

AIG Women's Open

Press Conference

Wednesday, 21 August 2024

Lydia Ko



STUART MOFFATT: Delighted to welcome two-time major winner and the Olympic Champion, Lydia Ko, to the interview room.

First of all, Lydia, how does it feel to be back playing in a major championship at St Andrews after your first appearance in 2013 here?

LYDIA KO: Yeah, pretty unbelievable in the sense that it's been that long since I came here. I think St Andrews was the second British Open I played at the time but yeah, excited to come back to the golf course that I've played before. I must say, I don't have, like, a lot of memory. I think I was just trying to survive the wind and the conditions at the time.

But yeah, it's great to be here and obviously this is the Home of Golf, so you know, it's kind of like a bucket list place for a lot of people. Yeah, I'm excited for this week to get going.

STUART MOFFATT: Obviously after your win in Paris and riding a high at the moment, are you looking forward to contending this week and putting yourself in a place to challenge for the championship?

LYDIA KO: Yeah, I was saying that I have not played particularly well in links golf in my 11 or so appearances that I've played. But there's always a time for a change and it would be great to have one of my best finishes here. I've gotten to love links golf more over the years.

I think before, I was so frustrated that was windy and rainy and all of the things combined and the conditions so play a big factor in how our rounds are played but I think I've slowly gotten to love it more and I love how that you have to be so creative when you play links golf. Numbers sometimes are very irrelevant. Yeah, it's fun. I know Dundonald is a very different type of golf course to here but to kind of get in the rhythm of playing links golf, I really enjoy that, and I think that's always a good preparation coming into The Open for us.

Q. Do you remember when you had this shift in mentality to learn to embrace the conditions?

LYDIA KO: I think when we played at Muirfield a couple years ago, that was one of the most fun I had had on the links. I don't think we played in like heavy rain that week. It was just very windy. But I was like, you know what, not hitting a stock 7-iron 175 yards is okay. And sometimes it might only go like a hundred yards. It's funny in ways, and I think it becomes a little bit more light out there.

I think last week I hit a really good drive on the fairway on my first hole of the day and I had 195 to the pin and I knew that my 3-wood would not reach the green. You just stand there and you can't do anything about it and you just take the joy out of all that.

I think Muirfield was a time after I stepped off after the Women's Open, I was like, I really enjoyed that. After that, I think every time I've played, it's just been more and more fun, whereas before, I thought, like why are we out here? Of all the sports, why did you choose an outdoor sport where you have to deal with everything?

But this is the beauty of it, and I prefer playing a links golf course when we are at the Women's Open, and obviously we are going to get a true test of that this week.

Q. Where is the Gold Medal now and have you take ten out and just stared at it and enjoyed it?

LYDIA KO: It's in my hotel room inside my backpack. We didn't really get like a case for it. So we wrapped it up in a towel and then just put it in my backpack.

My sister and I were there in Paris, and we had a few more family members come over this past week. So my mom took a picture of it, and my brother-in-law and my husband is here. We are all just enjoying it. I think after Sunday this week, it will be more of a relief in a way where I can take a step back and kind of take everything in, where these last couple weeks, I'm also trying to best the I can at these events and trying to focus on what's right in front of me.

I'm excited to get the tournament started but also excited for it to end after Sunday and really embrace what an amazing three weeks it has been for me.

Q. What do you remember specifically about 2013? I



would imagine you probably played a few holes on Saturday with the wind but is there anything that still stands out on what you think of that week with the weather?

LYDIA KO: I'm pretty sure I played in calm conditions on that Thursday and I was like, oh, this is fine. This golf course isn't that difficult. I don't know if it's because I said that; the weather gods said, "You're going to get a beating the next day."

I played in super windy conditions on Friday and I was very humbled to say the least. You know, it felt like a completely different golf course. I played here even on Monday and the whole back nine, apart from 10, 11, I didn't hit a club under 3-hybrid coming in, and also apart from 18.

So it can play really long, and I think the direction wind direction, whether it's just across to being across and into, makes such a big difference around this golf course, and especially with my ball shape.

So yeah, I don't remember like one specific thing but I knew that that was when I was quickly humbled there and I was like, you know, what don't say anything about a golf course and don't ever say anything is too easy because just never know. We could get sun and then five minutes later, it could be raining sideways.

Q. I'm sure you weren't surprised shortly after the Olympics to get asked about when are you going to retire, when are you going to hang it up. When you look at some players from the past, like a Suzann who have kind of retired on the spot, had like a walk-off, kind of going away, is that the type of person you are, or are you more the type of person who would just finish out a season and then call it quits?

LYDIA KO: Yeah, I think you just have to listen to yourself. The way Suzann did it after holing that putt at Solheim, I mean, she couldn't have finished her career on my anymore of a high. She's pretty much accomplished everything that she could have or maybe would have wanted.

So yeah, it's very, I think, circumstantial and depends on the type of player you are. Like I think that was so cool what she did, the mic drop, but it's much harder to do when you're playing the British Open in a couple weeks in my position.

Still I've always said that while I'm competitively playing, I want to play at the highest level I possibly can and continuously work hard with my team to become a better, more consistent player. So that's the goal right now.

You know, it's kind of been, go, go, go since the Olympics, so I haven't really had a lot of time to think about everything. I don't want to rush into any decisions. You know, this is definitely not my last press conference or anything like that.

It's exciting what's ahead. In ways it can be scary because I've played golf since I was five and this is -- this is my life whether I like it or not and golf has given me so much for me to be thankful for on and off the golf course. I think it's not an easy decision but I know I have a great support team and family that's so supportive. You know, great misrepresentation tors that are going to help me and give me advice, and I feel very fortunate to be in that kind of position.

But all in all, I'm just excited that you guys aren't going to ask me what about that one, what about getting into the Hall of Fame. I'm glad that's kind of over now.

Q. When you spoke to us last week at Dundonald, you said that you had spoke to your team after the Olympics, and they asked you about a goal and you said maybe one more major. Would this be the dream one, given this event at St Andrews, and obviously you know Ryan Fox has won here on the Dunhill Links. Can you be inspired by that?

LYDIA KO: Yeah, maybe I'll tell -- call Foxy, and go, 1-upped you, kind of, because it's the Women's Open.

Yeah, I've always wanted to play well at a Women's Open. I do think it requires something a little different to maybe some of our other major championships. You know, in Paris, what happened there was almost too good to be true. I still think I feel so fortunate, and people say, oh, it's because you've work hard, but I don't know a single player out there that's not working hard. They are still practicing when it's raining, or if it's like 110 degrees outside. Everybody works hard and I just feel very fortunate that I've been given these opportunities and having these unbelievable highlights if my career.

But you know, if that story tale, fairy tale happens again here, I mean, I've got to find a way to give back because I just feel like I've been receiving so much, and even a lot of overwhelming support after everything that's kind of happened.

Q. Players say they love playing St Andrews and the Old Course, but also being in the town. Is that something you've felt in your visits over the years?

LYDIA KO: When I came here in 2013, I remember I went and visited like the castle and probably all those touristy

things. I have family with me this week. So we have been checking off all the restaurants with the high reviews around here. Got to have fish and chips here, so I've had that, as well.

But a lot of things off the golf course revolve around food for me, which is one of the things that gets me most excited about. I'm excited when we have good food in player dining or there's like a lot of good options, and there's quite a few around here.

So yeah, enjoying the little perks of it. Like I don't know when St Andrews is hosting the Women's Open again but it could potentially be the last time I'm in this town; that I want to enjoy the little things.

Q. Just adding to that, you also said earlier that it's a bucket list venue. Is that something that you're able to appreciate while you're out there playing or is it just a focus on performance?

LYDIA KO: You know, I've never always been like a big golf nerd. So it's never been, okay, I want to go to these top hundred courses, but I know that for some people that are really passionate and love these kind of golf courses, this is a treat. It's held multiple championships but outside of that, there's just so much history here.

It's hard to kind of take everything in when you're playing just because you're focused on the shot in front of you and trying to execute that shot properly. But it's kind of when the week is over or when you're walking over the Swilcan Bridge and looking at all the architecture around here that you're like, wow, I'm at a very special place. And this year is more special because I have my family with me and my team with me to kind of enjoy this moment.

I think these photos that I take or these moments that I kind of capture in my mind are going to be the things that I look back when I'm done with golf and go, wow, how fortunate was I to play two Women's British Open at St Andrews and go to some of the best golf courses in the U.K.

Q. So you had the team photos on the bridge. That must have been a nice moment for you?

LYDIA KO: It's a must. I think I'm pretty sure when I was like 16 or 17 playing here, I was like, what are all these people, taking their photos, what are they going to do with it. Like now, as I've gotten a little older and I think I'm able to appreciate, it's these kind of things that make it. Like for me, like Paris, winning the Gold Medal was obviously one of the biggest highlights of my career.

Outside of that, the experience of being able to represent

your country; the fans that were surrounding the tee box on No. 1. Like the whole build up, those are the things that I kind of take away from. And I know that when you're not in that position anymore, I'm probably going to miss that.

Yeah, I'm just trying to take in all this, even though it may seem cheesy, I know that I'm going to feel like, you know what, it's a good thing that I did that then.

Q. So there's a lot made of the fact that it's been ten years now since Rory won a major. I'm sure you don't need me to tell you it's been eight, eight and a half years for you --

LYDIA KO: Those are only stats --

Q. Yes, sorry, I like my stats. Can you articulate how much of a personal frustration that is for you, and considering all of the incredible things you've done in that time, are you as surprised as we are that there's no more majors there?

LYDIA KO: Honestly winning the first one in Evian was a bit of a surprise. I had a little stat there following me, too. You know, it was the last opportunity where I could beat Morgan's amazing record of being the youngest major winner, and I was like -- well, it's the last one. I'm probably not going to do it here, and I had a great final round and ended up winning and won the ANA Inspiration, now the Chevron Championship, the following year.

Those were -- it was a great period of time. All of us tour players, our goal is to try and peak at the majors but it's easier said than done. It's not just about -- you know, you could do everything correct, and it just could be that time of the month or you could -- you know, you could just be tired or get the wrong side of the draw. There's just so many variables that you can't control as well. So I think it's a lot harder and I know that every time Rory tees it up, like everyone asks him, and obviously he played amazing at the U.S. Open but people just talk -- always just talk about his finish. I mean, the guy played awesome, you know.

It's just I think sometimes we get carried away about who won, like how many years it's been. Like it's a drought, this, that. But I think it's difficult. You know, all of us as player, we're trying to work to be at the highest level at that time. But you know, sometimes it just doesn't go that way. But no matter what, I'm so proud to be a Major Champion. I know that not all golfer has the opportunity to even say that. But whilst I am playing, I do want to keep putting myself in contention, and I think if you do that, I'm going to become more comfortable being in that kind of position, and I think sometimes that's all -- all of those things build up and if it's going to happen, it's probably going to

happen.

Q. Lydia, you just said you started playing at about five, five years of age, and you achieved just about everything there is to achieve: Youngest world No. 1, youngest major; Olympic Medalist. Do you think it's now more comfortable for you to play golf with less pressure of achieving more because you've done it all?

LYDIA KO: I think we're all greedy in the sense that Annika has won 70-something times and she may feel like, oh, she could have won 80 times. I'm like, wow, she's one of the greatest of all time.

But I think while you're still doing this, you still feel like you can get better. And I think it doesn't matter if you're the No. 1 player ranked player in the world like Nelly or the last player in the field this week, we are all continuously working to become a better, more consistent player. Just with golf, do you have your little ups-and-downs, little roller coaster rides, but you're trying to minimise those, I guess, the discrepancies.

But in ways, I guess it is easier, but we are all -- I think we are all competitive, and that's why I think we are playing at this level of sport. You know, we want to do better no matter like how much or how little you've achieved.

Q. You answered one of the questions earlier and it triggered a question for you now is, do you have a love/hate relationship with golf?

LYDIA KO: Oh, yeah. Some days, it's hate, hate, hate, and some days, I could kiss my putter. You know, it's just -- I think that's just the way it works. I have walked off the golf course with tears in my eyes from joy and from frustration, and I think that just shows how deeply invested we are and how, like I said, like golf is my life. As much as I want to separate it, I can't.

You know, I think when I was younger, I used to always think about the negative things of why can't I go to school camp with the other kids; why do I have to go like practise after school. But you know, all those moments, they have kind of led me to the journey and the place I am right now, and you know, I think like I've had my fair share of like emotional up-and-downs, but that's just part of it, and I don't think that's because I'm just playing golf. I think that's with anything, you know, in life. You're going to sometimes have the better days and sometimes not have a great day. But that's just life, and I think golf is a very -- golf puts everything kind of into perspective, and I think it gives you life lessons outside of just becoming a better golfer.

Q. Obviously speaking about your relationship with golf there, some people who are surprised that you would even contemplate when you're going to retire over the next few years, but I guess does that come back to, looking at Lexi Thompson retiring at 29, do we underestimate the psychological toll of competing for 10, 15 years at the very top?

LYDIA KO: Yeah, I think there's just a lot of factors that go into making -- go into, I guess, the equation of how a player decides to retire. You know, I know some players don't really ever fully retire. They play an occasional one or two, or like So Yeon (Ryu) retiring at the Chevron championship this year; Lexi announcing her retirement.

I think with golf, it's a little bit more flexible than other sports, where if you hit a certain age, you're potentially too old. With golf, as long as we keep putting ourselves in good shape and good health, we have the opportunity to be able to keep playing this sport, which is an amazing thing about golf. But yeah, there are, you know, the physical tolls but also the psychological parts.

Lexi has done so much for the game of golf and for our tour. She is at every single Pro-Am party. So it's not just what she does on the golf course, inspiring these junior girls and the people out here, but she does so much off the golf course, as well. I'm sure that even when she does retire, it's not like she's going to go MIA and not be seen again. I'm sure she's still going to be involved in golf in some shape or form.

But I think there are just different factors about it. As much as we are very grateful to be able to do what we love and compete at a high level, I think there is the other side of things that you have to consider, and you know, as someone that's maybe closer to that point in my career than when I was a rookie, you've come to realise all of these things, and you respect the player for the decision that she came up with. It's their journey, so all we can do is just slap and say thank you. I'm sure the whole golfing industry is very thankful to have such an inspirational role model like Lexi.

STUART MOFFATT: We'll bring things to a close there. Lydia, thank you for your time, and best of luck this week.

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