

Palos Verdes Championship presented by Bank of America

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Palos Verdes Estates, California, USA

Palos Verdes Golf Club

Marina Alex

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: Here with our 2022 champion at the Palos Verdes Championship presented by Bank of America. Marina, it's been a whirlwind since your last putt dropped. Just take us through some of the emotions you're feeling.

MARINA ALEX: Yeah, so to start, I didn't really know what was going on like as per usual, and I just didn't check the leaderboard.

So I putted out on 18. Saw that I was in first. But I obviously knew that there were groups behind, so I didn't even have an opportunity to look at what that even meant in terms of who was behind and how many holes they had left, how many opportunities they had for birdie, eagle, et cetera.

So I just was a little on the anxious side if I'm being honest. I just wanted to be in a good headspace if there was a potential for a playoff, so I just didn't want to count anything like as if it was going to happen without it happening.

So I just was like a little probably on the reserved side and quiet. Just didn't want to celebrate something that wasn't really a thing.

So I went to the locker room. I signed some autographs just trying to kill time. You know, just waiting for those last few groups to finish. Once they finished, it was just kind of like an overload of emotions.

It's been a tough couple years, so still haven't really probably processed everything yet. It's been amazing. PV has been great, the community here. There were so many fans out the last few days, which is really nice to see. Everyone is rallying around us being here, which is great.

I have some close childhood friends that came out to watch, so it kind just felt a little like home.

Q. It's been a while.



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MARINA ALEX: Yeah, four years.

Q. Yeah, four years; 2018 in Portland.

MARINA ALEX: Yeah.

Q. How much does this mean? You were telling Karen Stupples I'm getting older.

MARINA ALEX: A lot. Yeah, I'm not going to lie. If you had talked to me last year or the beginning of even this year, I didn't think was even a remote possibility that I was going to win ever again. I didn't know how much longer I really wanted to be golfing ever again.

I mean, I'm getting older. My back has been a struggle. You know, COVID changed a lot of things, changed people. My priority of being home and kind of just spending more time in one place and feeling a sense of community has been important to me.

It's tough. Like the tour life takes you away from that, so I've had a lot of struggle I think internally with what I want, the direction I want to go, what my next steps are in my life.

I think a lot of that is -- not that it's distracted my golf, but it's definitely made me a bit more realistic of like my future. I went into this year and I was like, I don't know how many more years I'm going to play if I'm being perfectly honest.

I just want to give it my absolute best this year and put every single opportunity into playing and putting myself in contention and trying to win tournaments.

And, I mean, it's amazing that it's happened. I didn't know if it was going to. My outlook this year was to go back to like 100%, and wherever that left me that left me.

The day I want to step way from playing, I feel like I will have given everything that I have given to this game and to myself and to everyone that's helped me get here. You know, I owe so many people a lot.

So it's been a tough journey, but I do think my perspective has changed a lot since 2018.



Q. Let's talk about today.

MARINA ALEX: Yeah.

Q. You started the day three shots back. Had to make something happen.

MARINA ALEX: Totally.

Q. 5-under 66. What was going through your mind? You had a couple bogeys early but settled down. How did you get yourself to kind of dial it back?

MARINA ALEX: You know, bogeys are weird, and I feel like people get uncomfortable at different points in the round. I was almost glad that I got off to a little bit of a rocky start because I was like, you know what? I got all that anxious anxiety, whatever kind of nervous energy out of my system.

At that point, you know, I kind of glanced at the leaderboard. I saw that Megan had maybe gone like 3-under through 3 straight out of the gate. I was like, okay, it's game on. There are scores to be had out here. If I'm going to sit around and just try and make pars it's not going to win anything.

So I just -- I said, you know what? Let's see how many birdies you can make for the rest of the day. I mean, made that bogey on 3, which wasn't the end of the world. I made a really awesome up and down on the drivable -- is it No 5, the tee they had pushed forward?

I hit my 3-wood left into the bunker on a slight downhill lie and it was kind of a longer shot and I made a really good up and down for birdie to get myself back to even, and another very good up and down on the next hole after we kind of got a little messed up with the wind direction and maybe slightly misclubbed; but saved par.

Hit it to a couple inches on 7 for birdie, and that kind of propelled me in the right direction. Sometimes you just neat to battle through those feelings in order to get to the good place, and that's where I kind of went cruising through the back nine. I just felt really settled.

Q. I know it's never over until it's over, but --

MARINA ALEX: Correct.

Q. -- at what point when you were dropping that hammer do you go, okay, I'm going to make something happen, give myself a chance?

MARINA ALEX: Yeah, I knew that once I got through No. 12 and made a birdie there I knew I was definitely in the mix. There was no way that if I didn't finish the round from that point on with two more birdies that I wasn't going to have a chance to win the tournament.

And I really struggled to play I think it was 14, the par-5 up the hill. Struggled to play that hole all week. Actually played it over par, which shouldn't have happened, because I was inside 70 yards every single day. I just didn't ever gauge the shot correctly and never had a very good look at birdie.

And so I par'd it again today. I was like frustrated with myself. I'm like, you know what? You can have a good opportunity for eagle on 16 and see what happens. Because I felt like 15, 17, and 18 were just probably going to be difficult to make birdie. The greens are firm. It's hard to get it close.

So I made that birdie. Made a really good hybrid shot, great two-putt on 16, and I was like, okay, let's just give ourself a chance on 18.

I didn't really feel like for me with the distance that that pin was on 17, it didn't felt accessible at all. I was like, let's make a good par, go to the next hole, give ourself a shot for birdie on 18, and then whatever happens, happens.

Q. Just last couple years you said have been tough.

MARINA ALEX: Yeah.

Q. I know we all know you had been battling a back injury. Do you know what caused that back injury?

MARINA ALEX: Just a lot of overuse over time. I think when I really think back about it, COVID probably caused that back injury if I'm being honest. A lot of time away from golf, not swinging. A lot of time just didn't know what to do.

I working out twice a day because I was bored in my house, going on runs. I was doing all sorts of things I would never in a thousand years do in my normal routine. I think it put me in a pretty vulnerable state if I'm being honest.

After about four events into the restart in July I was not in a good place at all. I'm also used to having a physio therapist out there and I'm getting pretty regular treatment, and none of that was happening when we were in lockdown.

A lot of things went unchecked, and just -- I wouldn't call them bad habits. It's just everyone had to fill their time

some way. None of that was productive for my golf unfortunately and it kind of just spiraled.

I was in a place that I didn't want to admit -- you know, I tried to come back to play the end of the year in 2020 because The Open had been rescheduled. There was CME. I was still eligible for all those things and I really wanted that.

Knowing that I was going into a Solheim Cup year I was like, I really want to try to like get some sort of starts in 2020.

I set myself back again trying to get ready, and then it derailed the whole restart until pretty much end of February, beginning of March. Even at that point I didn't even feel that great.

So I've come a long way from there. You know, over a year later I feel as strong and healthy as I've been, which is great. Knock on wood that that's where I stay.

Q. Been working with Claude Harmon.

MARINA ALEX: Yes.

Q. How long has that relationship been -- 4?

MARINA ALEX: That started -- we're going on about a year. I want to say started in April, May of last year, like kind of before the U.S. Open. I had seen him a couple times, and he's awesome. He's been great with me. I had an amazing coach in this Ian Triggs, a guy from Australia, and COVID, again, just really disrupted our whole relationship.

Ian hasn't been back to the States. Traveling there was not possible. You could only do so much with FaceTime. Then an injury. It's like all of this stuff was kind of compounding and I was like, I really need to figure out a way to correct everything and get on a good game plan.

I was -- I met him -- I was connected with him through Mel Reid. It was great. He was really supportive and welcoming of me coming out. He's been awesome for me. We've made some big changes in the off-season, and I'm really looking forward to seeing him this week coming up and just seeing where we are and keep rolling.

Q. You mentioned you're not a person that likes to look at leaderboards.

MARINA ALEX: I don't, no.

Q. Has that always been the case? Did something

happen?

MARINA ALEX: No. I think leading into Portland, if I go back to 2018, I played some good events and I had probably been in contention a couple times. I would glance and see the last few holes and I would mess up. I would press and make a bogey. I would get out of my comfort zone.

When you're playing rounds one and two are you really looking that much at what's going on with the leaders? Not really. It's like why should Sunday be any different than Thursday or Friday?

Some people respond super well to that; I definitely don't if I'm being honest. You know, the nerves, anxiety, all that is a real thing. It affects me.

So if I can figure out tricks to minimize having to acknowledge any of those things, I'm going to.

Q. When you made the birdie on 16 and you stepped to the tee on 17, do you any inkling that you're right there?

MARINA ALEX: No. I figured I was. I mean, just off of instinct I figured I was close. I was like, you know what, I don't know what's going on behind. Again, 16, the way it was set up today and yesterday, it's definitely a birdie hole, potentially an eagle hole if you really hit a good shot.

So I had to imagine even if I was ahead, there was a great chance that I would at least be tied. So I wanted to put two good opportunities on the board on 17 and 18 to try and make a birdie between one of those two.

Didn't really do it on 17, but I had an okay look on 18. I finished and I was I was like, if that's enough, that's enough. I looked up and saw I was solo first, but I didn't have an opportune to see where the other girls were. Again, the waiting game kind of just happened.

Q. The course today, the way it was playing, no one was able to really separate. Did that play into being able to come from behind?

MARINA ALEX: Yeah, maybe. I don't know. I actually thought the course today -- yesterday and Friday was so windy and the greens really have firmed out. At the end of the day it's difficult to hold the greens on certain holes.

So I thought that since Friday it's been playing tough. I thought today was maybe a little bit easier only because the wind wasn't as strong, which I was actually hoping for much tougher conditions today because I felt like it

wouldn't take such a low score to end up winning.

But it worked out how it worked out. Everything towards the end just kind of set up well. I felt like I had a lot of numbers that were good for me on the last like five, six holes.

Q. You mentioned you weren't sure and still aren't how long you want to play.

MARINA ALEX: Yeah.

Q. Does this change that at all?

MARINA ALEX: I don't know. I don't know at all. I mean, this is amazing. It was a goal this year if I'm being honest. It was a goal amongst like my family and people close to me. I was like, I really want to win this year no matter what I decide to do with continuing to play or the rest of my career. I would love to be in contention and win another tournament.

That would make me feel extremely fulfilled, and it is. I want to keep putting myself in that place, but I also like want to acknowledge how I feel physically, mentally, and what I want to do with the rest of my life.

I love golf very much. I'm just going to see what happens.

Q. Last thing: With the back did you have to do anything surgically or was it just laying off?

MARINA ALEX: No. I laid off. Did a couple cortisone injections and a lot of rest and a lot of rehab.

But it just took a long time to really feel comfortable swinging and training. You know, I guess people don't quite understand, there is a lot that goes into being out here and competing. There is a lot of time in the gym. There is a lot of repetition on the range, chipping, putting. All that stuff, you need to be physically capable of doing it, no matter whatever your injury may or may not be.

It kind of doesn't really matter. When you're not 100% it's very hard to put in the hours. You're trying to and it's just -- it's not -- it's hard. You're distracted. You're worried about am I going to make it worse? Am I doing too much? You're trying to find that balance.

So when you can play a little bit without that lingering in the back of your mind, it feels good. It's a weight lifted I would say.

Q. The conditions here, really hilly.

MARINA ALEX: Yeah, I was proud of myself. I got done every day and my therapist, Tracy, who I see regularly, she was happy with the shape that my body was in after walking all these hills and playing golf.

I was definitely nervous about going into this week. There are some courses here that are tough walks and we know it's going to be grueling. If you don't have a setback you're making a gain at that point. This week is an obvious a gain.

No, but physically it's a gain as well.

Q. When you were presented the championship trophy we saw some face contortion and we're thinking any minute now she's going to break down in tears. The question is: Are you just a naturally calm, collected?

MARINA ALEX: No. I think I had a moment if I'm being honest when I went into the locker room locker room and I had a moment to myself and I was just a bit overwhelmed.

I'm glad that was just with me. When I won in Portland I was extremely overwhelmed. It was the first time. Not that this isn't any different than Portland. I just didn't think I would be back here; I didn't.

So this is kind of a bit shocking but great. I had a minute to myself and I'm sure when I call my parents and talk to my friends it's going to be extremely emotional.

Q. New Jersey people are super special people.

MARINA ALEX: We are.

Q. What kind of celebration are you looking forward to when you swing by home?

MARINA ALEX: Yeah, next week is going to be crazy now that I'm going back there in a week and a half. I'm going to really close to where I grew up, so I have a lot of childhood friends I'm going to see. I'm staying with my godfather, so going to be some celebration definitely going on.

Then going back to Palm Peach next week and I have some golf friends that are going to be in town, so I'm sure there will be some celebrating there. I'll make sure of it. I'm just going to enjoy it.

Q. Hey, congratulations.

MARINA ALEX: Hi.

Q. Sorry to ask you about your injury again, but I was just wondering in the time you took off from



competition, how much of that time were you just not swinging a golf club at all?

MARINA ALEX: A long time. You know, so if I get my timing right, the last event I played in 2020 was ANA, which was in September I want to say. I didn't start hitting golf balls until November, and I tried to get ready to play in December.

At first I was thinking I was going to be able to play Dallas, U.S. Open, and CME, and then that kind of kept getting pushed and pushed.

At that point I completely like messed myself up again and had to reset. I had to get another injection and all of that.

So, yeah, ended up being from that point another six or seven weeks until I swung a club again. So I restarted in Ocala and I was cleared maybe February 1st of 2021 to swing again.

So all in all I maybe practiced like a week from September to February; then I had to get ready to start playing, and I was clearly -- I was unprepared. Physically I was okay, but competitively I was really, really out of touch with everything.

Q. Got it. And when you're talking about thinking about a life beyond golf or outside of golf, what kind of things are you thinking about or considering?

MARINA ALEX: That's a great question. I've talked to a lot of people about it. I love golf. I'm going to stay in golf. There is no way I'm not going to be involved. I just want to grow our game. I want more recognition, more women's golf.

I would love to get involved in events in some way, shape, or form. I really would love to see some mixed team tournaments. I would love to see the guys playing with the girls. A lot of things I want to get involved in that I think ultimately beyond playing can impact this entire tour, everyone, and just get more faces on us.

That's the most important thing.

THE MODERATOR: One more from me to wrap it up. Everyone talked you're heading up the road to New Jersey, Cognizant Founders Cup. What's it going to be like for to play --

MARINA ALEX: It's going to be wild.

Q. Yeah. To play in your home state as an LPGA Tour winner?

MARINA ALEX: Yeah, I know. It's really cool. Last year was great but it was a little tough. It's home, and sometimes that's not the greatest thing because there is a lot of expectations and a lot of responsibility.

But, I mean, I'm just going to go out and have a blast. I'm going to have a ton of friends and family watching so I'm just going to enjoy it.

THE MODERATOR: We're looking forward to it. Congratulations.

MARINA ALEX: Thank you.

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