

Marathon Classic presented by Dana

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Toledo, Ohio, USA

Sophia Popov

Press Conference



MEGAN MCGUIRE: Welcome inside the media center here at the Marathon Classic. I'm happy to be joined by Sophia Popov.

First, Sophia, I want to start with a year ago at this venue you qualified for the AIG Women's Open. When you were coming on site this week, did you think and reflect back on what this event has meant to your career?

SOPHIA POPOV: Definitely. It was kind of funny, because when I got to my host family I've been staying with for the last five years it was a little bit déjà vu from last year. Obviously the week before this I caddie for Anne and we had a week where it was just for fun.

I was having a good time can and then it was up to me to start playing golf again myself here at the Marathon. When I played the practice rounds I went through some of the holes and how I had played them and I remembered just having my push cart. I'm like, My God, things have changed a lot in a year.

You reminisce on those days, and honestly I really enjoyed that week, just me, my push cart, and myself. I just -- relying on myself to do everything was just kind of nice, so it's a cool memory to come back to.

MEGAN MCGUIRE: Has been one heck of a year for you here. As you've made your way around Highland Meadows this week, has the community come up to you or sought you out to say, Hey, during last year?

SOPHIA POPOV: Yeah, for sure. It's funny, because I think a lot of the volunteers that work here, they know my host family, too. I got to know a lot of the people throughout the years that I've played here, and a lot of people said to me -- but honestly, mostly players came to me and said, You remember one year ago you were here, I remember you pulling your pull cart trolley thing and just like -- just out of the blue just playing really well.

To me not out of blue, but to them and coming in Top 10 and starting everything that happened for the rest of the

year. And it's just kind of funny. I look back and I go -- It's just kind of one of those things that you don't see coming, and so you kind of don't plan with anything like that happening.

Yeah, it's pretty cool to be back.

MEGAN MCGUIRE: We were just talking, but you returned to Inverness yesterday as part of a pro-am. You actually played it. I know last year you were caddying for Anne van Dam. As we get ready for the Solheim Cup, what did you think of Inverness yesterday?

SOPHIA POPOV: The course is in absolutely mint shape. It was funny, I was standing on the first tee yesterday and I just remember I was carrying the bag, and the starter came up to me and said, It's a different job this year, isn't it? I'm like, yeah, it's kind of the one I like a little more.

But we played. It's in really, really good condition. They're starting to put up the stands. You can tell where the grandstands are going to be and all the tents. It's going to be a big event, you can tell, and it's in incredible shape.

I played with one of the members and he said they're doing everything in their power to have it be in the absolute best shape for us as they can possible.

It's going to be very exciting.

MEGAN MCGUIRE: Questions.

Q. On the weekend last year here and the final round, did you know what you needed to do to qualify for the Open? Was that on the your mind at all?

SOPHIA POPOV: Honestly, not at all. I didn't even know I qualified for the Open when I got done on 18 on the last day. I kind of forgot the fact that it was an Open qualifier.

So really Anne was the one who told me. She said, You do realize you just qualified for the Open. I'm thinking in my head, I'm going, hold on, what's my schedule? Is that even a possibility for me?

And that's -- I had no idea, which benefited me in the end, and it was probably better I didn't know where I was at.



Q. What has clicked for you this past year?

SOPHIA POPOV: You know, I think mainly just my mental game. I think my attitude out on the golf course. It's just been more enjoyable for me to play. I'm kind of in a position that I saw myself in years ago but I was just never able to quite reach.

Now I feel a lot more comfortable when I'm out there. I don't expect as much from myself, which is weird. You feel like your expectations might be higher, but to me I'm just trying to keep them low and just go out and have a good time.

I think that confidence that I'm playing with is allowing me to score better even when my game is not as its best.

Q. You guys have a pretty packed summer. Olympics coming up. When did that become a goal for you or enter your mind?

SOPHIA POPOV: Yeah, well, actually the Olympics has been a dream of mine ever since they made golf an Olympic sport. I've been -- you know, with my mom not being able to travel in 1980 to Moscow, it's just been something that was very -- like has always been a sporting event that's been so important to her as well as us kids.

When they officially announced it back, I'm not sure when, but 2016 was going to be the first year, honestly, I was doing everything I could to try to make that team, but I was just not playing well enough at that time.

I think right after the British last year I knew they had pushed the Olympics back a year and I figured with my world ranking now I'm probably going to take the top German spot, which was one the first things that popped in my mind right then and there. I think I can actually make this happen for Tokyo next year.

It's been a big dream of my National Team coach, too. He's been my coach since 2006. He said, We're going to Tokyo, and I was like, Hate to crush your dreams.

But then in the end it all worked out, and it's been pretty special to know I'm on that team.

Q. You had no hesitation whether you would go or not?

SOPHIA POPOV: For me, absolutely no hesitation. For me it's a total honor to represent Germany and to be there. You know, be able to experience something that a lot of athletes, it's the highlight of their career and they only get to do that every four years. I think that's something you

shouldn't take lightly in my eyes, and that's why I'm very, very excited.

Q. And one more. When you were at Inverness were you visualizing what things might look like and how you might play the course in September?

SOPHIA POPOV: Definitely. I think my caddie and I, we both took a good look at the course strategically, how we think they could set it up. We don't know how they're going to set it up exactly. Maybe some of the tee boxes we played yesterday were a bit shorter, a bit longer, so it's hard to tell.

But I think in general it gave us a very good idea of how we think we want to approach the course come September. Good to see -- the member that I played with and a few of the staff that work there, they said the course shouldn't be that much different in September. Should maybe be a little bit faster, a little bit drier maybe by then, but all in all very similar.

So good to see how much bounce we're getting out there and how to strategically make the most out of it.

Q. I wanted to ask about your host family, how long you stayed with them in Toledo, who they are, what you do with them, any kind of fun details?

SOPHIA POPOV: The Andersons. Tom and Joanne have been my host family -- I think the first time might have been in 2015 or '16. I think this is my fifth year. Sometimes I get the years jumbled up. But last year we stayed with them for multiple weeks, so I think it feels like my fifth or six week with them.

They've become good friends of mine, my family's. They come out to Arizona every winter. We get to see them there, too. Just the sweetest, and they love -- they come out to watch me play sometimes, and other than that, they just kind of let me do my thing.

Yeah, I just enjoy staying with them every year and knowing that I have a home away from home.

Q. And does that make Toledo feel, I don't know, more personal to you?

SOPHIA POPOV: I think so. I've been lucky over the years to have great host families at different cities and events. You know, I like to -- those are the relationships that I like to take care of, and I talk to all my host families and they all kind of treat me as their daughter.

So I'm lucky to have probably 14 sets of parents all over



the nation. So kind of every event is starting to feel like a home event for me, which is awesome. Definitely makes me more comfortable. It's kind of nice to be able to go back to a place after you're done playing and get away from the golf course and the game and just not have to talk about it, have a bed that almost feels like your own.

I think that's just very, very comforting in many ways.

Q. I know that winning a major filled your thoughts for a long time. Now I know there are so many big things coming up, what are you visualizing these days for the future?

SOPHIA POPOV: You know, I think sometimes it's just very easy to get ahead of myself. I had a couple I would say very busy weeks, months, the last two or three months, and I caught myself kind of getting into a position where maybe I was just a little bit -- it got a little bit too much. I played a lot. I was not able to kind of calm down on the golf course because I felt like my game is in a lot better shape than what I have been producing, results as of lately.

So I think that for me it's just kind of taking it week by week, tournament by tournament. I know there are big events coming up, but to me, honestly, this is the event I want to focus on right now. I like the course. I like being here. So it's step by step. I think there is no point in looking ahead to what's to come because I know it's going to be exhausting and stressful come six, seven weeks from now.

I just want to take it easy and definitely look forward to this week and next week for sure, too.

Q. This tournament marks the return to play for the pandemic in 2020. With it almost being a year, could you reflect on what it's been like playing in the LPGA's COVID era?

SOPHIA POPOV: Yeah, this was the first event back for me last year. I played a Symetra event before, but first LPGA event. It's been wild, to be honest. Last year I think it's just been amazing the way that this tour has been able to handle everything and the protocols that we went through and all players doing what they have to do in order for us to have the events. All the testing, I don't know how many tests we've done by now.

I just think we're lucky enough to have been able to continue playing last year with everything that was going on, so I think we're all just very grateful for that opportunity. And then this year, to be honest, it's felt a lot more normal again with spectators starting at the U.S. Open. That was

fun to have played in front of crowds.

Meijer we had very big crowds, KPMG, too. So it's been very nice, and I'm glad we found a way to safely have our tournaments run with spectators now, too. So it's been a tough year I think on the tour, but I think we're recovering well. I'm just glad and thankful to all our staff and everyone who has played a role in making possible.

Q. What's been the wildest part?

SOPHIA POPOV: The wildest part? Probably all the testing, to be honest, and booking your travels. Like I -- still with these European travels coming up and Olympics it's been very stressful. Last week was supposed to be an off week and I think I spent half the time trying to figure out how to travel to France in two weeks.

I think that's still the wildest part, all the testing and all this stuff that's going on around it.

But honestly, I'm a very social person and I kind of missed hanging out with all my friends and going out to dinner. I think that's one thing that's starting to become more normal again now, so I think that's been the nicest change as of the last few weeks for me personally.

Q. How difficult was it handling the isolation as part of the tour's COVID protocols?

SOPHIA POPOV: Very hard. I mean, I don't like to be by myself. Sometimes, but mostly not. So I think that's the hardest part, especially when we're overseas and we're literally in Singapore and Thailand we were confined to our hotel rooms all by ourselves all day unless we were on the golf course. We couldn't have dinner with anyone. We couldn't leave the hotel.

So it was -- I think that was very tough, especially for someone like me who likes to get together with friends to have dinner and do other things. Made you think about the golf way too much.

That's been the hardest part of it, relying on yourself and to entertain yourself and try to find ways to entertain yourself for six, seven hours before you go to bed. That's been the toughest part. I'm glad that's almost over.

Q. What ways did you entertain yourself?

SOPHIA POPOV: I read books, a lot of books. Netflix has been a good friend of mine. I don't know. A lot of stuff. I love watching documentaries. Just I love to inform myself on things that I'm interested in, so I did a lot of that.

A little bit of writing, a little bit of everything. So, you know, what you do.

Q. What was your favorite show?

SOPHIA POPOV: Favorite show? Probably Outlander. I love Outlander. I read one of the books, one of the parts of the book, and the show was really good. It was a lot better. Normally I'm for the book, but in this case I was for the show.

Q. I just want to ask about your pull cart. Where is it these days and when is the last time you used it?

SOPHIA POPOV: It's at home. It's missing me dearly. I miss it dearly. No, it's just sitting at home and waiting for me to return home. I use it when I play at home because I don't want to carry my bag. It's just sitting there and wondering why I don't need it anymore.

MEGAN MCGUIRE: All right thanks, Sophia.

SOPHIA POPOV: Yeah, you're welcome.

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