

AIG Women's Open

Press Conference

Tuesday, 17 August 2021

Sophia Popov



OLIVIA McMILLAN: Welcome back to the AIG Women's Open, you are of course our defending champion, Sophia Popov, and it's a pleasure to have you back in Scotland.

How are you feeling this week coming into it?

SOPHIA POPOV: It's kind of cool to see, first of all, from the parking spot to all the life videos going on in the clubhouse and all the pictures just brings back a lot of memories of last year. Obviously a special week in my golf career. It's a little bit emotional coming out here and it's obviously a really cool venue.

OLIVIA McMILLAN: You said it's been a little bit emotional. Can you tell us what those feelings were when you saw your car parking spot entering the championship and YOUR face is everywhere.

SOPHIA POPOV: Literally everywhere. Yeah, I just think it's -- it takes awhile. Like you only realise it once you get on-site and you do see your face everywhere and you realise, oh, my God, it's been a year now and this is the event that changed so much for me. And I think up until last week, it was just a regular season and just keep playing, keep playing.

And then once I kind of set foot out here, it was like, okay, I'm coming here to truly enjoy this week, you know, regardless of what happens. This is my sixth or seventh week on the road now so obviously it's kind of the highlight of the summer for or less for myself.

But again we are all probably a little tired at this point, but I think this is kind of energising me a lot just to be here and just the excitement surrounding the event.

Q. I know it was played at a different time of the year, slightly earlier in the year last year. Can you take us back to the Tuesday exactly your emotions, what your thoughts were about what you could achieve that week?

SOPHIA POPOV: You know, obviously last year was a completely different time, also just in my career where I was at at that moment.

It's actually funny just playing my practise round today, it's a lot of the same emotions I kind of go through that I had last year where it's just I'm kind of excited to be back to play some links golf, and just enjoy the venue because it's so special. It's the site of my first AIG Women's Open in 2011.

So it just brings back a lot of memories from having played here in 2011 and 2012, and so I think I'm just enjoying myself being out here and I think that's very similar to last year. Just last year I didn't know what was going to happen on Sunday, and I don't know this year either.

Q. Having played the course before, does it feel different, the setup this week compared to the first time you were here?

SOPHIA POPOV: Yeah, maybe a little bit. I think that the one thing that stands out for me is we are playing 17 as a par 4 this year. We played it as a par 5 back in 2011. I think that made that final stretch a little bit more manageable. Now we're looking at four pretty strong finishing holes with 15, 16, 17 and 18. So I think that you're just going to have to be fully on. It wasn't very much different at Troon either. I think the final stretch was not that easy but you did have 16 to relieve some of the pressure.

I think that's going to be a little bit different. I think I didn't really realise that quite as much in 2011 how tough that final stretch really is, so that's kind of something that's definitely noticeable this year. But other than that I think it's playing very similar. But it all depends on the wind. We're playing in a different wind than we're going to have starting on Thursday. It all depends on that.

Q. Having backed up the win last year, you have a Solheim Cup on the horizon, how exciting is that?

SOPHIA POPOV: Yeah, it's very exciting. I think a lot of times, I think I might even mentally get ahead of myself a little bit, just really looking forward to that week and the excitement of it always reminds me of all the great things that happened last year and this year.

The fact that the British Open, of course last year I played



well and I won the tournament but I had to back it up with some other finishes to make that Solheim Cup team. I did that pretty well throughout end of last season and beginning of this season. Now I fully grasp the idea that I really belong on that team, and now I think I can really enjoy it and look forward to it.

Q. So much of your life has changed over the past year. What have you worked hard to keep the same?

SOPHIA POPOV: I think that just the enjoyment I guess of playing, and just trying to have a good time and a good mindset. I've caught myself the last six, seven weeks have been a little bit of a roller coaster on the golf course just because it's been very tiring I think with all the travel that we've been going through. I think I tried really hard to just stay in the moment, go hole-by-hole, shot-by-shot and not really think ahead too much because I think it's just very easy, too, when you're playing so much and you're playing so many really big events to kind of get ahead of yourself a little bit and expecting a lot.

I think to this day, I just get to the golf course and I expect myself to play well all the time. Sometimes the body just doesn't want to go the way you do, and mentally you're fine but your body is just kind of tired or the other way around; your body is fine and you're mentally little bit exhausted from the last few weeks.

I think just really enjoying being out there, especially this week, just to take it all in because I don't know what's going to happen this week and going forward.

So just being able to tee it up as at defending champion is something that's very, very special and something I shouldn't take too lightly either.

Q. You had a very special caddie on the bag at Troon. What's the process like trying to replace him?

SOPHIA POPOV: He's irreplaceable. No, I talked to him yesterday and obviously Max is not just someone that's really -- I guess really good on the bag, but he's obviously a great life partner. So I think in every department, he always says the right things at the right times and I think it's very hard in that sense to replace him.

I think I've got a great caddie in Carlos on the bag this week, starting last week. He's very calm. Reminds me a lot of Max, actually, in a lot of ways.

It's tough because I know he's not going to be there to -- I don't think he's caddying any time soon. So I have to figure out a way to play golf without him, which I've done pretty well this year already. It's nice to know that he's only

a phone call away and is supporting me from wherever he is.

Q. Current form, where is your game at now, would you say?

SOPHIA POPOV: I think that it's actually in a better spot than I think it is. I think that I had some -- I think about five, six weeks ago, I think just playing so much kind of made me a little bit tired and I think a couple mistakes were creeping in starting at the U.S. Open, especially after that week in Vegas that was just really long and grueling. I've been trying to keep it very, very simple and, I have over-complicated things a little bit for myself these last few weeks trying to be that perfect ball-striker that I think I can be, but it's just not necessary around here.

You just have to pick good target and miss the ball in the right spots, and I think that's what I'm getting back at. I think these practise rounds have been very good and I think it's a lot more, I think mental effort for me than it is physical effort right now. So just kind of keeping my head in the game and making sure I stay very focussed and especially on some of the tougher shots.

Q. To be back at Carnoustie, it's a special place and there are going to be thousands and thousands of Scottish golf fans there cheering you on. How special is that going to be?

SOPHIA POPOV: Yeah, it's going to be amazing. It's going to be awesome to kind of see the flipside of last year. Last year was very quiet in general just because we didn't have any fans out there. I could see a lot of the people coming off the beach and they really wanted to watch some golf.

And I think it's going to be great thing about this year everyone is looking forward to this so bad. I know Scottish fans are always awesome. I feel like they are very well known to cheer for everyone which is great. They know the game so well, so they know they can decipher golf shots from bad shots and I think that's the greatest part of it, for them to also be really able to enjoy it because they weren't able to enjoy it last year. I'm just as excited for the fans as I am for myself.

Q. About the Solheim Cup, how much has Catriona Matthew talked to you about what's going to happen in a few weeks' time or has she been leaving you alone to focus on this week?

SOPHIA POPOV: It's been nice. She's been texting me after every time I've been playing well and just to see how I'm doing and how I'm feeling. I got to play with her

yesterday, which was very nice. We had a couple quick chats.

But also just about everything in general. I don't think she's just someone to talk to only for Solheim Cup purposes but for a lot of other stuff she's been a great help. I think that now it's a lot closer, we were able to have some conversations about it that obviously I won't let anyone into. But it's also a little bit early for her to talk about too much because she still has some picks to make.

I think that we, I guess, would try to help her as much as we can but it's up to her at the end of the week. For the most part we just chatting about this week and really just looking forward. I think we are just very excited.

Q. Would you tell giving away anything that she's told you, have those conversations made you more nervous, excited, petrified? How would you describe it?

SOPHIA POPOV: I think it calmed me down a lot. Someone with her experience and talking about things -- everything she says sounds really calm. I think that's the quite nice thing. I feel like there's not so much pressure tied to things she says, too. She's pretty laid back, and you take things as they come and at the same time, you know, she's probably deep down excited and very nervous about what's going to happen and how the team is going to shape up like this coming week. But I think that in general, our conversations have been very mellow.

And also I think a lot of the nerves I might have for this week. I've talked to so many players that have really given me great advice on it. So I'm starting to feel calmer and calmer, until I get to that first tee.

Q. So you're to the volunteering to hit the first tee shot on Saturday morning, will you?

SOPHIA POPOV: I'm definitely not hitting off the odds.

Q. Can you talk about the overall buzz that you're hearing in the locker room of players being at Carnoustie? For many in the field, it's their first or first time in a long time?

SOPHIA POPOV: It's been pretty fun, actually. I think that there's been this video that's been like on a 20-second cycle going on in the clubhouse and everyone is just kind of like -- I think everyone is fed up of seeing me to be honest. But it's really funny because everyone just comes by. It's like they call you defending champ and you're like, okay.

Normally I'm way too humble of a person to even identify with something like that, but I know this week I can, so I'm just taking it all in. I'm like, yep, I'm defending. So I'm getting better at just accepting that and being all cool about it. But it's pretty cool. It's awesome and I think just for me and myself, you walk in the locker room and I have one of the first lockers obviously for all the previous winners and that's just something that's very cool and I honestly didn't even know about until I got here.

OLIVIA McMILLAN: Thank you so much for being very generous with your time today. We really appreciate it and wish you the best of luck in your title defense at the AIG Women's Open.

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