

Kingsmill Championship

Presented by JTBC

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Lydia Ko

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: It's my pleasure to now welcome in the Rolex Rankings No. 1 ranked player in the world, Lydia Ko. Lydia, thanks for coming in. You took a couple weeks off. We haven't seen you in just a little bit. Seems like everyone is coming off of breaks now. Tell us what you've been up to. How were the off weeks and what have you been doing?

LYDIA KO: Yeah, the first week, just because my last event was in San Francisco for the Swinging Skirts, I decided to take a trip to Cordevalle. It's a short one two, two-hour drive, so went there and had a couple rounds, and on the way back I guess we went to Sahalee and had a couple rounds there and then I was home. It was definitely time for me to go home. I missed it. I'd say I normally don't get homesick, but I felt like it was time to get out of living out of a suitcase. So it was definitely good to go back to Orlando. I guess the second week I just kind of chilled out. It was almost like I was hibernating, sleeping until like 3:00 p.m.

I planned my day saying, okay, tomorrow I might go to the movies and I might stop at the mall and I'd wake up and it was 3:00 p.m. My days were very -- the times weren't coordinated very well, and obviously because I'd wake up late, I'd obviously go to bed late, too. So that kind of did me a little bit. But then after a few days I kind of got back to my own routines and chilled out. I practiced at Reunion and Champion's Gate.

THE MODERATOR: You're not making any matinee movies, are you? You're past those.

LYDIA KO: Yeah, gone.

THE MODERATOR: I want to ask you about the Invictus Games. Something pretty special. You got to meet some royalty, Prince Harry. How did that come about and how special of an experience was that?

LYDIA KO: We, I guess, had a connection through someone that was already involved with the Invictus Games, and what Prince Harry did to I guess support the wounded warriors and just I guess embrace it and to make them into superstars and the champions they are. So it was really inspiring for me. I got to go to the closing ceremony and some of the reception. It's

amazing. I complain of the things I wish I had or I wish I could be better at this, and there are men and women and their families who have gone through so much more.

I met I think a gentleman from Britain who had both amputated legs, and he was still out there still enjoying the game and was excited for the game for the next day. It was a really inspiring thing, and for what Prince Harry did to, I think, make this a very global thing, I think it's kind of, I guess, like the Olympics or like a Paralympics where a lot of countries come together, amazing competitors, and I think especially during the opening ceremony there were a lot of tears going on.

But it was very inspirational, and for them to do what they're doing is I think -- kind of takes us back, and I think it makes it all more humbled.

THE MODERATOR: Was the feel a little bit Olympics-like? I know you said you were at one of the ceremonies, but was it like, wow, just to be in that type of atmosphere, like whoa, this is going to be cool.

LYDIA KO: Yeah, for sure. The big thing about the Invictus Games was "I am," and you could see how proud each of the competitors were, how proud they were to be from New Zealand or to be from Britain or from the United States or Canada, like all the countries. I met some of the New Zealand team members, and he gave me an "I am Kiwi," kind of a little bag. I think it just represents your country and how proud they are, and obviously they serve their country and now they're doing so much more, too.

Q. What about this tournament maybe stands out compared to other tournaments?

LYDIA KO: I think this is one of the events where it's really beautiful out here, first of all, and the course is in really good condition. I know the last two years I've played it, there's been some rain. Obviously last year there was a bit of the rain and delays that caused the last few groups to finish on Monday, but still ended up being a very exciting finish. I feel like this is a very beautiful area. The course is in really good condition, and even though we've had a lot of rain the last couple days or the last few weeks from what I've heard, still, it's in great condition.



I think this is a great area with Jamestown not too far away. I've had dinner there before, and you don't really know what it's like until you experience it. It's a really neat area here for sure.

Q. Could you talk about the competitive level of the Tour right now?

LYDIA KO: I think it's pretty sky high right now. I saw a stat that the winners have been all under 23 or 23. That's a pretty amazing stat. But you know, I think everybody has been playing great. The top players like Lexi and Stacy and Inbee, everyone has been playing great, and for me it was great to see Ariya win the last LPGA event in Alabama. It was a really cool thing, and I can't imagine what she felt like and her family.

I think our Tour has been only going up, and I'm sure it will keep continuing to do that.

Q. Aside from that heavy level of competition, are there other things that make it a challenge to be No. 1 in the world?

LYDIA KO: No, not really. I guess when you have the higher ranking, then you get more media requests or sponsor requests, but you know, I think that is part of the experience. I've always dreamt of being world No. 1, but I don't think I ever imagined what would come with it. But I think it's all a learning experience. I feel like there are so many things that I can get better at, even media-wise or getting involved with sponsors. It's been really cool.

I don't think I could have fully understood what it could be like and what are the things I need to do and learn more as being world No. 1.

THE MODERATOR: I'm going to put you on the spot, and I know you're going to hate me for this, but I was looking at your stat sheet. This one shocked me because I know you usually lead a handful of categories and whatnot, but currently leading eight categories on Tour. I'm going to rattle them off and put you through the pain. CME Points, Player of the Year, Money List, putts per green in regulation, putting average, scoring average, rounds under par, rounds in the 60s. I want to give you a round of applause but I won't do it. I know earlier this year at Swinging Skirts you said this year has been an A or an A+. I think you gave it an A+. How hard is it to be so consistent? I know you have to be consistent every week, and I know that's the challenge out here, like you said. Competition is tough, but consistency is so key to your game. How hard is it week in and week out?

LYDIA KO: I mean, it's so hard, especially like for me right after the California-Phoenix stretch where I came tied second, first, first. Kind of going into Hawai'i, I think there was a lot of expectation, especially at that

time those couple weeks, I was playing really consistent and trying to put myself in positions where I could be around the leader.

But it's hard. That's the thing about golf. You can shoot 70s one day and then come the next day shoot in the 60s. I think for me a couple -- not last year but the year before, I think I shot 80 or 80 something the last round at the British Open, and the week after I won at the marathon classic. That's the thing about this sport is that anything can happen, and it's just not like huge, dramatic changes or dramatic things that affect it, but it's those small things. Instead of ball kind of lipping in, it could have just lipped out, and those small shots I think can make a huge difference.

But coming into this year we've been trying to be a little bit more consistent in all aspects, so even during the season if we're working on things with my coaches or putting, long game, we're trying to make it as in, hey, even though I have not my average days can still be playable. I don't want it to be like, okay, 26 putts one day and go to 36 putts. How can I be a little bit more consistent. So that's what we've been working on, and that's what we'll continue to work on. I think consistency is not something that you can go, okay, I've mastered it because even until the last moment you play on Tour, I know that I want to be more and more consistent.

Q. Some days they lip out and other days they don't, but overall you're just an outstanding putter. Have you always had the same approach or do you tinker, change putters, change grips?

LYDIA KO: I mean, the first year on Tour I think I had eight putters, so there goes the consistency with the equipment. But everything else equipment-wise, I don't really like to change much. If it's good, I like to keep it in the bag. I didn't really know what was going on my rookie year.

But I've always felt like putting was the key thing for me to improve on. I wasn't a long distance hitter, so I felt really confident with like a hybrid or like a short iron in my hand. So I always said, hey, I really want to improve on my putting because sometimes even if my ball-striking is not good, my putting can help me out. At the end of the day, like for me at ANA, if I didn't make those crucial par putts or I didn't make that long birdie putt, I don't know if I could have won that event.

We've always been working on to try and get more consistent, and that's why Sean, David and Mark, we've all been trying to make it, hey, my bad days are better, and my good days are really good.

But I think with everything, you can always get better at it. Even if you're hitting -- unless like a driver per se, if

you hit all the fairways, obviously you can't get much better than that. But unless I hole every single putt that I've got, it's never going to be perfect. It's always something that I think I can get better at.

Q. Sometimes you use the pronoun "we." Is it always a team effort with your group?

LYDIA KO: I feel like I couldn't be here without my team, that's for sure. Starting from the team I had in New Zealand to my past coaches to my family, like my mom and sister travel with me most weeks, to my coaches, current coaches, Sean and David, and my trainers, my mental Dr. Lehr, and there's just so many aspects, and I mean, my goal like as my trainer says is trying to get better every day. I wouldn't know how to get better every day if I didn't have a little bit of advice because sometimes when I'm playing out there, I'm just trying to do the best I can, but outside the ropes you're able to see more of me and what I'm doing.

I really feel like my team has been really supportive and really helped me to be in this position, so I know for sure without them I couldn't be here, and I think that would go for all the players. It's important to have a really strong team, and it's really important to have that support because sometimes even if you have a bad day, to come off the course, and for someone to kind of give you a pat on the back, that means a lot, and that's what my sister kind of does for me.

I think that's been a huge key for me, and I'm very lucky to have that strong team around me now.

Q. There's been so many players on the Tour that have accomplished so much so early but you especially with the No. 1 ranking and money and so forth. How have you been able to stay, I guess, grounded during all this?

LYDIA KO: I think my team. I'll relate back to that. You know, the team has always helped me, and sometimes if you start playing well, it is easy to kind of get a little bit on a high and go, but I think that's where it's been important, where my team has helped me to keep me grounded and go, hey, obviously I played well last week, but these are the things we could work on to get better.

And I think that's the thing about golf in general. There's no perfect because you always know that you can work on to get better at something that helps you to keep more grounded and be more level-headed and understand that, hey, you did win this week but also you could have done this better. So that's the challenge and beauty of the game. I think that has really helped me to be more grounded, I guess.

Q. And to follow that up, with the couple weeks off

you had, 11 in a row I believe it is coming up, do you feel that will prepare you a little bit more for that?

LYDIA KO: I mean, I won't be playing all 11. New Zealand is not in the International Crown, so that's one event I won't be playing. Hopefully there will be -- New Zealand will be able to make it into the International Crown or another team event and I'll be able to play in more of a team format, so that's some of the things I miss from my amateur days.

It's a long stretch of events even if you don't play it all, especially because there is three majors within that stretch. It's a lot of travel. You're going from Michigan and then you go to like Seattle, and I'm really bad with geography, but you know, it's a long stretch.

But I think that was kind of guided around the Olympics coming up, so I think everybody is excited about the Olympics, so the 11 in a row, who cares. It's worth it. I think it's just an exciting year. We have five great majors plus the Olympics, and all the other events coming up.

I think everybody is excited more than worried that it's a long stretch of events.

Q. Kind of the youth movement on the LPGA Tour, is that something that younger players like yourself kind of take pride in and just how quickly and how big of an impact you all are making so quickly in your careers?

LYDIA KO: To me when I was first on Tour, there was no -- none of the girls were younger than me or even the same age. Last year Minjee, she's one-year older, but we played in the amateur ranks together, and Ariya just a couple years older, and I guess end of last year Brooke came along. So it's been really cool to not be the young one, first of all. No, I think as everyone says, age is just a number, because the more time you have on Tour, the more experience you get, and I think experience makes a huge difference, especially when you're coming down the stretch, you've got a couple shots' lead, those things can kind of help you. But that's the great thing about golf is a 10-year-old can play it and an 80-year-old can play it. Obviously the past winners of this season have been under 23, so it's very young, but I think if we can make a difference in making one more junior take up the game, I think it's kind of a job well done.

Q. You had some success as a high-level amateur before coming on Tour. What was that like for you when you first got a chance to play against this level of competition as an amateur?

LYDIA KO: I mean, that experience, I guess, being able to play in the LPGA events as an amateur was huge.

You know, before coming on Tour I think I played 11 LPGA events, and that was without being a Tour member. I think that gave me a lot of experience, obviously, and not just with the courses, but just getting to know a few of the girls. That makes a huge difference. It's like the first day of school, you go and you're a little worried because you don't know anybody else in that class. For me to have known some of the girls out here and for like girls like Christina who kind of ran up to me after I won the U.S. Amateur, she ran up to me and gave me a huge hug to say congratulations.

You know, those kind of things are very special memories, but it really helps me, and that first year on Tour, I don't feel like a complete, like, rookie as I had like no idea what was going on, and just knowing the girls, because everyone is so nice out here, they said, hey, this way is player registration or this is what you do. They gave me a lot of great advice. And just playing an as amateur really helped me knowing that I knew some of the girls and I could talk to some of the girls, but if I needed help or I had problems.

Q. You say age is just a number, but still, you just turned 19, but yet as you -- you seem very relaxed, poised, sitting there, just starting a conversation. Has this part of it, this interaction with the public and the media always come easily to you, or is it something that you had to grow into, so to speak?

LYDIA KO: I mean, when I think about it, like if I'm talking to Juli or if I'm talking to like Cristie or Michelle, anyone, I mean, they're not going to come to my team's level and talk to me in that way. Obviously we're going to have a good time and joke around, but I needed to get more mature and be able to understand and talk on their level. That's been kind of a learning experience for me being on Tour, and it's not something that was kind of like, hey, I was good at it straight away. I'm still learning how to get better at it. But you know, I feel like it's something you learn until you really finish.

But it never came to me like really easily, especially because English isn't my first language, so obviously there is like so many diverse words you can use and you're playing with pro-am partners, you're not going to talk to them like I'm going to talk to my friends. It's very different, and obviously like sometimes you make those mistakes and you learn from them.

It's been a big learning curve for me.

Q. (Question regarding Olympics.)

LYDIA KO: I mean, I'm super excited, and I mean, I think there has been some questions around, hey, are any of the girls going to pull out, but out of the girls that I've talked to, I think everybody is excited for -- just on my personal view, I don't think I could have ever

imagined myself to be an Olympian. I was not very good at athletics. If you see me throw or run, you'd hide. I'm not good at basketball or anything else. For me to say I've got a chance to say I'm an Olympian and to be there with the other athletes, not just golf or sports we see here, even like synchronized swimming, it's so great that these athletes come together and are able to represent their country and have pride and are proud to be there.

I'm excited for it. I think the girls are excited for it. You know, it's exciting, and you can see by The Golf Channel or whatever, they're counting down to the second of the opening ceremonies. I think there's a lot of hype about it, and I think it deserves that. Golf is returning to the Olympics for the men's, and I think it's the first time for the women's. I think this is a way to grow the game.

I've looked in the past where I've turned on the TV, there was a certain sport or an athlete that I've never really come across, and I start looking on social media or Googling about them because that's how you learn more about it, and I think that's how juniors can take up the sport more, too, and they go, man, maybe I can be an Olympian. I think it gives you a lot of hope, and this is the way to grow the game, and I think it's a great start. Maybe in the future there might be a teams event, but for now this, I think, stroke play, four rounds, I think it's a great start. So to me I think it's very exciting.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, Lydia. Good luck this week. Thanks for coming in.