

Trust Golf Women's Scottish Open

Wednesday, August 11, 2021

Leven, Fife, Scotland, UK

Dumbarnie Links

Sophia Popov

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: Welcome to the Trust Golf Women's Scottish Open. It's been a remarkable year for you, AIG Women's Open win, your first LPGA title, your first major.

Can you just talk about how the 2021 season has been as a Major Champion and how special is it to you to be a Major Champion winner.

SOPHIA POPOV: It's probably a lot better than not being a Major Champion winner. Normally my season would have been a lot different had things not gone the way they had last year. It's been amazing and very fun. I enjoyed it a lot, not just the end of last year but beginning of this year, too.

It's been quite freeing to be honest to go out and play and knowing I'll be out here for hopefully awhile, and I can actually take everything in and like I said just actually really enjoy it without feeling the constant pressure of having to keep your card.

It's been fun.

THE MODERATOR: You competed in the Tokyo Olympics. How special is it to call yourself an Olympian?

SOPHIA POPOV: Yeah, 100 per cent, I think for me one of my biggest accomplishments in my golf career, because I think it's very -- I guess just very rewarding. Ever since golf became an Olympic sport, it's been one of my goals and one of my dreams and I talked to my coach about it a million times. I said, "We're going, we're going," and I just never played well enough.

After last year, I felt like, you know, this is finally my chance to climb up in the World Rankings to actually make the team, and I had such a good time. I stayed in the village all week, and you know, it was definitely a very memorable experience for me.

THE MODERATOR: Lastly before I open it up to



questions, this is your first time at Dumbarnie, what's your thoughts on the course and are you excited to be back in Scotland and back on links after the Women's Open last year.

SOPHIA POPOV: Yeah, the course, it's awesome. I played all 18 today. It was very enjoyable. I think it's a great golf course. Obviously depends on the weather conditions that we get. You can tell it's fairly new but I think it's a great test and I think it could be set up in so many different ways. That will keep it very interesting for the week.

I'm very excited to be back in Scotland. I quite like it here as most people would probably think by now. I just think it's been a very, very intense season. Our schedule is very packed, especially with the Olympics last week. I think I'm a little bit tired now still with the jet-lag everything and but going out and playing today was very fun for me. I really had a good time and it kind of reminded me a lot of last year. So yeah, I just -- I'm excited to be back.

Q. When Graeme McDowell won the U.S. Open, he said he could not wait to get to the next U.S. Open to stop the madness and get back to a sense of normalcy. Do you feel the same way?

SOPHIA POPOV: I guess in some ways yes, but I think that next week is still going to be a little bit crazy for me just obviously trying to defend. I think it's a great spot to be in. I think a lot of people would wish that on themselves to be able to defend a title, especially a major title. I'm very, very excited for it.

It has been a crazy year but at the same time it's been fun. If it were up to me, would I want to keep it going. I wouldn't mind doing it all over again. I'm going to do my best to try and defend.

Q. He said he felt overwhelmed at times. Did you feel overwhelmed at times?

SOPHIA POPOV: Yes, I do think so. Quite honestly speaking, it's definitely a position that you have to get used to being in. It's not easy. I think that you underestimate

what comes with winning a major championship, and I was able to firsthand experience all that this past year.

At the beginning, it was all fun and games, and at some point, you know, you feel a little bit overwhelmed. I think my personality always I think suits the position that I'm in. For the most part, everything is fun but it's definitely more demanding. The schedule is more demanding, the time that is required of you.

But like I said, those are things that are easy to complain about but really it's what we're all hoping for.

Q. Let's just say on Sunday you're in the same position as you were a year ago. Playing the last hole, would you want crowds everywhere or do you like the silence of walking down the last hole with your boyfriend?

SOPHIA POPOV: It's very interesting question because I've actually been asked that a few times, and I think that somehow the silence last year and not having very many spectators made it very special in some way, too. Because you could really take in the atmosphere of being at Royal Troon and really what it's like on an everyday basis.

I think that I really enjoyed that. I know my boyfriend, Max, kind of enjoyed that. We could have a normal conversation and actually hear each other.

But at the same time, this year, I found the last maybe two months we've been playing with spectators again and it's been really, really fun, and I kind of forgot about how much I actually enjoyed it.

So I think if I were in the same position, I would actually quite enjoy having a lot of spectators for a change, especially with a three-shot lead. It was a one-shot lead, maybe let's talk about it again. But three shots, that would definitely be more fun.

Q. Could you assess your game right now and what's your experience at Carnoustie?

SOPHIA POPOV: As far as my game goes, overall it's pretty solid. I think there are a few things here and there that I'm working on, especially when it comes to scoring. I've been hitting it a lot better than my score would suggest the last maybe four to six weeks. I haven't been able to make quite as many putts as I would have liked to. I've been putting well, just not making them, especially last week, that was tough because birdies were the name of the game. It's in a better position than I would even like to think.

For next week -- wait, what was the question again? How do I feel about next week?

Q. Have you been to Carnoustie?

SOPHIA POPOV: Yeah, I played my first Open there in 2011, and I played the British Am there in 2012. I've seen it twice in completely different conditions, actually.

So I know it can be really fun and it can be really not fun. So I'm hoping for really fun.

Q. Stacy Lewis was in earlier. Slow play was a big topic at this event last year. How would you assess where the Tour is in dealing with slow play, and I don't know, just your overall thoughts on what it's like week-to-week?

SOPHIA POPOV: Yeah, you're asking all the fast players; is there a reason for that? Just me being a very fast player, slow play has always been very tough for me.

I think I literally, most of my mental game that I work on is to keep calm when everything is slow. So I would love to see it a lot faster to be honest. I still think we're in a very slow spot. I think most of the tournaments we're playing, I honestly half the time can't believe how slow it is, and I wish -- I don't know, you know, I'm not in it. I'm not a rules official. I don't know what would help and what would be the easiest way to combat it.

But I definitely feel like there has to be something done about it to make it more enjoyable. For some of us players that are very fast, it's tough. We talk about it a lot. I don't know the best way to go about it. So for me it's all about learning how to deal with it and just to assume that I'm going to be in slow groups and still be able to play well like that.

Q. Do you feel like now this is where you belong --

SOPHIA POPOV: I actually think it goes both ways. I think partially that win really helped my confidence out here, and just to realise for myself that, yes, this is where I belong. And I saw myself for so many years in this position but it just never worked out.

So it was kind of more of just, you know, making a point to myself, and saying, listen, really, regardless of how you play, you should be feeling this way. You should tee it up every week with the most confidence possible. If you're not hitting it as well, it doesn't matter. Like if you don't have any confidence, you're not going to play well. Yes, last year helped me. But at the same time, I think I also went into The Open with quite a bit of confidence just

because I was playing well and I was actually enjoying it more.

I think with enjoyment, the confidence comes. If I'm not having a good time on the golf course, I'm not confident. I'm not having a good time obviously. Last year, I think those weeks leading up to the AIG Women's Open were very exciting, very enjoyable for me.

So many different things: Caddying one week, playing well the next myself, and so I just think I played with a different sense of enjoyment, really.

It's been my biggest goal to really actually have a good time out here. I mean, regardless of how I'm playing, the last two months, I've had a few stretches that were definitely a little more challenging for myself where I wasn't hitting it quite as well as I'd like to.

But I found a way to still have a good time out here. I have a lot of good friends. I go out and I support my other friends when things aren't going my way, and I think that's something that I don't want to lose. I just want to -- I just want to have a good time. I don't want to look back and have any regret on how I played or how I took in everything at a tournament. Just kind of, yeah, be more present and have more fun overall.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you so much for joining us and good luck this week.

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