

AIG Women's Open

Press Conference

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Sophia Popov

Zoe Ridgway

Michael Wells

Lucy Fato

Phil Anderton

KAREN MYERS: Good afternoon from Scotland, and good morning and good evening to those of you joining us from overseas. Welcome to the virtual media opportunity for the 2021 AIG Women's Open at Carnoustie. I'm Karen Myers, and I'm the R&A's Executive Director of Corporate Communications.

To begin today's session, we've prepared several pieces of content to present to you. After each presentation, we'll be joined by the key speakers, and you'll have the opportunity to ask follow-up questions. If you'd like to ask a question, please indicate this by commenting to the group in the chat function. I will then call on you in turn, and at this point, you're welcome to turn your camera on and unmute yourself to ask your question. To end, I'll hand you over to Olivia McMillan, who will moderate the session with Sophia Popov, the defending champion of the AIG Women's Open.

So with 50 days to go and with the build underway this week, I now ask you to turn your focus to Carnoustie Golf Links.

(Start video.)

GEORGE HARPER JR.: We're here at Carnoustie, and you can really see things starting to heat up ahead of the AIG Women's Open, which will be played from the 16th to the 22nd of August. So we're going to take a look around, and who better to catch up with than Championship Director Zoe Ridgway. Let's go find her.

Okay, Zoe. Set the scene for us, paint the picture. What can we expect at the AIG Women's Open?

ZOE RIDGWAY: Well, I think the easy answer is a world class championship. That's our guiding principle for the



AIG Women's Open, and I think we're all working together to try and create a world class championship for the world's best players to compete this August.

I guess planning a major championship during a pandemic isn't necessarily easy, but we're working really hard with the UK government, Scottish government, and also the public health authorities to make sure we have all the necessary protocols in place to stage not only a successful championship, but also a safe championship in August.

GEORGE HARPER JR.: That certainly isn't easy. I guess that's what shows the commitment of The R&A towards the championship, which was the only major sporting event for women in the UK last year. So the roars, the crowds, the fans, they weren't there, but it did feel like a major for the players. Can we see those fans come back this time around?

ZOE RIDGWAY: Yes, I think we were really proud of the AIG Women's Open last year. We felt it was really important for women's golf that the championship was played, and what a fantastic year it was thanks to Sophia Popov's remarkable victory, but I think we definitely miss the fans. They bring the atmosphere. They add drama to the championship. So I think undoubtedly we want to see the fans return this year, but only if it's safe to do so.

I think we're cautiously optimistic that we'll be able to have fans back at the championship in August, but of course, we'll continue to follow the government's latest advice, which continues to evolve.

GEORGE HARPER JR.: That's outstanding. I think it's time we head to the 18th and catch up with Mike Wells, the Chief Executive of Carnoustie.

It's such a special place. There's been so many Open Championships, so many great moments. What can the players expect when they arrive here?

MICHAEL WELLS: Thanks, George. It's fantastic to be here talking to you today. The players coming to Carnoustie have a fantastic time. We call it golf's greatest test. It's going to be a test, a strategy. You're going to have to think your way around here. We're just so excited to be welcoming you guys in August and can't wait for you



to get here.

GEORGE HARPER JR.: Obviously, the Championship was here in 2011, when Yani Tseng won, and Sophia Popov, the defending champ, she actually debuted as an amateur here. How exciting is it to have them back? But also, there's not going to be many players that have played here before other than them, so what tips can you give those players?

MICHAEL WELLS: We're so excited to have them back. These are the world's best players. For us, this is one of the world's best golf courses. The challenges they can expect here is going to be a bit different to what they usually encounter on Tour. This is a traditional links course. Hopefully, the weather, if it turns out okay, it's going to be hard and fast, and they're going to be playing some shots they're maybe just not used to.

I think strategy is going to be the key here. We're going to need to think our way around the golf course, but it's going to make for some tremendous viewing.

GEORGE HARPER JR.: We mentioned 2011 earlier. How has the championship evolved since then? Because it's come such a long way.

ZOE RIDGWAY: I think one of the biggest changes we've seen to the AIG Women's Open is right there in the name itself. We welcomed AIG as our headline partner for the championship in 2019, and since then, we've seen two very successful stagings of the championship, albeit both under very different circumstances.

But I think what we saw last year was real commitment from AIG to support the AIG Women's Open, and they not only stood beside us, but they also shared our belief that the championship should be played in order to be able to support the women athletes whose playing opportunities have been so severely impacted by the pandemic.

And major championships, I think, are all about the best players in the world competing on the best golf courses in the world for a prestigious title and trophy, and what we tried to create at The R&A is a venue for the AIG Women's Open which visits courses like Royal Troon last year, we're here at Carnoustie this year, and we've also got Muirfield, Walton Heath, St. Andrews and Royal Porthcawl to look forward to in the coming years.

GEORGE HARPER JR.: Mike, how does it feel to be part of such an amazing line-up of courses like that?

MICHAEL WELLS: As Zoe said, it's a pretty special line-up of golf courses, and we're very proud to be part of that and

also part of the leadership and the governance of the game, which The R&A is supporting here, and we're extremely proud to be part of that and to be within that line-up.

GEORGE HARPER JR.: Carnoustie has always had a strong relationship with the women's game of golf and with The R&A. How important are those relationships?

MICHAEL WELLS: They're really important. I do feel there's maybe something quite special going on here this year. We've got not too far behind us here, the world's oldest ladies golf club, the Carnoustie Ladies. We were one of the first signatories of the Women in Golf Charter here at Carnoustie, and our own golf development program, the Carnoustie Craws, we've got just over 300 children who participate every week, and 50 percent of those are girls. So there's a really bright future here in terms of that modernisation of the game, if you like, which is long overdue.

I think it's a lot in alignment with the values of The R&A, so we see ourselves as partners, as part of that mission, and we very much look forward to continuing to be part of it.

GEORGE HARPER JR.: Mike, we're excited to have time with you. We're about to walk into the Barry Burn, so thank you so much for showing us around today.

(End video.)

KAREN MYERS: Carnoustie looks fantastic. As you can see, I'm now joined by Zoe and Mike and would welcome any follow-up questions.

Q. Just a question to Zoe, please. I appreciate a few weeks out, but you mentioned about spectators and following government guidelines. What kind of ambitions do you have? Have you got any kind of expectations of the sort of numbers of fans you're going to be allowed to have in yet?

ZOE RIDGWAY: Thanks so much for your question, Peter. I think we are, as we mentioned in the video recording, we're optimistic we will have fans in attendance at the AIG Women's Open this year. We're continuing to work very closely with Scottish government on those plans. We're still kind of working to see what kind of numbers will be achievable.

So I'm not able to give you an exact figure at the moment of what's achievable, but we're on sale with tickets, and we've seen a good level of interest in the championship, which is great.

Q. Could you give me any sort of ballpark figure, any sort of estimate.

ZOE RIDGWAY: I can't really at the moment because it's kind of a bit of a moving feast. I think we'll just keep on developing the protocols for the championship, and as we get closer to the championship, we'll just look to understand what's safe at the time and therefore what's appropriate in terms of attendance levels.

Q. This could be for both of you. Last time the Women's Open was at Carnoustie in 2011 -- I know it's a long time ago now -- but there was some criticism that the course was played too short and Carnoustie without its full teeth. I was wondering what length you're looking at for the course for the women, what par you're looking at, and have you any intentions of toughening up a little bit from the last time?

MICHAEL WELLS: I'm happy to have a go at that one, if you want, Zoe, and please feel free to jump in from The R&A perspective. I believe the course is around the 6,800 mark, and we may have different golfing skills, Steve, but I certainly don't think Carnoustie needs too much toughening up.

The course -- and I guess one of the great things about Carnoustie is it hasn't had a lot of tinkering. We're very fortunate to have a design here that seems to be standing the test of time. But the weather's going to play a huge part for how we present it when the AIG Women's Open comes to Carnoustie, but we're very confident that whatever happens, the test is going to be there.

As I said in the video, I think, as we all know, it takes a strategic thought to get around Carnoustie that's as good as any weapon in the bag.

Q. Hello, Zoe. Hello, Mike. I'm just thinking, going on from what Steve was saying, that in 2011 Yani Tseng got up on the 18th green with a driver and a 9-iron. So I take it you'll be thinking about that when you make -- do the yardages?

ZOE RIDGWAY: Yes, I think Mike's right. I think the course sets up for 6,800 yards, but I think it will depend on the wind direction. So I think we're going to keep some optionality in terms of tees moving forward or backwards depending on the weather conditions at the time, but I would expect that hole has been lengthened since the previous stage of the championship.

Q. Thanks. Because I remember the girls saying they would rather see more of the Barry Burn because I think they were escaping it too often.

KAREN MYERS: And Liv just put in the chat that she's happy to send out the card of the course after the call.

Q. Sorry I missed the start of the call there. I was just keen to see if a decision has been made on numbers expected, et cetera. Obviously with the good news on attendance at the men's event, has a decision been made on numbers for Carnoustie?

ZOE RIDGWAY: No, we haven't managed to reach a decision on exact numbers as yet. We're hopeful that we will get spectators in attendance, and I think all the signs are sort of pointing towards that, but we're still working with the Scottish government to just try and understand what the picture is a little bit closer to the time and therefore decide on the appropriate numbers should be to hold a safe championship.

Q. Mike, obviously, you would be keen for fans to be there obviously to show off Carnoustie. Fans being there jump starts the whole thing, doesn't it?

MICHAEL WELLS: Having fans there is everybody's preference. We've worked very hard with the Scottish government for that to happen. Time will tell. I think there will be a lot of lessons coming out of The Open at St. Georges in a couple of weeks time as well. Everybody wants fans to come along as long as conditions are right and we can do it safely, but we're keeping our fingers crossed.

KAREN MYERS: Any further questions for Mike and Zoe? Thank you then.

We now shift our focus to the importance of growing women and girls golf and the very important role that AIG has in helping The R&A achieve our goal.

(start video)

IONA STEPHEN: We've just seen fantastic footage of Carnoustie thanks to Zoe, George, and Mike, but now it's time to turn our attention to some exciting off-course activities. I'm delighted to say today I'm joined by two very special guests. First of all, Lucy Fato, Executive Vice President, General Counsel, Global Head of Communications and Government Affairs of AIG, and Phil Anderton, Chief Development officer of The R&A. Thank you both so much for taking the time to join us today.

Lucy, I'm going to come to you first, if that's okay. We heard from Zoe earlier on about how important the partnership with AIG has been for the AIG Women's Open since 2019. I wondered if you could tell us a little bit about

what first attracted AIG to sponsoring this world class major championship.

LUCY FATO: Sure. Thank you for having me. It's very exciting to be here to talk about the AIG Women's Open. So the partnership started really with our CEO Peter Zaffino, who has always been, not just a big fan of the sport of golf, but he's also been a real champion of diversity and gender diversity in particular.

You can imagine a company the size of AIG. There are a lot of opportunities for sponsorships in a lot of different contexts, but when this sponsorship became available, it was really just a no brainer for us because it touched on a number of things that we value as an organization. Number one, supporting women in sports, which we also view as supporting women in business, and so to watch these women, elite athletes really, from all over the world, it just really matched up nicely with us as an organisation.

IONA STEPHEN: Phil, we know that women's golf is a real key priority for The R&A, and it seems that the AIG Women's Open really exemplifies that.

PHIL ANDERTON: Absolutely, Iona. We're a little biased here at The R&A, but we think golf is a fantastic sport. We want it to thrive, we want more people to be able to play this great sport, and that obviously means women and girls. We think that not only is it right to do from a moral point of view, inclusive sport, and so we think that partnering with AIG for our showpiece event, that really shows The R&A's commitment to women in golf is absolutely perfect.

IONA STEPHEN: It's absolutely a very good match. Lucy, the support that AIG continues to show women and women's golf continues to evolve. We've noticed that both the 2018 champion Georgia Hall and the 2020 champion Sophia Popov both wear AIG on their caps, which is very exciting. Can you tell us a little bit about your relationship with Georgia and Sophia?

LUCY FATO: Yes, absolutely. We are delighted to be sponsoring both Georgia and Sophia, and they're both so personable. They care about the sport. They want to draw other people in. So they really have, not just the skills as elite athletes, but just also the same mindset we have about the importance of promoting women in sports and young girls in particular as well. They both take a lot of time to focus on that sort of thing.

So we think they're terrific spokespeople for the sport, and they're also terrific spokespeople for us at AIG.

IONA STEPHEN: Two excellent role models in Georgia

and Sophia, and perhaps a star and a name to look for in the future, Phil, the Scottish superstar, that is, Louise Duncan, recent winner of the Women's Amateur Championship, has booked herself a ticket to the AIG Women's Open this summer.

But she's already familiar with The R&A, and I'm sure she's a name that you've heard already as she's one of the recipients of The R&A scholarship. Can you tell us a little bit about that program and how important it is to amateur golfers.

PHIL ANDERTON: Obviously, we were delighted when Louise won the Women's Amateur down at Barassie, a Scottish player at Stirling University, and as you say, an R&A scholar, and we have a large number of scholars.

The reason it's important to us is because we need to support these elite athletes as they are striving to be the best, and it's important that we support these players because not all of them are able to go on and play at the highest level at the AIG Women's Open, for example. So it's important that they're able to have that education. So The R&A scholarship program provides that funding and that support to enable them, A, to study but also to compete.

To see Louise winning down at Barassie and now to be able to step up to the highest level, the showpiece event of the AIG Women's Open again here in Scotland, made us all very proud here at The R&A.

IONA STEPHEN: That's going to be an exceptionally special week for Louise, no doubt.

Lucy, what I'd love to talk about now is a little bit about the future and how AIG plans to continue to support women's golf and women's sport in general going forward.

LUCY FATO: Well, we did extend our sponsorship of the Women's Open during Covid. We wanted to demonstrate that, in spite of the challenges of the last year plus, that we were really committed to this. So we extended the sponsorship, but I will say it got me more and more interested in the sport. So I've been watching it more. I've been learning more about the players, both male and female, to be honest, and I do see the differential between the men and the women in terms of the sponsorships and what they're paid and the purse and the differences in the audiences and television coverage.

So I think our goal at AIG is we really want to be allies to these women. We really, really mean that, with The R&A's partnership in terms of making sure where we're playing, is it a venue that's supportive of women, and trying to get the

winning, the purse increased as much as we can, trying to get more coverage of these events, and just generally raising the profile.

At the end of the day, if you can educate people about this and what's going on, there will be a movement. I think the women have come a long way in golf. There's still a long way to go to get to real true equality, but we're very committed at AIG.

IONA STEPHEN: Your enthusiasm for it, Lucy, is absolutely infectious, and it's wonderful to hear you talk about it so passionately.

Phil, I'm going to ask you to look at the future as well, if that's all right, and to give us your vision of golf and women's golf over the next 50 years.

PHIL ANDERTON: My vision and the vision of The R&A, more importantly, is to see this sport thriving in 50 years time. What do we mean by that? Make it more inclusive, which means more women and girls playing the sport, more accessible, and more appealing. We've just seen the numbers have come back for 2020, and in Great Britain alone, we've seen the numbers of people playing golf on course has gone from 3.2 to 5.2 million people.

The really great bit of news is that the women playing, the number of women, 25 percent of them are entirely new to the sport, and that compares with only 12 percent for men. So women are beginning to translate the interest into actually participating in the sport, which is fantastic.

IONA STEPHEN: I do very much like the sound of that. I mean, both of you have such wonderful energy for this topic. This summer, there's no doubt the week at Carnoustie for the AIG Women's Open is going to be exceptionally exciting. I'd like to thank you both, Phil and Lucy, for joining us today. We look forward to seeing how this championship, the AIG Women's Open, and your partnership continues to thrive in the future.

PHIL ANDERTON: Thank you very much.

LUCY FATO: Really nice to see you. Thanks for having me.

KAREN MYERS: Thank you to Phil and Lucy. I agree with Iona, the passion that Phil and Lucy clearly share for this topic is obvious. I'm now joined by Phil to answer any follow-up questions you may have.

Q. You obviously talk about the growth in the women's game, which is fantastic. How helpful is a story like Sophia Popov winning the Women's Open

last year, which was a real fairy tale given her world ranking, how helpful is that type of thing in terms of what you're trying to do in growing the women's game?

PHIL ANDERTON: I think it's very important, Martin, because what we need, as Lucy said, is role models. When you've got someone like Sophia, who comes through and wins it on the highest stage, that is raising the profile of women's golf, and it's creating those role models that will help both the aspiring elite athlete to then go on and try to be the best they can be, but also it really helps provide that impetus for young people to get into the sport in the first place.

So I think it was fantastic what Sophia achieved last year, and hopefully we'll have more of that in the future.

Q. I was going to ask Lucy about what AIG knew about women's golf when they came on board. Did it take them by surprise? Was it better than they thought? What were they expecting?

KAREN MYERS: We don't actually have Lucy on the chat with us at the moment. We'd be very happy to put that question to her. I know they were already very committed to women's sport. It was an important focus for them both for the development of women in business and the development of women in sport, but we can certainly put that question to Lucy and come back to you afterwards.

Q. Just last week we were speaking to the Chief Executive of Trust Golf, the new sponsors of the Scottish Open, and she was telling us that within three years she was looking for financial parity with the men's Scottish Open. Given how golf is moving at the moment, how close do you think the AIG Women's Open, can get to matching The Open Championship in terms of prize money, and how quickly do you think you can do that?

PHIL ANDERTON: A very good question, Brian. Obviously, long-term ambition is to get as close to parity as we can, and in fact, steps have already been taken in that area. So back in 2019, the total prize money for the AIG Women's Open went up by 40 percent, so significant changes, and it's with companies like AIG that enable us to begin to move in that direction.

But to really achieve it and to be sustainable, what we'll need is all of the women's professional events, together with the whole industry, raising our game to drive up the interest and the profile of the women's game because it's ultimately demand -- you know, the fans' demand, the media demand, the broadcast demand -- that will decide

and generate the revenues that will enable us and others to support the professional women with the kind of prize money that is currently afforded to the men.

But certainly a long-term ambition, and The R&A is making strong progress in that area already.

Q. We see Wimbledon is on at the moment. Of course, for years and years they battled for parity there. Can you see it within the next ten years where there is parity between the men and the Women's Open championship in terms of potential prize money?

PHIL ANDERTON: As you know, Brian, I don't like to look in the crystal ball too much or put exact dates on it, but I'd like to think, having seen the increase in interest in women's golf, one of the really powerful bits of information I saw the other day from a report that we've just got back is that in Great Britain, the percentage of people who play golf in all its formats, the on course but also alternative formats, driving ranges, et cetera, the percentage of women playing golf has gone from 16 percent in 2019 to 28 percent. That's almost a doubling in the space of a year of the number of women and girls playing our sport.

Now, if you drive those numbers up and you translate that into people following the sport on broadcast, et cetera, going to events, as I said earlier, that will drive up the revenues that will enable the whole sport to be getting nearer to parity as well as The R&A with the AIG Women's Open.

As you said, there are other sports that have done that. It took a long time to progress to that, and I think it's really -- it's encouraging that The R&A took the proactive and bold step to say we need to do better. We need women to be a key part of golf. So let's hope in the next decade we can move nearer to that target.

Q. If I can ask one final question, Phil. The importance of young girls playing golf now, playing all sports, is fantastic to see. How important has Paul Lawrie and Steven Gallacher and their foundations bring able to give young girls the opportunity to play golf, has that helped the interest in the sport in women and young girls golf?

PHIL ANDERTON: It's absolutely delightful, and we're delighted that champions, top golfers like them are able to give their time, experience, and resources to make those types of programs happen. At The R&A, we're pleased to say that we support those programs as well. And also, places like Carnoustie, as Mike Wells discussed with the Carnoustie Craws program.

So the more of that we can do, the more of these introductory programs that make golf appealing and make it accessible, I think it will be fantastic for the sport. So those types of initiatives, you have heard The R&A, we're partnering with Modest! Golf, with Niall Horan, so watch this space of the kind of activities we're going to be doing with them, and as you can imagine, we believe that that type of promotion will reach millions more young girls and present the sport in a very positive and appealing way.

The more of these types of things we can do across the industry, the more girls will play, and the more women will eventually be playing in the sport.

KAREN MYERS: Thank you very much indeed for those questions. Today we've heard a little of The R&A and AIG's long-term vision for the AIG Women's Open, and I would like to highlight the importance of AIG in helping us elevate the championship to the level we aspire to.

With that sentiment in mind, I would request that you acknowledge the contribution that AIG makes to women's golf by using the championship's full name, the AIG Women's Open, in your coverage, and as Phil touched on, each stakeholder in the industry has their part to play in growing women's golf, and that's one way that the media can help us.

So thank you very much for your time, and I'll now pass you over to Olivia McMillan.

OLIVIA McMILLAN: Thanks, Karen. I am delighted to welcome Sophia Popov, the reigning AIG Women's Open champion, to the call. Thank you so much for joining us today, Sophia.

SOPHIA POPOV: Thank you for having me.

OLIVIA McMILLAN: It's a pleasure. I know we all look back on last year's championship with some very fond memories of your win. It was such a wonderful story of hard work and perseverance, but can you reflect on your past 12 months, your year as the AIG Women's Open champion?

SOPHIA POPOV: Yeah, it's been a crazy rise. I think, as unexpected as maybe my -- the turn of events were for me last year, it's just been a lot more of that even this year. I've been playing well ever since, and so I have new opportunities that were coming my way, and it's kind of a thing where it's really exciting and it's amazing, but there are all these other things that come with it. So I think for me every week has just been so fun and interesting, and finally I get to, I guess, be that player that I've been wanting to be for so long.

Really all I can say is it's just been an amazing 12 months, and I'm just excited to see what the future holds from here on out.

OLIVIA McMILLAN: We're very excited to see what the future holds for you too, Sophia.

Looking to the AIG Women's Open, it's being played at Carnoustie this year. This is the second time that it's been played there, the first being in 2011, when you made your debut in the championship as an amateur. How surreal is it for you that just ten years later on you're going to be returning as the defending champion?

SOPHIA POPOV: It's amazing. Honestly I can tell you that I remember exactly what I felt like on the 1st tee in 2011. I played with Caroline Hedwall, Anna Nordqvist, and I was first off in the morning at 6:30 a.m. as the reigning European individual amateur champion.

I remember just being very quiet and very serene, and I go, oh, no, I know exactly what this golf course can turn into. Use every opportunity you have while the wind is not blowing. It was just amazing. I had such a good time. I made the cut that year and just remember having to make a ten-footer for par on my 36th hole to make the cut, and it was really, really cool. I had such a great experience.

Links golf has always been so special to me, and the year after that, I got to play the 2012 Women's Amateur, at Carnoustie also, and it was just -- I love being there. It's an amazing golf course. I saw it at its toughest, and I saw it when it's not quite as tough. I'm not quite sure what I hope for this year, but I'm really excited that we get to play there.

OLIVIA McMILLAN: That's great. Thanks, Sophia. We do have questions coming in for you now.

Q. Hi, Sophia. Thanks for doing this. Obviously, the win was fantastic last year, but you backed it up really well over the last 12 months, in the world's top 20 and the highest ranked European. How pleasing has that been? And also, just as a follow-up, how big a goal is that Solheim Cup that's looming on the horizon now?

SOPHIA POPOV: It's been great, I think. I've been playing with a different sense of, I would say, confidence and enjoyment, to be honest, on the golf course. I can finally -- it feels like I can finally unleash my full potential because I'm not afraid of the consequences, to be frank.

It's just been fun for me to play each and every week to be able to decide which events I want to play, to be able to focus on the bigger events and just have a good time out

there. Of course, the Solheim Cup, the moment I won the AIG Women's Open last year, the Solheim Cup was on the forefront for me, as well as the Olympics, but I think to me the Solheim Cup was always something I watched year in and year out and I was part of the Junior Solheim Cup and I knew how special it was.

I have so many friends on that team, and I think every year that it happened and I wasn't on that team was kind of a little bit disappointing to me. So to me, it's just been a huge goal, and I hope I can make that team this year because it would be pretty much the highlight of my career so far.

Q. Would it be right to think you have a personality that suits team golf?

SOPHIA POPOV: I would think so. I don't know if there's anyone I don't get along with, so I have a lot of friends on -- I think there's no one on the team that I would not get along with, and I really love match play, the match play format, since I've been very young playing in Europe. I think all those personality traits kind of feed in to, I think, make myself a pretty good team player. So I'm excited to explore that further hopefully in September.

Q. Hi there, Sophia. Thank you for taking some questions. Firstly, how are you going to approach this year's AIG Women's Open? Will you approach it any differently to how you did last year given you obviously had a big surprise win last year? And as a follow-up to that, what are your expectations going into this year's championship, given you missed the cut the last two majors, but you've obviously had a great season apart from that.

SOPHIA POPOV: I think it's going to be very different. I guess I would start answering this question by saying last year I didn't prepare the way that I would usually prepare for a major, coming from Arizona, only having one practice round, and getting out there.

With that being said, I am that kind of person. I don't like to put that much more thought into the preparation of a major because, to me, it's just like any tournament out there. I like to prepare the same way. I feel like you have to execute every shot to the best of your ability and then you kind of play a round and see where you end up.

I think this year's going to be a little bit different. I've been lucky enough to be a brand ambassador for AIG since the end of last year, and it's just been amazing. So I think it's also going to come with a few other obligations going into this year's AIG Women's Open, which are amazing, and it almost feels like you're kind of hosting an event as such,

but it's going to be amazing. I'm just excited to be there, and I think, like I said, my prep will be very similar to last year. I might add on another nine holes or so.

But the thing is too you never know what the course is going to give you and what the weather conditions will be like. I'll take a look at the course. I pretty much know it from previous years, and then from there on, it's just about checking the weather forecast and seeing what kinds of shots I'm going to have to be executing.

Q. Hi, Sophia. You spoke a little bit earlier about the changes that have taken place and the sort of new life that you've got and the trappings that have come after your win last year. What is the one biggest thing that's changed for you both on and off the course since that victory?

SOPHIA POPOV: I think a lot of that, to be honest, to answer your question as honestly as I can, at the beginning, the only things that changed were the fact that I would get into more events and I would be playing more. My schedule was pretty packed, obviously, with the media attention that comes with it.

Now looking 11 months on, it's been amazing, but at the same time, very, very busy. I have off weeks that don't turn into off weeks, quite like I would like to, but it's just you have a lot more obligations that come with playing. So you realise, I think, the true life behind a professional athlete and especially when you're playing well, which is how I want it. I wouldn't want it any other way than I've been playing well. So it's just keeping up with the schedule that I have and being smart about the way that I schedule my events, my off time, my personal time, because at home for me personally nothing has changed. Everything's the same.

I'm lucky enough to have an amazing support system, but obviously I have amazing partnerships starting this year, especially with AIG. It's been amazing. So all these things that have come with that win have just been awesome for me. I'm just lucky to be in the position that I am in right now.

Q. Has the TrackMan that you managed to buy after that victory you spoke about a few months ago, has that improved your game even further?

SOPHIA POPOV: I'd like to think so, but I love TrackMan, and I love working with it, but I think as of recently, I've kind of almost gone about 50-50 as far as trusting my feel and being -- I know that's the kind of player I am. I'm more of a feel player. I don't like to look at the numbers too much because they can freak me out quite a bit.

I think that's maybe honestly what happened at the KPMG Women's PGA a few weeks ago. I think I started looking at those numbers maybe a little too much, so I'm kind of backing off that now and going back to the player I feel like I was previous to TrackMan.

Q. I'm just wondering, it could be a really busy but a great summer for you. How do you feel about, A, turning off as defending champion, which gives you a different status, but before then, carrying your family name into the Olympics?

SOPHIA POPOV: Actually, this week's been all about my scheduling for this summer. I realise that it is very packed. Our season has been full of events and scheduled pretty tightly already, which is amazing because coming off of the Covid year last year, we're lucky enough to be playing this much. But like you said, it's an Olympic year too, so with Evian coming up and then flying to Japan for the Olympics, coming back from Scottish to British, and then the Solheim Cup on top of that, it is going to be very, very busy.

So there's some decisions that I have to make about certain events that I'm not 100 percent that I'm going to be playing because I think for me defending my title is probably one of the most important things to me this year, as well as the Solheim Cup and the Olympics. So those are three events that I want to highlight and want to focus on.

So I think to me right now I'm trying to make a decision about how to schedule those and how I can be sure that I'm ready, honestly, come Solheim Cup because that's the basically cherry on top in about eight weeks where we want to be playing our absolute best golf. I think it's going to be very interesting as to how I end up, what I decide to play and how ready I'll be come September.

Q. I think it was like 2015 Solheim Cup, Sophia, you were working for German TV, obviously, at the time. When you think about that now, is that kind of beyond the wildest dreams, a Solheim Cup then, when you were covering it for TV, did you ever think that would be a possibility to be inside the ropes?

SOPHIA POPOV: Yeah, it is pretty wild. I think when I was commentating the event, I had just gone through kind of a little bit of a rough year as far as it being my rookie year on Tour and going through a lot of health issues.

I had this opportunity at the end of the year to commentate the Solheim Cup, and I can honestly say I had such a great time that week. It was something that was very -- in some ways, very dear to me to just be able to talk about my

friends and how they're doing, having to be very impartial, though. So it was an interesting week.

It was at my home golf club in Germany, so that was very special to me. When I saw the emotions that go with winning the Solheim Cup, I think it made me realise I'm not done playing this game. I really want to go out there. This is my exact goal right there in a nutshell, and I think, to be honest, it just motivated me to keep going and to play better golf and ultimately, hopefully, make the team this year.

So it's a crazy transition, but I think for me it was a huge point in the process of motivating me to get to this point that I'm at right now.

Q. Commentating more nervous than playing?

SOPHIA POPOV: I don't know. I think everyone who knows me knows I can talk a lot. I don't know if I get that nervous about talking. It was a little bit nerve-racking the first day, but then once I got into it, it was very fun and exciting. So I'm going to have to believe that standing on that 1st tee is going to be a lot more nerve-racking than commentating.

Q. Sophia, I was actually walking the first few holes of Carnoustie in 2011, so I actually saw I think you birdied the 2nd hole. And I remember I was talking to your parents and friends at the time, and we got a bit of a giggle because they were quite excited to see you effectively leading the tournament at that point, albeit at about 7:00 in the morning. Their excitement then was quite a fan. I'd just like to know how much greater it was nine years on when you actually won it.

SOPHIA POPOV: I don't think you can really -- I don't know if I can put into words what it means to my family because it meant so much to me last year, and they couldn't be there, but they were obviously watching every single shot I hit. Actually, my dad wasn't. He was too nervous to watch. They follow along, and it's such a big deal to them because they know what I've been through, going from, like you said, the 2011 British Open, my first major that I ever played and possibly contended in for a couple of holes, to last year, where I end up winning.

I think of all the hard work, sweat, and tears, and all the stuff you talk about with athletes, but really all I went through in those nine years, I think they're the only ones who get a close-up view of what that's like and what I'm doing and the behind the scenes of my career. So I think to them it's just been so special, and ever since, I can see my parents -- they're so proud, and they come out to my events. My dad said, I'd love to come out and watch you

more because I feel like I missed out last year in not being able to be there. So I don't want to miss, hopefully, the next victory if it comes soon. It's been really, really nice for them too.

Q. Just a question about the friends. I remember they had flags. I think they had the German flag and "Go Sophia" or something. What were their reactions?

SOPHIA POPOV: I remember one of my friends from (indiscernible) came out with a poster, and I can't remember what the poster said, but I was kind of embarrassed. I was like cringing because I go no one even knows me out here, but here I've got that one fan that's holding up a poster for me. It was a good friend of mine, and she was also one of the first people who messaged me and said, you know what, remember this? She sent me the picture from Carnoustie in 2011, and she said, it's been a crazy ride for the last nine years, and it's just amazing to see how far you've come, and it's just been really, really nice to see the support still there.

Q. Sophia, thank you for taking the time to speak to us today. I've got a very simple one for you, Sophia. After what happened last year, what does Scotland mean to you now, and what will it mean to you forever more when you set foot in this place time and again?

SOPHIA POPOV: I love Scotland, but I've always loved it. It's been the site of many great tournaments for me. Obviously, from the first and to my most recent Open appearance. It's funny because I talk to my boyfriend about this a lot, and he loves Scotland, and we say there's a certain vibe that we get once we set foot on Scottish soil.

I think the last time I landed in Edinburgh, the guy at the immigration said to me, what are you here for? I said, well, the AIG Women's Open, and he goes, oh, and he starts talking to me for 20 minutes because he knows how big the tournament is and what type of big deal it is, and he said, we'll be following along, and it's going to be exciting. That's the kind of love and passion for the game that I wish I saw in every single country that we step foot in.

That's why it actually means a lot for me to be there, and I love the links golf. I love especially Scottish links golf, the courses around there. Even the Scottish Women's Open, I've always had great memories there. So I just love it, and I always can't wait to come back.

OLIVIA McMILLAN: Thank you, Sophia, for your time. I certainly hope that like myself that you and everyone on the call is as excited for the AIG Women's Open coming up at Carnoustie because this call certainly has me inspired for the championship, and I can't wait to watch you defend

your title. So thank you so much for your time today, and we'll see you at Carnoustie.

SOPHIA POPOV: Absolutely. Thank you guys so much. I'm really excited to be back soon.

OLIVIA McMILLAN: Thank you to all of our media colleagues for joining us today.

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