

JM Eagle LA Championship

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Los Angeles, California, USA

Sophia Popov

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: All right, welcome everyone here to the JM Eagle LA Championship presented by Plastpro.

Joined today by one of our sponsor invites, Sophia. Just tell me how excited you are to be back in LA. Went to college here and this is a good place for you. Just tell my your initial thoughts on the course and your sponsor invite.

SOPHIA POPOV: Yeah, obviously, you know, huge thanks to Walter and Shirley Wang for the invite. This is a super special event for me having gone to school here. LA is always nice to come back and kind of reminisce on the good old college days.

I know we played an event here, too, so it was interesting to come back. It's been a long time, so I was kind of shock to do see the course has -- there are a lot of changes that have been made since we played here, but good changes.

The golf course is in really good shape and it's a great golf course, a ball-strikers' golf course. The greens I think have settled in and they're definitely probably the toughest part of it, but I'm actually kind of looking forward to a different challenge versus we usually play in Wilshire.

This is a little bit of a longer golf course. Yeah, I personally like it a lot so far.

Q. What was the call like? I know you wrote a letter to Walter and Shirley about this event. Tell me a little bit about that and what the call was like when you heard you were going to get into the field this week?

SOPHIA POPOV: Yeah, I think I wrote a letter and obviously for me, just coming back from maternity last year and kind of having a tough couple years just learning the whole playing as a mom thing and wanting to play this event so badly and just about not getting into it, I wrote a letter and kind of, you know, pleaded my case.

I think Walter and Shirley are just huge, not just golf fans, but they're huge supporters of women's sports and women in general. Yesterday I did a women's summit for them. I was on a leadership panel.

There is just a lot of cool things that happen in the events that they organize or that they head, and so I just made my case and I guess a made a good case, and they thought it would be beneficial to have me here.

Obviously I'm very thankful for that.

Q. Can you talk about what was your case? What was your main point about why you wanted one of the exemptions?

SOPHIA POPOV: I think a huge part of it is kind of my role just as a mom these days. You know, I still have major exemptions this year from winning in 2020, and I feel like last year I played a lot of good golf, but I just -- I couldn't quite figure out a good schedule and just get organized enough with my daughter.

I faced a lot of struggles and I did have a couple good weeks, but I know I had a lot of unfinished business. I think I stated that in my letter. I said I feel like I have a lot of good golf left and I want to show female athletes, mom out there that it can be done. You can play great golf.

I know it. I've seen it in Stacy and a lot of other moms that have played great golf. I just want to showcase that. It's important to me.

Obviously kind of the hometown, you know being going to USC and wanting to be back because it is definitely my favorite event of the year and I'd be super bummed if I miss out on it.

So I think those two cases were the biggest ones.

Q. What have you found works best for you and your family?

SOPHIA POPOV: You know, I think a lot of it was a mindset. I always travel with my daughter. She's always with me. She always comes first. I think at the beginning it was -- I struggled a lot because I felt like I was not maybe as prepared as I used to be, and that really bothered me.

I said I need to be 100% prepared and organized, and it's



just not a thing, especially when you have kids. Something happens or they get sick or wake up in a terrible mood. There is always -- and they need you.

You're like, I need to leave in five minutes and they need you. I'll stay at home an extra ten minutes and sacrifice that.

Mentally I've come to peace with that. You know what, I'm good on a 45 minute warmup. I know I can do it. My body is in a good spot. I work out a lot. I make sure that I do that work at home, and so just knowing no matter what the circumstances are and how she's doing, I'll be fine out there.

I think that's the biggest, yeah, thing that I want to do to manage that also going forward.

Q. Any former teammates or who will be in your galleries this week?

SOPHIA POPOV: I don't know. I don't think so. I've already seen quite a few just people I went to school with that have been here, whether they're either working the event or they're planning on coming out.

A lot of my friends that said, you know, we would love to come out. Do you have tickets? So boosters that we dealt with a lot when I was still in college and that I haven't seen in a long time. You know, supporters of the -- especially the golf program. So it's funny because just in the pro-am part I saw so many familiar faces.

It's kind of nice to -- LA is a very -- even though it's so huge, it's a tight-knit sports community. You tend to see the same people again and again because they all support the same cause.

It's just been kind of nice to see a lot of the people, same people that supported us through our college years here again.

Q. Last one from me: Obviously you've had a lot going on; been a bit of I assume a rollercoaster for you. Can you talk about the emotions with that clerical error and kind of how you handled that and if you've come to peace with all that's happened?

SOPHIA POPOV: I think after what I had to deal within 2020 after winning, I think I've matured a lot and I think I always give everyone the benefit of the doubt. I never try to say, you know, it's your fault or you did something wrong.

It is what it is. I feel like I'm very disappointed because I

made the effort to go out and play these events. I feel like I earned my points. Left my daughter behind for two weeks. That was really, really hard for me.

I think that -- with that being said, I'm in this place where I just want to play golf. I love it. I'm really prepared. The last six weeks I just worked so hard and I just want to focus on my golf now. Because it is what it is and I can't change it.

Things like that happen. They shouldn't, but it did, and like I know on the golf course I'm trying to work on whatever happened, happened and leave it in the past. I try to do the same thing with this and just focus on my golf going forward.

Because I think in the end, good golf takes care of everything. I think that's just my mindset now.

Q. You mentioned about noticing the different changes in the course. You were talking about focusing on your golf. What is something you're going to go into the match first focused on?

SOPHIA POPOV: I think just really honing in on what I have kind of worked on the last few weeks. I've been very -- I would say very strict with my practice, and compartmentalizing family versus work.

I just am kind of excited to take it out on the golf course and see where -- what that results in, because like I said, I worked pretty hard. This golf course sets up great for me. It's a ball-strikers' golf course. I think the changes they makes it even more so.

I just want to take advantage of this opportunity I got thanks to Walter and Shirley and go out and show them what I got.

Q. With that said, speaking of this being a ball striking golf course, what will your approach be for your approach shots?

SOPHIA POPOV: I think a lot of it is just very smart play. I talked to my caddie a while yesterday, and I think it's key to just hit the right spots on the greens.

Just not short side yourself on this golf course. Just be smart. You know, take your medicine sometimes if you have to. Just plot your way around. Don't be too aggressive. Just be aggressive where the pins call for it.

I think that's just to have a good guardianship going in and staying very, very patient. I feel like this golf course holds a lot of birdies but can also hold a lot of other numbers.



Trying to avoid those is going to be my number one goal this week.

Q. This will be my last one: You are a fellow Trojan. With USC, how has it been since you left USC to where you are now where you would say they prepared you to be where you are today?

SOPHIA POPOV: Every day I'm kind of -- I think of myself as very blessed I've gone USC. It was an amazing four years. Such a great opportunity for me to kind of grow not just as an athlete, but as a person. You learn to be independent.

If I think about our golf schedule back then and our school schedule and how I managed it all. It's kind of funny. It's kind of similar to motherhood now. I have to really -- I have to have my time blocks exactly like I did in college, and a lot of times I think back on that and my husband tells me, you know what? In college you practiced from 8:00 to 12:00 and then you went there and did your schoolwork; you were up late at night. It was also very stressful. In a different way.

I think just kind of honing in on that a little bit and maybe use some of the skills that you learn there to take forward with you. Sometimes it takes ten years after you graduate to figure those things out.

Q. Well fight on, and thank you.

SOPHIA POPOV: Fight on.

Q. You played college here; LA is like a second home for you. Go back to in January when the fires were going. Did you -- were you in touch with your former teammates, friends here?

SOPHIA POPOV: For most parts I was in touch with my brother. He lives in LA. Thank God he's down in Venice, a little bit removed. I have a set of very, very close friends, actually my mom's college roommate, that lives in the Palisades that I stayed with on numerous occasions. They're both doctors, and every time I had procedures done I would stay with them.

They're very close and near and dear to us, and that's the first thing, first people I thought of. They got hit pretty hard, their community up in the Palisades. I followed it every single day. I didn't hear from them much because they were hustling trying to get out all their stuff.

They said it was a pretty rough time. For a community that's so pretty and just a place that's so nice that they live

in, to have to think of something like that happening and being removed from their home and trying to figure out where to stay, I think that was pretty tough.

Obviously through my brother I kind of got daily updates on how everything was going. Thank God he was, like I said, further down south. It's very heartbreaking. I feel like just we played a lot of golf up there. Riviera is like one of my favorite places to play, and also kind of in the heart of all that.

Q. Uh-huh.

SOPHIA POPOV: Yeah, I think it's just hard to look at from Arizona where I was and kind of -- I tried to contact as many of my friends as I knew are still here. I think a lot of them have also left California, and everyone was kind of just checking in on each other which is something that honestly hasn't happened in a long time.

It was kind of nice to reconnect with people, but I wish the cause was different.

Q. Is this your first time here in LA since all this?

SOPHIA POPOV: Yeah.

Q. When you were coming here, was it a little bit more surreal, more real when you were coming here?

SOPHIA POPOV: Yeah, it's interesting, because usually my brother actually is -- he's big into biking, road biking. First time I chatted to him, went straight down to see him. He was like, we're not road biking as much because a lot of roads we go on are all close and it's eerie and weird.

I think the mood is a little, you know, off. Everything feels like it's slightly off. I think everyone is just kind of still obviously recovering and trying to figure out what to do. Everything is rebuilding. It's an awful time.

I think we have gone through it with other nature disasters in the U.S. I think it takes five or six years to get out of a hole like this.

I do notice that a lot of people are in very, very good spirits. Everyone is super supportive of each other. This city is incredible to me because it's a huge city, but everyone seems so close-knit and it's so important to everyone to rebuild the community.

So I feel like for the most parts everyone is back in very good spirits and there is only one way, only forward from here on out.



Q. Yep. This is the sole professional golf tournament this year. Genesis went down; we had PV that got canceled. So Walter and Shirley have been pretty open about this. From you guys as players, having this tournament here, is it just kind of like an elevating of the spirits to get fans to just kind of take a breather for a few days to come watch the best players play golf this week?

SOPHIA POPOV: Yeah, 100%. I think -- I feel like most people think everything will be closed, we're not going to have any events. Everyone is like, how long is it going to take an event like this.

I always feel like it gives people a couple days to just feel like everything is normal. We had this during COVID, too, where I felt like sports kind of just felt like it gave people an opportunity like things are somewhat normal again. We can watch. We're outside.

That's the nice thing with our sport. We're an outdoor sport. The fact that we're able to be here and El Cab is hosting us and Walter and Shirley are making it happen kind of against all odds right now is super, super impressive.

Just judging by the amount of people that are in the pro-am and the pro-am party and the supporters, and already the crowds coming out, you can tell it's very special to people.

I think everyone is just excited for a fun event and to just obviously watch the best players in the world, because the field is loaded this week.

Q. You may have mentioned in there, but when you got the call that Walter and Shirley gave you the sponsor's exemption here, how excited were you?

SOPHIA POPOV: I was super excited. Obviously. Just because LA is always a home game for me. It's my favorite event of the year. I love coming back. I have a lot of friends, family, supporters in the area. They all want to see me play here.

So for me it was just the coolest thing.

I think getting sponsor invites are never easy. They're also never easy to hand out for the ones that have to do that, and so I'm just super grateful and thankful to them for giving me the opportunity.

Yeah, I mean, obviously the excitement was pretty palpable at home. If you asked my mom she thought I won the lottery. Feels a little bit like that to me.

Q. Two more quick ones: As an AIG Women's Open champion you probably saw this. Mo Martin will be out here this week. Her women's British Open trophy got destroyed by the fire. AIG and the R&A just gave her her -- she just got her trophy last week. So somebody who is a past champion, how much do you as a past champion, how much do you think as somebody who has been here with the fires, does that mean to you as a past champion and how much do you think that means to Mo?

SOPHIA POPOV: I could only imagine what it means to Mo. You know, I keep mine in a very special place at home and I'm always -- I clean it a lot. I take care of it a lot. It reminds me of an amazing week, and winning The Open is such a special because it's such an old event and so special to us.

For something like that to happen -- I mean, you know, AIG, you know, they're the kind of company that would hop in and definitely say, here, that's going to be our priority, is to get you a new trophy, because that's something you earned a while back and I know it's very special to you.

There is nothing like losing things that might not be the most expensive but mean the most to you. I'm sure she lost other things in the fire that are a lot more expensive, but nothing will be as valuable as that to her, and I feel that because I would be the same.

I think if I were to leave my house that might be the first thing I would grab.

Q. Last one. Kind of a shift. Ewing Outdoor on your hat. Talk about that, how that relationship started. They have a national relationship with Walter and Shirley and JM Eagle. Talk about how that started.

SOPHIA POPOV: Yeah, so I was with Doug and Kelly York and I kind of got connected with them in Arizona. They're in Arizona. I live in Scottsdale. They're big supporters of golf, but also women's golf.

They were looking to sponsor someone on the women's side. I think they have a couple guys. As they're growing their golf business they also want to show up at these events and have a bigger presence.

Me being a local from Arizona, I think that connection came pretty quickly. Doug is a fellow USC Trojan, so we have that connection. There is a lot of USC and pipe business, a lot of connections between the three of us, so I think it was just -- it's kind of a funny thing, because I think a lot of the connections that we have came after they decided to even sponsor me.



So it's just been kind of a quickly growing friendship from the very beginning which was nice.

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