

# Palos Verdes Championship presented by Bank of America

Tuesday, April 26, 2022

Palos Verdes Estates, California, USA

Palos Verdes Golf Club

## Sophia Popov

### Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: Here with Sophia Popov at the Palos Verdes Championship presented by Bank of America.

Let's start with the most obvious thing. Got the USC connection. We were up the road in proper LA last week; down here in Palos Verdes Estates this week. You're kind of a hometown hero here, at least for USC fans. What's it been like being back in your old stomping grounds?

SOPHIA POPOV: It's been really nice. I think especially for me. I've come off a few weeks where I've been not playing my best golf, so to come out here a few days early and seeing some of the members that I haven't seen in a long time, I used to -- straight out of college I worked with Jim Gormley, the head pro here.

I came down quite a few times and I've stayed with a few members, and, yeah, it's kind of -- it's weird. It's kind of my home course when I'm here in LA and it's been really nice.

We had a clinic on Sunday with a lot of the members, and just to see them all again. They always come out for the college event, the Northrup Grumman, so it's nice just to have some -- not just SC support, but just the members from PV.

**Q. Anybody that you really wanted to see that you did get to see already this week?**

SOPHIA POPOV: I think just in general. It's fun to see Jim obviously. He said it's weird to have a tournament like this in his backyard, because we obviously always had the college event here every year and so now he's used to that one. Now to see a bunch of girls that played that college event play this LPGA event is cool for him to see.

No, I think just in general, like I said some of the members and the staff that work here. A lot of them still work here. It's been about eight years since I graduated, so that's always fun.

**Q. Let's even talk about that. Doing some research,**



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**you finished second here, finished seventh here, had another top 10 here. You really like this golf course it seems like. What's it about Palos Verdes that really sets up for you?**

SOPHIA POPOV: I just think I always liked it, and I think due to the conditions, too, I think a lot of girls will say this was one of the toughest events they played during college just because it was always cold. We played it in February. It was always cold and windy.

It's fun. I think you have to really think your way around the golf course. It's not just straightforward. You need to know where to miss the shots into the green, you need to know where to miss your drives, if you do miss them.

I think that's just something that I like to do. I like to think my way around a golf course. I don't love golf courses that are extremely low scoring, and this was never a low scoring event.

I think every year if you finished under par you were finishing top 10 usually just because of the weather conditions, and I think that's something that just set up well for me.

And obviously it being kind of a home event for us and members supporting us, that just always felt good and made it a little bit easier to play.

**Q. As a player that's probably seen every inch of this golf course, have you had anybody come up to you, even some former USC teammates, and be like, hey, what are the tricks here?**

SOPHIA POPOV: Yeah, absolutely. Some of the German have asked me, some of my other friends on tour, what's important to look out for on this golf course.

They did make a few changes that I had to get used to, too, that happened after I graduated. But in general, yeah, I was -- I'm able to give out a few tips here and there. I think that's kind of a thing of just playing it a bunch and knowing how balls react.



It's funny, I played a practice round and I hadn't played in a while, but it's just so stuck in my memory that I would hit certain shots and I would like, Oh, yeah, you you just absolutely cannot be short on this one or you can't be long here or it takes a big hop over there. Those are things I'm relearning again a little bit.

I'm trying to give out as much advice as I can, but not all of it. (Laughter.)

**Q. What are some of the changes that have been made to this golf course? A lot of us don't know what came before and what we're here now with.**

SOPHIA POPOV: Yeah, so they took out a bunch of trees. The views are just incredible. What is normally the front nine we play as the tournament back nine, have -- No. 11, 12, there are some incredible views to the ocean there.

They've changed a few of the greens, made them a little bit flatter. They used to be extremely severe, so that's one of the things where I always said, okay, in the college event you had to be below the hole all the time because they were very severe back to front. They changed a few of those.

Like I said, just opened it up a little bit and then changed the stretch around 6, 7 -- 5, 6, 7, and just made to maybe I would say a little bit more scorable. I think it was actually -- might have made it a tiny bit easier, the golf course, but it's just more open and I think it looks better.

I think's aesthetically it's just an amazing golf course now.

**Q. Having been here for a few days, obviously seen a lot of the golf course now, tell us about the conditions out there.**

SOPHIA POPOV: Yeah, I think we actually had some beautiful days now for practice, and I actually didn't play as much because of that.

I'm afraid to play here when it's really warm and nice and no wind, because I know it's going to be different during the tournament. I backed off a little bit and just practiced, played few holes here and there just to get a feel for it.

I know it's going to be cooling down throughout the middle of the week and towards the end of the week, so I'm trying not to get used to just how far the ball was flying the first few days.

It plays very, very similar to the way I've always played it. It's just kind of nice to -- maybe couple tee shots, relearn targets and stuff, but in the general I'm doing the majority

of my practice probably today and tomorrow just leading up to the first round.

**Q. Let's talk about your season. Probably not the fastest start --**

SOPHIA POPOV: Nope.

**Q. -- that you would want to get off to. How are you staying mentally tough and what are you working on to kind of get yourself back into form?**

SOPHIA POPOV: Yeah, I think mental work I think is the key here. I've actually put a lot of work in the last four to six weeks into my swing and some of the physical things.

I've been playing well. I just haven't figured out a way to score. I think I've had a hard time scoring. It felt like I was moving in the right direction during the JTBC and the Chevron, and I was kind of trending a little bit in the right direction.

Then I had a tough two weeks the last two weeks, and I think last week had a little bit of that -- you know, putting a little bit of pressure on myself because I know there were a lot people that wanted to watch just us SC players or UCLA players.

Yeah, it's just two or three little makes that I have made during my rounds that have been very costly. I'm working on that. Definitely just my mindset, a little bit of that, because I think just physically my game is in a great spot. I just have to figure out a way to push myself a little bit to go lower.

Yeah, I just think the conditions the last two weeks. It's been extremely windy, gusty, and I think playing at maybe the wrong times during the day or having tough tee times has been just a factor. Something I just had to I think just be a little bit harder on myself with, not succumb to the weather conditions, and just kind of power through.

But, yeah, it's not been the best start, but I think my game is heading in the right direction and I'm pretty excited for the next few weeks.

**Q. I think we, outside of the players, I think we kind of think about golfers when they're high, right? How do you personally give yourself some grace when you're in not a low spot, but not where you want to be?**

SOPHIA POPOV: Yeah, it's been quite tough actually these last few weeks. I think I would definitely like to see myself in a different position.

I've had some rounds where I feel like, Okay, it's definitely heading the right direction and this is where I want to see myself more consistently, but I think I'm just learning for myself to just be a little bit easier on myself.

I'm usually someone who's so hard on myself, and then it's really hard to get out of that little dip that you're in I just think emotionally and physically to kind of start over a little bit again.

I think I've just decided, you know what? It is what it is. You're going to have weeks and months like this. It doesn't define you as a player.

So just actually use the weekends to do things that you enjoy and hang out. I been hanging out with my family and friends and had a great time off the golf course. I think that's been important for me, just to not have it completely take over my whole being, golf is everything.

It just really isn't. I think that's what I'm trying to keep in mind as I go into the next few weeks and into a swing of events that I really, really like.

**Q. Good luck this week.**

SOPHIA POPOV: Hey, Steve.

**Q. I'm actually doing a story on the 50th anniversary of Title IX, which is this year. You are in a very unique position in that you are the daughter of a Title IX mother. I just wondered what kind of impact it had having a mother who was a college athlete on you becoming an athlete?**

SOPHIA POPOV: A huge impact actually. My mom was kind of the I would say driving force behind our athletic careers in that sense. I'm still making a career out of it. Both my brothers were athletes. My other brother swam at Arizona.

I think for all of us I think it was very eye opening as to what we could do and what we could do in college sports. I don't know if it weren't for her I'm not sure where my Gerina knee from Germany would've gone. I think most kids that grow up there, I don't think the first things that comes to their mind is college sports in the States.

I think for me it was definitely -- she was kind of the driving force behind that. Yeah, she was a swimmer and she said to me, It's extremely competitive. It's the best steppingstone to becoming a professional athlete and getting a degree at the same time. I think she was a prime example of going to Stanford, swimming for the team, doing it all.

So, yeah, she's definitely -- that's why she's always been a role model for me in that sense.

**Q. Was there a sense that because you had your mother as a role model out there that it was okay to be an athlete, whereas some who didn't have that may not have felt the same way?**

SOPHIA POPOV: Yeah, definitely. I think it's more of it's possible and you have a good chance -- I think that's the thing. When we -- especially coming as an international student, you don't know what are the possibilities that I even have, what is the scholarship situation, how much is it going to be to get me through college.

Obviously with Title IX I think it's been awesome just because there are so many scholarships available to girls, and I think it's very encouraging for a lot of girls coming out of high school to want to pursue a career in sports or athletics starting in college because now they have this opportunity.

It's a way for parents to get their kids through school, because obviously, especially the school that I went to is extremely expensive, but they're all getting very expensive and it's almost impossible without a little bit of financial help.

I think especially on the women's side we're lucky enough to have the amount of scholarships that we have, not just in golf, but in all the other sports. I definitely think my mom was the one who told me about it and said, You know what? It's a possibility. It's a way to get a great education -- and in my case, I'm lucky, for free, which is still mind boggling to me.

And I think it's just a great opportunity for any girl going through high school right now.

**Q. One more question about college. You mentioned you obviously have quite a bit of support from USC, but you also have a bit of support from this membership. How excited are you to have another opportunity to give them something to cheer for?**

SOPHIA POPOV: Yeah, I'm very, very excited about that. It's just nice to be here and have that little bit of like home field advantage or the feel of coming to a home course.

I just think that's -- we're very lucky, I think blessed to have so many events out here actually in LA where a lot of SC supporters are coming and here, the membership also.

So I'm excited hopefully to give them a little bit of



something to cheer on throughout the weekend. Yeah, just to see home familiar faces is really nice.

THE MODERATOR: Good luck this week. Fight on.

SOPHIA POPOV: Thank you.

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