

U.S. Women's Open

Tuesday, May 31, 2022

Southern Pines, North Carolina, USA

Pine Needles Lodge and Golf Club

Lydia Ko

Press Conference

Lydia.

THE MODERATOR: Welcome back to the interview area for the U.S. Women's Open presented by ProMedica. We are joined by world No. 3 Lydia Ko.

Lydia, you have had an unbelievable season, having finished outside of the top 25. How does your game feel right now, and what's your mindset coming into this week?

LYDIA KO: Yeah, obviously I started off my season well winning the second tournament of the year, and I think that was the earliest win I'd had in a season.

I feel like there's been ups and downs, and I still feel like there's a lot of things to work on just to be a little bit more consistent throughout my game.

I don't think anyone ever feels like they're perfect. There's always something that could improve, and even when things are going well.

It's nice to kind of have my attention focused on the things that I want to work on, and hopefully the things that I was able to will work this week.

Q. We're back at Pine Needles for the fourth time; some unbelievable champions crowned here. Have you had a chance to see the course?

LYDIA KO: Yeah, I've already played a couple times out there. It's nice. It's so close to Pinehurst, but I feel like it's different to Pinehurst at the same time. It's got some holes that kind of reminds you of Shoal Creek, as well, just kind of the finishing holes.

And yeah, it's just a good mix. I knew that it was going to be a great golf course, obviously hosted so many big championships here, but I didn't really know what it was going to be like and how my game would have to play around here.

But it's fun; I don't think it suits one type of player and not



someone that's super long or super short. At the end of the day, especially at the U.S. Open, I think you do have to drive it really well, and with these greens having a lot of falloffs, having good ball-striking and giving yourself even 30- to 40-footers for birdies is not the end of the world.

Q. I think a lot of people would be surprised given the fact that your finishes have been so good for you to say you've still got to work on consistency. Can you explain that?

LYDIA KO: Yeah, even when I finished third or tied third at Palos Verdes, I felt like there were things I needed to improve on. Yeah, even when you win and you had a great week -- you know, coming off Gainbridge I knew the things I wanted to work on in the four weeks leading up to the Asia Swing, and overall I realize when my ball-striking is there it puts a little bit less pressure on my short game, and the results were able to come with.

Sometimes the ball-striking is great and the putting is not as good and vice versa. Just trying to get that more polished, and I think that way it gives less pressure on the other things, so it's more like driving consistency would be probably my biggest thing.

We've been trying to work on that, and I think the more times I keep putting those repetitions in, they're all things that add up. And it might not show right away, but I know that all those reps count.

Q. Is Sean here with you this week, and what are you in particular focused on in the next couple days before round 1 starts?

LYDIA KO: Sean is not here this week. I saw him last week before flying over here. I think just getting familiar with the golf course. It's kind of like when you go to your home course or a course that you've played well or a course that we always return to, you become more familiar with it just because you've seen the course enough, and I think that's why sometimes practicing and hitting a lot of balls on the driving range, yes, you need to do that just to make sure that your game is trending in the right direction, but at the same time, I think just to be able to see the



course one more time, I think it gets you more familiar with it, and when you are in pressured or nervous conditions, everything seems so new.

I think I played Lake Merced once and I got a painting for winning, and then I didn't even realize there was a bunker on one hole, and I played it so many times. I remember calling the tournament director and said I think they drew an extra bunker that doesn't exist, and after I went, I was like, oh, my God, there is a bunker, and every time the pin is close to it all I say is don't go in the bunker. It's things like that.

When you get familiar with it you just get to take it in rather than it feeling like a threat or something that you're worried about. I think just being out there, just kind of enjoying it, just kind of saying, okay, these areas are probably going to be the easier places to make up-and-down from, there is this, but even though there's fescue it's not that bad.

I think just feeling more comfortable over these next couple days is good. It's getting pretty warm, so making sure to stay cool. It's another 72-hole event, but at the same time, as many of our events, but it can feel like a lot more. So just making sure that I'm on top of things and just being relaxed. I have an awesome round 1 and 2 pairing, group, so I'm really excited for that, as well.

Q. With the recent results of Steve Alker and Ryan Fox, how good is the state of golf in New Zealand right now?

LYDIA KO: Yeah, I saw that Steve won last year, and I was watching Foxy's playoff in the dining, moving my chair to get a better view, and he played amazing. He came second I think a few weeks ago, so it's really cool to see the New Zealand flag being shown out there.

There was one of my former teammates, Julian Alvarez is also in the field this week, and we're playing a practice round tomorrow, which I'm excited about. I know there aren't a lot of Kiwis out playing on the tours, but hopefully there's more and more, and I think as players that are playing, we're trying to be the inspiration and motivation for more Kiwi juniors to take up the game and dream of hopefully playing on the European Tour, PGA TOUR, LPGA Tour.

Yeah, it's exciting times for New Zealand.

Q. Players usually say they don't think about the prize money, but is a \$10 million purse enough to get your attention?

LYDIA KO: I mean, it's great. Obviously you have to play

well to be rewarded with that. With Mike Whan, I think it's super exciting what he's done with ProMedica and raising the bar this high. I mean, this is probably the biggest championship, major, that probably all players would like to win, and I guess it all goes up.

But as you can see on the LPGA and even our other majors, the purses keep increasing, and it just shows -- I think that's right. There's so much talent in the women's game, and for it to kind of match that, it's really cool to kind of be a part of that generation of it growing.

I'm excited for like all these championships, and not only just the purses but like the hospitality and the fans growing. It's a really exciting time and exciting things for women's golf.

I think sometimes tournaments -- like people only just talk about the purse, because, yes, we are playing for money, but I think it's just so much more than that, and for a lot of these sponsors, like ProMedica or AIG, Evian, Chevron -- which one am I missing? KPMG. For them to believe in women's golf and see women empowerment I think is awesome.

I know even the many other partnerships we have like with the LPGA Tour, it's exciting, and I think as a Tour we very thankful that they believe in us and they see what I think we see as players.

Q. Do you think it might bring in some extra nerves on Sunday for some of the players that haven't won quite as much prize money as you?

LYDIA KO: I don't think so. I don't think anyone is going to have a putt on the 72nd hole to possibly win and go oh, my goodness, if I miss this putt it's like something, something thousand dollars.

I think it's going to be like oh, my goodness, I have this putt to win the U.S. Women's Open or I have this putt to make the cut on Friday. I honestly think when there's just so much on the line, none of us -- I can say none of us are going to think about the money.

You only know about it later, like oh, that cost them \$40,000 because Golf Digest said that.

I think we're all players and we're here at one of the most prestigious events of the year at one of the biggest major championships, and I think that in itself is a win. Sometimes I think purse can really get in the way of what the actual meaning of this event is.

I think for all of us that are in the field, we're just excited to



play the Women's Open, and obviously for us to play for that amount of money, it's an extra bonus.

Q. When you look back at the start of your career, did self-belief and confidence come easy for you?

LYDIA KO: I think things were -- like people would say it seems so easy, and I think in ways it seemed like it because you just didn't -- I just didn't have as much experience.

It's kind of like when they say, oh, look at that kid, like he's just holed like 10 five-footers. It's almost because you don't have that experience, you're in a good way just innocently going about and just making sure to try to get that ball in the hole.

I think the more experience you have, you end up seeing a lot of different things and feeling a lot of different emotions that maybe you didn't feel before.

But at the same time, I think because of my nine years on Tour and all those experiences, good and bad, I think I'm able to handle it a lot better. Like when I first came on Tour, I wasn't a huge fan of playing in front of fans. I didn't want to hit a bad shot, me hit a bad shot and they're like, ooh, or your putt lips out and everyone is like, ahhh.

Now I'm like, hey you try it. It's not as easy as it looks. You're just able to handle it better because you've just done that. I was actually talking to my boyfriend yesterday and then he was like, you still get nervous, and I was like, yeah, I get nervous even in the pro-am.

So it's still there, and also he said, well, it must mean that it means a lot to me. I think the experiences can be good and bad, but I think mostly really good, and I think I've grown as a golfer and as a person because of all of that.

I realize sometimes, yeah, when I won so many times earlier on in my career it may have seemed easy, but at the same time, I think the level of play right now is just incredible, and I think that's why the year that Jin Young and Nelly had last year is just unbelievable.

People may have thought it looked easy because they made it look easy, but it was far from that.

Q. Coming into U.S. Open week, a major week, it's easy to have higher expectations and pressure and a lot of players talk about the process of combatting that expectation. What is that process or what does that mindset look like for you when you're coming into a week where you might feel you have a little higher expectation or some pressure on you?

LYDIA KO: I think there is like a lot of headlines this week, obviously Michelle being one of them, announcing that this will be her last -- she will be retiring after this obviously before the '23 Women's Open at Pebble; Nelly's return; Jin Young Ko's World No. 1. Hopefully I'll kind of fly under the radar behind all that.

Like I said earlier, I have a really great pairing playing with Jess and Hannah, so I'm excited just for that, and that's just going to make it, I think, a little bit more comforting just to go out there with a couple friends and just have fun.

Hopefully I'll play great this week, but just with golf, like you never know. One day I feel like I felt good and I know exactly where I'm going, and the next day it feels clueless. I think that's the thing where they say, oh, did you wake up on the wrong side of the bed, like this game I feel like also exemplifies that.

I'm just going to enjoy it, take it one shot at a time. It's a long week, and I know I'm going to hit a lot of good shots, but then I might also hit some bad shots, and making sure to not get too frustrated and kind of believing in the process and never giving up until the very end.

Q. When you do have a week where you kind of have the spotlight on you, how are you able to zone in on your game and your process and not focus on everything else around you?

LYDIA KO: Yeah, to be honest, I think it's an exciting week itself. It's going to be -- it's actually harder to kind of hear all of the things that are being said.

I think for most players, I think everyone is going to put in their 100, 110 percent in their focus and the shots that need to be executed.

Yeah, I think it's -- almost because it is this kind of a week, it can at the same time be a little easier to like not focus on the other things because you're really focused on what you have to do and the shot in front of you.

Q. Another storyline this week of course is Annika coming back --

LYDIA KO: Yes. How did I miss that? GOAT.

Q. I was wondering since you practice at the same place if you've seen her grinding away for this and what your expectations are for Annika this week?

LYDIA KO: Yes. She was practicing so much before the Gainbridge last year, and I was like, oh, guys, be careful,

the GOAT is coming up. She's won so many times, more times than all of us.

Yeah, before the Women's Open I was home last week, and she was there every day with Mike, her husband, doing course work, putting work, long game, short game. She's covered it. Definitely one to watch out. And she's won here multiple times, right? Yeah, she won the Senior Open was it couple years ago?

THE MODERATOR: Last year.

LYDIA KO: Was it last year? Yeah, so I don't think anyone has as many championships as she does in the field like for this week.

We all know that she does amazing under pressure and on all of the above. Yeah, she's definitely been putting in the time, and it's amazing -- when she played Gainbridge she made the cut there. She almost won the Hilton event at the start of the year.

So yeah, I think it's really cool to be in the same field as her. I think she changed the game, and people that don't necessarily know golf knows the name Annika Sorenstam.

I think she plays -- yes, she plays for herself, but at the same time, I think she plays a lot for her family and her kids, and like even seeing like last year, her kids coming out and being excited to see their mom play like that I think is so cool and I think there's just so much meaning to that.

I'm sure like she's inspired so many of us. She's inspired her kids, as well. Yeah, it's really cool. Definitely one to watch out for.

Q. Which hole was the painting of at Lake Merced?

LYDIA KO: It was recently the 9th, but it was normally the 18th hole. When it was the Swinging Skirts event it was the 18th, the one that went down and up on the dip and there was a bunker like halfway up the green on the left.

But now it's the 9th hole when we played it for MEDIHEAL. I remember calling the tournament director at the time, Kevin Hopkins, and I was like, they drew an extra bunker that shouldn't be there. He's like, no, it's there. The next year I went and I was like, oh, my God, there's a bunker. Things like that.

I feel like when you're in the zone you sometimes don't see it. All you see is the fairway or your target. When you see it then you can't get it out of your mind.

That's all I think when the pin is front left: Don't go in the

back bunker.

Yeah, it's amazing, like our mind and when we're really focused, like what draws our attention, and in those pressure conditions what really comes into our eyes. I think our eyes plays a huge factor while we're out there.

Q. About the money not mattering as much as just getting to compete in this major championship, do you think there's any amount of money in the world that would change your feeling about that?

LYDIA KO: No. Yeah, at the end of the day it comes with results, right? Like none of that matters. None of that matters if your results don't follow.

Those are like the extra bonuses and perks for us, I think. As an athlete and as a female athlete, to be able to play for this kind of money, I think it's -- not even just for my generation, but for the future generations, and when you see like what our founders played for, yes, the cost of living might have been cheaper than now, but still, I think we're very -- we should be very grateful, but at the same time I think there's still a ways to go, and I'm excited where women's golf and golf is trending.

At the end of the day, yes, the more zeros are better, but we're all professional athletes and trying to play well in what we do and just having a good time out there, and to be able to play for more money doing that is a bonus.

Just for me, like sometimes I probably play with these players and see like how well they play and just like the amount of talent, I feel like it is -- the women's game deserves this, and that's why I said earlier, I think we're very thankful to these partners that really believe in us and see what we see.

Hopefully more and more of these great partnerships will happen, and it will just continue to grow in many different aspects.

THE MODERATOR: Lydia, thanks for your time. Good luck this week.

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