

AIG Women's Open

Press Conference

Tuesday, 8 August 2023

Lydia Ko



ED HODGE: Delighted to be joined by Lydia Ko in the media centre.

Lydia, you had a Top-10 at Muirfield last year. What are your hopes to build on that this year.

LYDIA KO: Yeah, I've only actually played well at the Women's Open like twice in my career, once was at Turnberry and the second time was at Muirfield last year. I think last year I was super excited to go to a very historic venue, and the first time that the ladies have played the Women's Open, so there was a lot of hype about it, and for me to have played really well was like an added bonus.

This week's golf course here at Walton Heath is very different. Before I came here people said, oh, this is a heathland-style golf course, and I said, I have no idea what that means, and everybody was like, stay out of the heather, stay out of the bunker. And I was like, so you pretty much want me to hit it like from fairway to green, and obviously that is the best-case scenario.

I think when you know you're going to a golf course that isn't super linksy, you are a little skeptical because we only play over on this side of the world like a couple times and I wasn't really sure what it was going to be like. But you know, the golf course is super nice. It's in really good condition, and it actually feels more linksy than you think, and the heather definitely comes into play.

I'm excited. This feels like one of the longer in distance tournaments that we've played all year and I think it's going to play tough. But we're forecasted to have nice weather these next few days, and I heard when this course gets drier, it actually gets more challenging. So I'm excited to see how the course changes over the next few days, too.

ED HODGE: Great, we'll take some questions.

Q. If I can ask you about sport in general for a second. You've been at the forefront for women's sport for a few years now and we have the Women's World Cup up going on at the moment, and all eyes will be on here this week. How nice is it for you, and how do you assess the development of women's sport and the

coverage of women's sport over the last few years?

LYDIA KO: Yeah, I think a lot of the times, especially if you are not in golf or you don't really know so much about the sport and you ask someone, what athlete comes into your mind and probably some of the names are like Michael Jordan or Tiger Woods and it's a lot of, like, male athletes.

But now, I think you could, you know go, to someone and they could say, oh, yeah, I know Charley Hull or, you know, different soccer players. I saw one, she might be a goalkeeper, I saw one of the players last week doing a press conference and she has seen so much change in her sport, her now becoming a role model and when she first got into soccer, there wasn't somebody she could really idolise.

It shows how much women's sport has grown and for me to be a part of that is really exciting, and for us to see so many little kids that come to watch us play in Ohio or here in England, and then want to be in our shoes the future, it's really exciting.

I hope that more and more people come out and watch us play because we play the best golfers, week-in, week-out. Sometimes I feel like I'm a spectator because there's so much talent here and TV does not do the players justice. I think it's such a big key for people to just come out and watch, and they will never want to leave and they will be booking tickets for 2024 Women's Open. And yeah, I'm just super excited to see where this goes and I think it's only going to grow, and yeah, I've become more of a woman's sport fan myself.

Q. Obviously I know you've been busy and preparing for this as well, but with the World Cup taking place in Australia and New Zealand, have you had a chance to watch any of it?

LYDIA KO: I have not to be honest but I have seen Instagram reels and clips going on. I was super excited when I did hear a few of the games were being played in New Zealand, I wish I was back home watching it live. I've gone to one football, let's say football, because that's how we say it in news, how you say it here, football game, before. It's exciting because the players are just moving and it's very different, to, like, my sport, and even though



we are all, like, playing a sport and we are all athletes.

So that was such a cool experience, so if I was not playing the Women's Open, maybe like that's where I would be. But it's just New Zealand, I feel like we are a small country and it's very far to, like, get to, but it's so cool to have, like, the biggest female football championship to go there and be played there, and I'm sure a lot of the home fans are there supporting all the athletes.

Q. How have you been managing with the heather, if you have not seen it before, have you been practising judging the lie, that sort of thing?

LYDIA KO: I think it's hit or miss. Firstly, you obviously don't want to go in there but if it does go in there, I've had some great lies where I know it's not just extending it out with, like, a wedge, and I've had some lies where the most you're going to get is like a sand wedge or lob-wedge and you're just putting it back into position.

It's kind of like fescue in the sense that sometimes you're going to get lies that are like playable and you could potentially hit a hybrid out of there, but then you get some rougher bits. I think what is unique around here is that there is not only heather just off the fairways but also some guarding some of the green side bunkers as well.

So yeah, it's just I think you have to be smart and at the end of the day, it's a major championship, and you know, obviously someone could shoot a very low score but it's the person that has really smart strategy is really important. Just knowing, okay, like this is my situation. Like, do I get a reward for trying to be aggressive. I'm sure if it works out, it's great. But you just have to, I think, judge it by each scenario.

But I'm trying to keep out of it as much as I can so that I do have to not deal with it as much. I was joking that if every player went the heather, like in the similar spots, then by maybe by Sunday there will be less of it because we would have really hacked out a lot.

But yeah, you know, the heather is a crucial part of this golf course, so I think just being really smart is going to be key.

Q. You've won major championships before. It's been seven years. But I know it's been a while now but knowing that you can do it in a major championship, that must give you confidence to know that you could win this week?

LYDIA KO: Yeah, you know, I think this is -- I think three of our events rotate to different golf courses. Three of our majors are at different golf courses. Sometimes when you

go to a place like, let's say, Evian, I know that I've won there before and I've got memories to draw back from, whether it's good or bad, but the Women's Open, it's like a new experience every time.

And until St Andrews next year, I haven't had a golf course we've come to and go, hey, I know I definitely can't hit it will or you know, what the area is not add because add you think. The 17th drive at St Andrews, when I first went there and somebody said hit over the hotel or the building, I was like, no, the fairway looks like it's way over there.

So in that way I think it's very fair for everyone. You know, nobody really has a huge advantage in knowing the golf course really well. I'm sure some of the girls that are from England or from Sunningdale or this area, they might have played here a couple more times. But because it is new, I think it's like a fresh new book for everyone. So just feels like, you know, it's a very level playing field.

This is a very different style of golf course, I think, than any of the other Women's Open that I've played. So I think it's going to draw maybe like potentially a little different names on the leaderboard to what we may be used to in previous years, and I'm hoping to be in the mix. You know, like I said, I think I've only played at the Women's Open well twice and I hope to put myself more in contention. There's something about this tournament that I think requires maybe a little more creativity and shots that you we might not play at any other events. I think there's just, like, that 15th club of, like, different expertise that just you're required to play. You know, you can even see by how impressive the playoff was between Ash and Ingee last year.

I think it's going to be a fun week, a tricky week, but I'm just trying to stay patient out there and try to play the best golf I can and see.

Q. In New Zealand, they often put women sports people on the front cover, don't they, of the newspapers. Now, if you were to list the top 5 women's sports in New Zealand at the moment, what would they and be how much has it changed over the last few years?

LYDIA KO: In sports in general? I hope golf is one. I would say, like just having played a few of the previous -- well, the last couple Olympics, I think New Zealand is very strong. I mean, Valerie Adams is I think one of the most successful female athletes from New Zealand, and she's a shot putter. I think Lisa Carrington, she does -- she does multiple of the kayak ones. She has multiple medals, and you can never take away rugby. Rugby is, I think for both men and women, the signature sport of New Zealand.

How many is that? Is that four? Five?

I think like a lot of our track and field athletes are like, whether it's pole vaulting, I know Eliza McCartney she won a medal at Rio, as well. So I think a lot of the track and field. And like water sports are really strong.

Growing up, I always saw rugby, cricket and net ball as like the big three sports. Obviously we had Sir Bob Charles, who I think has been the most successful golfer from New Zealand, and like I was like, man, I wish like golf could be a part of that mix.

And with the team at Golf New Zealand, I think golf in general has grown so much with the programmes they have been doing. I see a lot more juniors that want to play golf and are hopefully excited to be on the LPGA or PGA TOUR or European Tour, and I think that's a really big change, and, like, growth we've had in New Zealand since even when I first started playing.

Q. I know you had the win in Saudi Arabia this year and a couple of top threes, and I think you've been in the top five in the ranking throughout the whole year, but how do you assess your own form coming into this week?

LYDIA KO: Not great. To be honest, I wish I was playing a lot better golf and to have been more in contention at majors, because that's when you're trying to peak throughout the season. Obviously even if you don't -- if you play okay but like peak at the major, that's where I think you realise, okay, my game is still at a good place.

If I said, you know, I'm happy with how I've been playing, you know, I still feel like I've been doing okay, I think that would be a lie. Honest answer is, I do wish I had put myself more in contention and was a little bit more consistent. In ways, I think internally, even though I was trying not to, I think I was comparing myself a lot to the year I had last year. I didn't think I could ever go back to No. 1 after being 50-something in the world and playing alongside Jin Young or Nelly or Celine who has won, you know, these past two weeks.

I think like last year, I was like, no, I'm probably never going to go back in that position. I just want to, like, be able to win and be in contention again. And for me to have won three times, winning my last tournament of the season, and getting married, there were just like so many great things. I don't think I could have even written that on my diary and go, "Dear Diary, I'm going to win three times this year and going to get married to like the love of my life." That's probably a story I wouldn't have even been able to imagine but that happened.

I think coming into this year, I started with a bang, winning my first tournament of my season and you know, I think I put a lot of expectations, and actually missing the cut at Chevron was a bit of a wake-up call for me. I think, like, I had to play one hole on Saturday. You never want to come play one hole on Saturday and not play the next two rounds.

But like, I did some practise, and, like, talked with my team, and it was just a moment for me to reassess, like, where I'm at. I think I, like, kind of took a step back and said what are the things that I can do that I can control and do better at. You know, what place I finish and all my results, to be honest, those things are totally out of my control. Sometimes I'm going to have okay weeks, okay days, and still be top 10 and sometimes I think I feel like I should have won but somebody plays better than me and they win.

So it's just very different and so I am just trying to do a better job of the things I can control, and I feel like we are moving in the right direction. It's kind of frustrating, the last couple months seeing -- you see improvement but the results might not necessarily show and sometimes I'm having a hard time to bring that all together. But it's not like I've not been in this position before.

So I'm just trying to be patient, and I know it is better than maybe a couple months ago, so you know, I can only look forward, and still have a couple of events to go this year. I'm very lucky to have a very supportive team and family that says, hey, you know, what these things were good this week, I see improvement. Sometimes I think when you see your game and try and replay, it you are your harshest critic, but to have my team be there and support me, I think it makes such a big difference for me to just keep moving forward and keep my head high and just move on to the next tournament or the next round.

Q. Obviously there's been a lot of attention on the men's game this year and the state of flux that has been generated by the arrival of LIV and all of that sort of thing. I just wonder how much impact that has had in the women's game in the women's locker room. Do you guys talk about it and whether or not the women's game can capitalise on what's been happening on the other side?

LYDIA KO: I feel like I'm pretty antisocial, so I'm not -- I don't really go out and, like, talk too much, you know, sit down and have a chat.

I feel like when the players are getting together and catching up, last thing we are talking about is, like, the

men's golf, LIV and all that.

You know, people -- a lot of people have asked me, like, what I think of it, but to be honest, it has had no real impact to us because it is not something that has happened -- it's not a reality that we have to face right now because that is not the case.

Obviously the Ladies European Tour have the Aramco Series and a few events, and those events are some of their pinnacle events on the LET which gives a lot of great opportunities for the players.

But to be honest, it's, like, the thing with LIV, it really doesn't affect us right now, and I don't know if there's been, like, any conversations or, like, a lot of conversations. I don't know.

So I'm going to say, I feel like because things are happening, we like think, oh, what if, but right now, we don't even have anything to think about what if. So I haven't really heard much. All we can do is if there is a day that, you know, those kind of things happen, then I'm sure the Tour and the people, that we have, we have great leadership, they are going to do the best for the players and the members. I believe that. So you know, I believe in the LPGA.

I'm excited to see where women's golf goes. We've had purse increases in a lot of our major championships, and even other tournaments outside of that. So it's a growth, and we've seen a bunch of increase in little girls coming out and just spectator. Those are little things that I think we should be focusing on rather than things that aren't really here right now.

ED HODGE: I think we are good. Lydia, thanks for your time and have a great week.

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