

# NW Arkansas Championship

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Rogers, Arkansas, USA

Pinnacle Country Club

## Gaby Lopez

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: All right, hello and welcome to the 2023 Walmart NW Arkansas Championship. I am here with a local favorite, Gaby Lopez.

Welcome to the media center. Can you just walk us through the many connections you have to this place and why it's so important to be here this week?

GABY LOPEZ: Yeah, to me this week is one of my favorite weeks on tour, if not probably my best. I really, really like it. It's just coming to the community, back to Shauna, to Mike, which are my college coaches, yeah, being able to see the girls on the team, talk to them and spend some time with them, has been great.

I've been staying with different families here in the community, in Pinnacle, and it's been great. Everyone is so welcoming and I just love it here. Every single LPGA player enjoys their time here. They come back to this place, and really looking forward for this week.

**Q. I saw you out there volunteering yesterday with the local community. Walk us through why that's so important to you, especially being here.**

GABY LOPEZ: Yeah, being able to give back to the Northwest Arkansas community is just something that I take as a responsibility and I take as something that I'm very proud of, just being able to connect with the kids and being able to just give back to this amazing place that gave me so much for four years.

It's been just a dream come true to be a Razorback, being able to play at home. All the love, all the support that we receive from the fans. Even the girl -- I was playing the pro-am and there was this little girl with her mom. They were following me since hole 1 to hole 18, and it was a six-hour round. So you can imagine how much love there is for this sport, for the Razorbacks community, and it's just great to be back.

**Q. This is your 11th time playing the event. First three times you were an amateur. Take me back to those**

**years playing as an amateur versus now. You're a professional now. What does that mean that this is your 11th time playing this one event?**

GABY LOPEZ: Yeah, I feel like a veteran, which I am. It looks like a long time ago since I played for the first time, but it was actually just the hook to be able to come play for the Razorbacks for me.

The LPGA event providing a sponsor exemption for the best player on the team was just a magnificent opportunity, because you're always testing yourself against the best college players in the world, but then you're testing your game against the best players in the world, and being able to kind of reflect on those weeks and how much that made me enjoy and embrace and practice and love the process of being an LPGA player, it has for sure changed my life.

Yeah, being able to look back to that little girl playing, I was nervous as hell. It was just really, really crazy how at that time you have so many emotions, so many nerves, so many things going through your mind because you really want to be in this stage.

Once you kind of take this week on, week off, it feels more natural, more normal. I tell the girls all the time the more you experience it the more comfortable you get with it. It's just matter of time that you get to even enjoy the nerves out there.

**Q. Speaking of comfortability, how comfortable do you feel about this golf course? What have you learned from playing the course?**

GABY LOPEZ: Yeah, I've learned that sometimes when you're feeling comfortable on a golf course, you can take a little bit more aggressive lines off the tee. They're going to provide you probably a closer shot, opportunity for birdie. Like hole No. 4, hole No. 5, I mean, you see those chances that you can probably squeeze in your driver and there is no trouble.

And, yeah, it's playing a little soft because I guess you guys got a lot of rain for the last couple weeks. Honestly, the maintenance crew and all the gardeners have done just an amazing job.

**Q. You make us feel old covering you for 11 years.**



**Welcome back. Good to see you.**

GABY LOPEZ: Thank you.

**Q. You talk about how many times you played here, how familiar you are with the course. What's looming out there is a win. What's that going to take from your game to get that win here?**

GABY LOPEZ: Yeah, to be honest, I think it brings more my mental game, that probably my ball hitting or my putting, it's been more like, okay, I'm going to really try to play this week as a normal week and not put any pressure on myself and just really enjoying it. I feel that sometimes the more aggressive to my targets the better I play, so not holding back any single time but really going through my routine exactly how I want it. I want to breathe, I want to walk slowly into the shot.

Yeah, I think it's just a matter of not putting too much pressure, because from past years I've been trying so hard and I've been wanting it so hard that I'm just going to do my job, and whatever that ends up, I'm going to accept that.

**Q. Miriam is the sponsor exemption this year for Arkansas. I don't know if you saw on 18 driving down, they have that big billboard with all six of your former Razorbacks who are playing. When you drive by something like that, does it put it into perspective what it means to be a Razorback and play in this tournament?**

GABY LOPEZ: Yeah, 100%. It's probably the biggest honor to be able to have the experience that I had in the UofA. I always tell all the kids and the girls on the team, I was talking to them yesterday for an hour or so and I was telling them, hey, use your college experience as if it would be your Epson Tour experience.

Feel like a professional player while you're an amateur, because that transition is going to come much easier. You're going to feel more comfortable under LPGA or pressure situations. So you really have to start doing and acting and preparing and committing and practicing like a professional player and not losing your time.

I told them, if you're losing your time out here in these facilities you shouldn't be on this team. We want all professionals. That's exactly what this place made me believe, that I was feeling that I was playing the Epson Tour while I was in college.

**Q. You've had a great year. What are a couple keys to that this year?**

GABY LOPEZ: Yeah, I've been up and down. At the beginning of the season I didn't have the best start. That puts a little more pressure on yourself when you're not playing the best at the beginning.

But being able to really -- I'm out there and setting up to the ball and thinking, I don't care where this goes. I'm going to pick my spot and I am going to hit it. If it goes in, fine. If it doesn't go in, fine.

I'm more committed and more aggressive to my targets rather than trying to make the putt or trying to hit the line I want. I'm just going to set up, hit it with all the guts that I have, and let it rip.

**Q. I don't know how much of the Solheim Cup you got to watch. Stacy did a great job as an underdog. There has been some discussion about tie. If you could break a tie how would you do it in the Solheim Cup?**

GABY LOPEZ: I was just thinking that, and I was telling my caddie that I didn't like the tie retaining. I'm really up to, okay, let's see who wins this year.

How I would probably do it, I would probably pick two of the best of each team and play a four-ball, and if that is a tie, then you play foursome. If that's a tie, then you go on a different team, different pair of girls.

I do like to determine who is going to win. I really hope that we finally sometime get our Presidents Cup because I'm dying to play for a team event.

**Q. Kind of talk to me about big picture. The season is kind of wrapping down behind you, Race to the CME Globe, some points are kind of available here. Talk to me about big picture. This is a very big event for a lot of people out here.**

GABY LOPEZ: Yeah, this is a huge event. This is a great opportunity to be able to climb up that leaderboard. I mean, it's crazy. Sometimes I would rather in my perspective have -- if it's a probably more dense field with all the top players, give more points.

But, yeah, I'm really happy that we get this chance, and CME has done an amazing job as a company to just build up this amazing tournament and the purse and everything. It's just a big bonus to be able to play again, and I'm really hoping we get to do that for the eighth time.

**Q. Yeah, for sure. I think your 40th, up three spots. I think there is a \$2 million check to the winner of that. This is a nice little prize.**



GABY LOPEZ: Yeah, for sure. That's the biggest prize in women's history, so at the end of the day you really have to see -- you don't really care for what you're, playing. You just care for your game. That's how you probably have to see it. If you end up winning the Northwest Arkansas Championship or the CME, both would be very sweet.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you so much, Gaby.

GABY LOPEZ: Thank you.

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**Q. We talked a little about what it would take to win this. Tell me a little about what it would mean to you personally to win this? I think the hog call on the final green would be pretty sweet. Have you envisioned that? That would be a pretty sweet celebration.**

GABY LOPEZ: Yeah, I've been visualizing for many, many years. It would be probably the cherry on top of the cake. You know, it's such a special place for me. I was able to kind of help and get more Mexican girls on the team and open this community to the Latin American society, and I'm really happy that more and more and more and more girls are coming and boys.

There is a Mexican girl coming up next year. We have had plenty of Latin American girls, so of it's just crazy how much this place -- at the beginning when people ask me, where you going, I said Arkansas. Where is that on the map? I didn't have an idea.

But just being able to open these doors for more people to see how amazing this place is and the community and the people that there is just so much love out here and that's what makes this place unbelievable.

**Q. Take me back to the first one. How much has this event grown outside? I remember the last one I think I was here in 2010. This is -- it's changed even so much since then. Talk to me about the community has really taken this event to another level in the last 10, 15 years.**

GABY LOPEZ: 100%. You see right now between hole 16, 17, 18, that corner, that confidence club that Shauna is doing, is such an amazing game changer for the girls.

How you inject and put so much of this confidence term into little girls in such a young age. That makes them a strong human being from the inside out when they're growing up.

So it's just been crazy -- I mean, growing so much, and it's just crazy how much good there is in the community. There is good and there is good intentions and people mean well.

That's exactly what this place -- why this shines.

