eight months I'm going to be able to do this. Like I am just so out of shape.

At the time, it feels to you like forever. Feels like you're doing a core exercise that's so basic and it's exhausting. That's where you have to start off. Your core. I had a lot of

ab separation, so you're trying to get your abs back working, functioning.

You hit a golf ball and you're like, man, I need my core a lot. I didn't even realize that before. Like it comes naturally and you take it for granted. You go, yeah, I was in shape. Fine.

But now it's like a whole different thing. I do all any exercise just to get my body in shape and then for sure golf. So just like respect I have not just for the golfers out here, but for all the female athletes that get back into track tennis, swimming, all these sports, it's wild. I totally underestimated it.

Now I just am like all, go moms everywhere, because we've been through it now. You just know what it takes.

Q. For both of you, like Megan mentioned, there is a younger legion of moms. Stacy's class had a little bit of a group. How cool is it to do this together. Jess just had her nugget; Lindsey Weaver just ran a half marathon last week. To have this group of women --

SOPHIA POPOV: Wild.

Q. -- to really go through this and learn together, I know it's not always the easiest.

CAROLINE MASSON: Yeah, it's like you said, a little bit of a generation kind of getting to this age where I think we're all starting families. It's fun to share the journey. We've been doing that. You go through pregnancy a little bit together and learn from each other and just talk.

Because everybody is feeling the same way. It's nice to have people in the same situation that you've known for a very long time going through the same things. Just kind of connecting over that.

So, yeah, I think now we're the experienced moms here.

SOPHIA POPOV: And helping each other out. She texted me, I'm coming up 9; she's fell asleep in the car. Okay, this is a serious situation. So how about this is the game plan. And like we actually can be there for each other, too, to help out you with the kids, which is also great. I think you only understand that scenario when you have a baby. Oh, no, they fell asleep in the car. We need to keep them asleep. What are we going to do now?

Like just texting a game plan, like how are we going to get to the presser with a baby. I think that's also kind of just as an example.

CAROLINE MASSON: Totally. Have the kids get together like down the road and in the future and help each other out. Yeah, it's a new part of our life now. I think we're both super excited to just start it and just to be able to do that and combine it with playing golf out here on the LPGA Tour with the best players in the world is really, really cool.

I think we're, again, going to enjoy it that a little bit more than I think we've had and appreciate it. It's not going to be forever. You realize that when you're out of it for a little bit. I think the next few years should be really fun.

Q. For both of you, what was the reasoning behind the timing? Some girls go out and try to do that kind of early in their career; some people later. What was went into the timing? It is a challenge when you're a young female athlete when this lovely business starts of being a mom.

CAROLINE MASSON: Yeah, well, Jason and I with COVID, we had such a hard time getting married that everything seemed to be delayed a couple years. We planned this for a long time. I think you're always waiting for the perfect time, and the perfect time really never comes around. There is always things you want to do and achieve.

I went into pregnancy basically thinking, okay, I would love to play golf again professionally. There is also a good chance it won't happen. And I was content with that. I felt like I have done good things in my career. I mean, you always think you could have done better. I really didn't feel like I had that much to prove left. So either way I would've been okay.

I think that was a very nice feeling, situation to be in, to really be able to focus on him and our family, and then obviously, yeah, if I get the chance to play again, I'll do it. Like I said, we'll start this new chapter as a family.

Just knowing there is no perfect time, and whenever it happens it's going to be amazing. There are many possibilities after having a baby in terms of playing or doing something different, too, which is super exciting.

SOPHIA POPOV: I agree. Just to piggyback on that, I think there is no perfect timing, and I think for me it was kind of a thing that I was just -- it was kind of like planned, we didn't want to wait too long. I wanted to maybe be able to play still after having a baby. I didn't want to wait so long personally because I don't know, just having a family was always a dream of mine and just I've always want that, too.

So to be able to do both now is obviously a blessing. It's tough. It's really tough, but it's enjoyable. I think some just

decide to do it after their career; some decide to do it during. Sometimes it just the timing. It happens. You can't fully plan these things.

Just as a female athlete that's always hard. It's so under-rated and not talked about a lot. If you want both things, then how can you do it? Can you play and can you do your sport while having a kid? All these things. So I don't know. For us it just worked out well.

Happened to be basically almost the same timing as Caro. Happened to work out that way, so I can't tell you exactly if it was planned or not. Now I'm happy about it.

Q. And you can get through a press conference with a little one, too.

CAROLINE MASSON: I know.

Q. So going back a little bit, how does making your first start from coming back compared to your very first start, your LPGA debut?

SOPHIA POPOV: That's an interesting question. My first start, that was in 2015, was just very nerve-wracking. I was so young at that point. It was a totally different thing.

Now, just having not played for about a year and a half, coming back, I know what it's like to be out here. I know what it's like to play. I mean, I had to figure out where to pick up my credential but all that stuff kind of like I forgot. I'm like, I have to go here, there, but the planning part.

But just being out there and playing the pro-am, oh, yeah, it's kind of second nature. We've done it for so long. The first time you come out as a rookie it's very nerve-wracking. You're not sure how to handle certain situations. You're nervous.

Not to say I won't be nervous on the first tee. I always am. But I definitely think it's different, because now coming back, it's like done this before. I'm enjoying it. I think there is less -- I put less pressure on myself. Because if it works out, great if I play good golf, a some of if I don't, like I said, I have my family. I have so much support from home. I have all these things to do.

It is what it is. I've just noticed the last few days of practicing I've been more relaxed than I previously had been just practicing. I think I would actually say I'm overall just a lot more of a mature person at this point than I was 2015.

CAROLINE MASSON: I can agree. You are. (Laughing.)

Q. Just about this overall tournament, for both of you, Seri Pak has her name behind this event this week. She stated how much she wanted to come back and give this back to the LPGA Tour and how this has been a dream for you. What does it mean that we have The ANNIKA and something like Seri Pak Championship? What does that mean to players like you?

CAROLINE MASSON: I think it's absolutely amazing. She's one of the legends of the game. The impact she has had on women's golf has been amazing, and I love her personally, too.

I feel like she's been always like the nicest person. She's been -- I don't know, she kind of comes across as a little bit of a mom in a way. When you see here she is very, I don't know, comes across so normal and down to earth, which is awesome.

To have the legends still associated with the LPGA and our tournaments is awesome. We all look up to them, and I'm sure there is a lot of girls picking their brains too while they're here. Definitely a cool tournament to come back.

Q. For you, too, Sophia you, being a USC grad and coming to an event like this, what does it mean to you?

SOPHIA POPOV: Yeah, it's always kind of cool not just to have her name behind the event, it's always cool to have the legends of our sport connected to these events. It's big. It's big for the tour.

I think it'll just continue to go that way. Just for also the players to stay involved and be around for the next generation is very cool. These are the people that we looked up to playing, and I think we're getting to be part of that generation where if -- at the end of our careers like we're kind of that next generation to the rookies now. So I think that's very interesting.

For me, being back here as USC alum is fun. I've been here a lot. Never learned how to play the golf course, but I like it a lot. The views are really nice. But it's kind of nice to be so close to SC. I drove past the campus yesterday. I see so many supporters that we had in college that came out and already said hi. That part has been great, too.

So it's kind of a neat place for me to start my LPGA season.

Fastscripts by ASAP Sports...

