

LPGA MEDIHEAL Championship

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Daly City, California, USA

Lake Merced Country Club

Lydia Ko

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: All right, welcome everyone inside the LPGA MEDIHEAL Championship virtual media center here in San Francisco. I'm happy to be joined by Lydia Ko here.

So with that, Lydia, thank you for joining us today. How are you feeling?

LYDIA KO: Yeah, it was actually a really nice day out. I think we've had four straight days where you can kind of see the sun, which is really nice, considering it can get pretty chilly.

Good to be back. Obviously with last week only being 10 minutes from here it's nice to have a couple weeks where you don't have to move hotels or housing. Yeah, looking forward to the second week of us playing here in San Francisco.

THE MODERATOR: You talk about not having to change hotels and getting used to San Francisco air. Just talk us through your experience last week at Olympic Club and what it meant to be playing so close to this event, and also in San Francisco in general.

LYDIA KO: Yeah, obviously it's super convenient for us to not have to drive or even fly somewhere now for the next event. Doesn't happen very often for us, so really nice, and when I saw the two tournaments were going to be back to back it's just a really easy transition from one week to another.

Olympic Club was a beast but I enjoyed it so much. I think it was a true test of what a major championship should be like and what a U.S. Women's Open should be like. I think it's a great leadup to this event. This event has some tricky holes as well.

With the weather and temperature being pretty similar I'm guessing between the two weeks, hopefully I would've done a lot of adjustments last week and kind of help for us this week.

THE MODERATOR: You come into this event so comfortable on this course. Before we open to questions, you're coming into this event already a 2021 winner. Where do you feel in your game as you get ready for the MEDIHEAL Championship?

LYDIA KO: Yeah, obviously last week wasn't the week that I had hoped for, but in general I actually played really solid. Sometimes you were going to hit good shots and you were still in the rough, and when you go in the rough it was pretty thick there.

But I think it's a great leadup, and even with this week aside, I think just last week itself was such a fun challenge. Yes, it was stressful, but I enjoyed every moment of it.

This course, you know, since it became the MEDIHEAL Championship they flipped the nines so that's obviously a little different. They changed a couple of the holes in the past few years as well. You have to be -- I think your ball striking needs to be on, and it tends to be pretty windy here so just having that under control.

But no, I wish I was coming into this week playing a little better, but I feel like it wasn't far off. It was just a handful of not-so-good shots last week and ended up becoming a few higher scores, and that can happen really easily, especially at a U.S. Women's Open.

Hopefully I'll be able to maintain the good feels and positives from last week and work on the things that I feel like needs to be fine tuned these next couple days for the Thursday's first round.

Q. When you won here in 2015 it was kind of a new experience for you at the time. Then you win again in 2018 where it's kind of a comeback experience. You've already won this year. You've been on a very good upward trend. How are the feelings different coming back this year as opposed to the other two wins here?

LYDIA KO: I think every single time it was like very different, just the situation I was in, just the way I was



playing leading up to the event.

To be honest, in 2018 I think I had played the HUGEL LPGA in L.A. the week prior, and I was so stressed out after the week in L.A., not like obviously with my game, but like I feel like I couldn't hole anything. I wasn't -- ball striking wasn't there.

Then shows like week to week things can change. I think golf is one of the big sports where someone could literally miss seven cuts in a row and win on the eighth week. It's really good to be on a good momentum and confidence run coming into an event, but I think if you have your feels and you know what you're doing, what happened last week or what happened the day before is what already happened and you can focus on what's in front of you.

I think, yeah, because the situation has been different it's really hard to compare. I'm just excited to be here. Sad that we couldn't be here last year, which was first time in a while that we couldn't play this golf course.

But no, I'm excited. Hopefully I'll be able to hit my fair share of good shots and roll some good putts; see with that puts me at the end of the day of the week.

Q. I remember being here in 2015 and the take for people describing Lydia was, precise, not incredibly long, great deft touch around the greens. Nobody says you're short anymore. Tell me the difference in your game now as opposed to then.

LYDIA KO: Yeah, I think I'm probably carrying the driver approximately like 20 yards further than I was then, so in some perspectives I think it makes me change my course management a little bit, and that actually happened throughout the week last week where when I played the practice rounds and the advance practice rounds as well. It was a lot colder and you're not in that tournament adrenaline mode as well. You're obviously going to hit it shorter.

So in tournaments you're going to hit it further and further. There were some holes, like No. 18 in the practice days where I was, Okay, driver, just get it down to the bottom of hill, and then by Thursday I was hitting 5-wood off the tee and I could have really hit less, and it was also the case on some other holes as well.

So makes you have to think a little bit. And even last year when I played few courses that I had before, you know, at a shorter length, it made me think, Okay, is driver still the right club or now I can be a little bit more aggressive.

So just makes my think a little bit and actually I didn't play a

practice round yesterday, but leading up to the week I was thinking a few holes, Okay, it might be a 3-wood off the tee because might be a better position to go into some of these greens.

It's not the narrowest fairways in the world but not the widest as well. So I think positioning is such a big key. Even normally with the greens being pretty firm out here. I think being on the fairways is going to be pretty crucial.

So I just have to be smart. Sometimes people might go, Oh, man, why is she hitting that club off the tee. You just have to do what's right for and you what you feel most comfortable with.

I think I'm just trying to get a better gauge of that.

Q. You have been a master at managing expectations, not just your own but the ones people have of you. Was a burden lifted this year after the victory where you're like, Whew, okay, that's behind us; now I can focus on something else?

LYDIA KO: I think it was more I wasn't putting as much pressure on myself. But I think the big thing since would working with Sean was that he said, You know what? Winning is great obviously and you're going to be super happy when that happens, but that's not going to make you a better person. It's not going to be like a life-changing moment just because of that win whenever it comes.

And I felt like that was a really good mindset for me to play in. I wasn't putting added pressure, but it was more like when I did win in Hawaii it was just telling myself, Hey, I can do this. I can be back in the winner's circle. It was more proving to myself than other people at that point.

I think that's what's most important. Even if everyone says, Oh, you're so bad or, Oh, this and this, I think if you believe in yourself, then I think that's it. You can just focus on yourself and believe in the work that you're doing.

And I think it becomes the hardest when you're doubting yourself and doubting your process. I feel like even though I hadn't won in a while, the last few weeks -- the last few months leading up to Hawaii I think I was slowly building up confidence and belief in myself.

I think that was the more important thing, and just winning there just kind of put the exclamation mark on that just for I think me, and I think that's more important than anything else.

Q. You talked about the logistical advantages of back to back. Can you compare the courses? Seems like

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

there are some similarities in San Francisco golf and the trees and the layouts at Olympic Club and Lake Merced. In what ways is it different and similar at Lake Merced this week?

LYDIA KO: I haven't seen the golf course yet so I don't exactly know how firm, fast, soft, how long the rough is out there. But I think the layout itself, there are some dogleg holes, which was also the case last week. So those things are pretty similar.

There are some narrow holes where could still be on the fairway but it's a better angle from another section of the fair, which was kind of the case last week as well. So those thing are similar.

I think the greens are poa annua, where last week it's bent, so that's a little bit different. But I think the greens, grass around the greens and just off the fairways are pretty similar as well.

But this course, I think it's not super demanding, but I think you need to be pretty accurate off the tee. Just going to give you like way more opportunities to go at pins, and especially if it's windy, which has been the case the past few times we've been here. It plays very handy card in your hand.

So, yeah, I think those are probably some the major differences and similarities between the two courses.

Q. Two other quick questions: I'm curious your perspective on what it's going to be like for Lexi to come back three days later and play again. You've won some majors and I'm sure there have been final rounds where you haven't played well and maybe lost the lead. How difficult is it to come back so quickly, and what are the ways you've bounced back from disappointments such as the one she had Sunday?

LYDIA KO: Yeah, I think at the end of the day everyone can agree that Lexi played incredible golf. If she had -- obviously wasn't the finish that she had wished for, but if you put that back nine into, let's say, the back nine of a Thursday, it's not really that big of a deal.

I think I'm like 14-over on the back nine so I know for a fact she played a lot better than me. She played amazing golf. Yuka and Nasa just played a little better, and obviously Yuka ended up winning, which was amazing.

Yeah, I think no matter what happened, nobody can take away from Lexi how great of golf she played, especially the golf that she played on Saturday that was absolutely incredible.

I don't know how you have a bogey-free round there or on any other golf course, but especially around there, so I think I'm sure there may be disappointment, but she still played incredible. I'm sure she's going to still come into this week with a lot of confidence, as she should, because it's pretty hard to -- it's hard to win, but also hard to be contending at those moments.

What she did was great. I'm sure she's going to put on a great show again this week.

Q. And one last question: Yuka is obviously only 19; Nasa is 22. I believe Megha Ganne is 17. A lot of young players in contention at Olympic Club. I think that sort of speaks to the next wave on the LPGA Tour. I'm curious on your take on all the young players being able to contend in a major like that and maybe how it's different than five years ago?

LYDIA KO: Yeah, there is just so much talent, and golf is a sport where literally age is just a number. Obviously the more time you play on tour and the more experience you have that can play to your advantage going down the road. And experience is such a big thing. Just because you're 19 doesn't mean she can't win a major.

What she did was amazing, and the playoff holes were so good. Even when they were out of position they hit some incredible shots to give themselves birdies. I played with Yuka for the first time at U.S. Women's Open practice round I think in 2019, and I was like -- I had heard about her and I had seen her swing from afar and I was like, Wow, this is super impressive.

I played a practice round with her last week as well. Weirdly, I'm only 24 and I was a youngest -- oldest one in the group, which is like weird to think because I used to always be the young one.

But, yeah, no, super impressive. I saw something like everyone was saying, Oh, Yuka swings like Rory, but now could be like Rory swings like Yuka. Those kind of things, and I think it's great.

I think Rory watched her and supported her, which was super awesome to see also the men's golf keeping a good eye on our U.S. Women's Open as well.

But, yeah, super impressive. It's great to see like different names and new names, and I'm sure they are names that we're going to see a lot down the future as well.

So it's great for women's golf and I think hopefully through this the game itself will keep growing.

Q. You touched on it just a few minutes ago. How much do you pre-strategize about how you're going to play each hole and each course? Do you think that far in advance about it, or do you wait until you get to the hole? Talk about that.

LYDIA KO: I would probably -- I don't like pre-strategize a lot. It's because it really depends on how the course is playing, and every year could play differently, every day could play differently.

I think when I'm playing practice rounds is when I get most of the course management work done. If the wind changes or the firmness of the fairways changes, then I also think, Okay, what is the next option when things change.

So I think it's mostly done during practice rounds, and then before tournament day I always like to see the wind direction and go through my yardage book to see how the course is going to play. And especially around a course like this when the wind can blow, I think the wind direction is a huge factor. Most of the time the wind direction is a constant -- pretty consistent and comes from the same direction, so hopefully I'll be able to strategize well and get ready for Thursday.

Q. I know you can't speak for other players, but I notice when I look at the field there were several players that played last week that are not here this week. Such an easy travel situation like you said. Why would they not?

LYDIA KO: I think some players played the last couple weeks and it's -- I think Kingsmill was the start of our long stretch of events going -- I think it's nonstop pretty much until the Irish Open if you want to keep playing them all.

We have three majors in between this stretch, and to some, they may want to play the week prior to a major championship, which our next one is KPMG in three weeks. They may not want to play four or five weeks straight in a row.

Major championship, yes, you try and think of it not any differently to another event, but I think when you are especially in contention or you're in those kind of featured groups, it could be a little bit more energy draining than you think.

So I'm sure with all these amazing events, yes, players want to play all of it and it's a great opportunity. At the end of the day you really can't do everything. So I'm sure it's just to get ready maybe for the next one and make sure they're rested and recovered for the other events that are

coming up.

Q. One more question: You mentioned future names, and I was looking at the field. Not exactly a future name, but there has only been a really small handful of players that have won here at Lake Merced. Haru Nomura is one of them. I haven't seen her on TV in a long time and she's in the field this week. Talk about her and why a select few of you have only won here, including Minjee in the junior girls.

LYDIA KO: Yeah, I have no idea. You know, I don't know why there's only a handful of players that have won here. Saying that, this tournament hasn't been around for -- it's not been a tournament that's been around for 10 years plus where a lot of tour players have been coming and coming and coming.

Obviously it was the Swinging Skirts event before. Some of us played the US Junior Girls and now MEDIHEAL Championship. I think things have changed, and it's also been at different parts of the year as well.

So it's just I don't think it's been like, okay, a regular stop for the Tour in general for a long period of time, so that's why could be a smaller selection.

But Haru, I love her. I think she's one of the best personalities on tour. She's goofy, funny, really nice and really caring, and the week before the LOTTE Championship she was there early and I was there early in Hawaii so we played golf with a friend out at Turtle Bat, which was really nice.

And, yeah, you know I always love her company. She's a multiple-time winner on the LPGA, so she clearly knows how to get it done. Hopefully she'll have a good week here and hopefully I'll have a good week here as well.

Q. This is the last time the LPGA is going to play Lake Merced on this layout with the renovation coming later this year. How did you react when you found out the course was changing and how does it feel to play this course one last time under this setup?

LYDIA KO: Hopefully I finish strong on this setup. I haven't seen the exact layout of it, but when I came out here few weeks ago I heard that I think they were going to start in November or something and go until October, or start in October and goes to November, one of those two.

But I think they said they're going to lengthen some of holes, make them a differently. I think Gil Hanse is meant to be doing the new layout and he's a really popular golf architect right now.

Yeah, I'm excited to see what it will be like at the end. Obviously won't have the same feel as it is now because we -- I played here pretty much every single time we've come here as a tour, but even now a few holes have changed since I've been playing this golf course as well.

Sometimes it's hard to make that change and kind of that step forward. I'm sure the club and the members are super excited for this kind of one step ahead. Maybe the new venue may make it a stop for us later or could be where the men play or a major championship comes and plays.

Yeah, I'm sure this is very exciting for the golf club.

THE MODERATOR: All right, thank you everyone for joining us and thank you Lydia.

LYDIA KO: Thank you.

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