

# Cambia Portland Classic

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Portland, Oregon, USA

Columbia Edgewater Country Club

**Sophia Popov**

**Roberta Bowman**

Press Conference

KELLY SCHULTZ: I think we can get started. All right, good morning everyone. Thank you so much for joining us here today.

It's always a very special day here on the LPGA when we get to launch a new DriveOn spot and tell the story of one of our very special players; this week is no different.

As we all saw a few weeks ago over at Troon, one of the most magical stories we've seen at a major championship in women's golf history took place with Sophia Popov capturing the trophy and working her way into everyone's heart with her story of triumph over adversity.

So we're excited today to launch her 32nd DriveOn spot that launched just about an hour ago, and then we have a first-person piece on LPGA.com telling a little bit of the story that maybe perhaps you haven't heard even through all the different media coverages. I know Sophia has very busy the past few weeks.

Very fortunate to be joined today by Sophia and by the LPGA's chief brand and communications officer, Roberta Bowman, who spearheads all of our DriveOn efforts.

First off, Sophia thank you for join us. I know it's a little early out in Portland as you're getting ready to make your first start back on the LPGA after winning the AIG Women's Open.

First off, just want to ask you, what have these last few weeks been like for you as it's just been so much attention to your victory and lots of I know media requests that we've seen come through here at the LPGA?

SOPHIA POPOV: Yeah, it's just been pretty busy, I'm not going to lie. Definitely not quite back to my normal routine. I've just been -- there are a lot -- been jumping on a lot of calls last minute, too. Trying to figure out my schedule. That's different. Even for this week it's a whole different way of going into a tournament. I don't have exactly my



same schedule that I usually am able to follow during a tournament week.

I'm trying to get used to everything, but it's still a little bit crazy.

KELLY SCHULTZ: It was very, very special for all of us watching you win, and now getting your story out there. The victory helps people learn a lot about your battle with lyme disease, what you've gone through. That moment that's really captured in your DriveOn piece where said you really thought about quitting.

To now see that come through in this DriveOn story, how special it for you to get to tell that story to an even bigger audience?

SOPHIA POPOV: Yeah, no, I think the first time I saw the spot, for me it was -- it just really reflected kind of how my last couple years have been and it was pretty emotional for me watching it again. I think I've always wanted to be able to tell my story. I just never thought that -- you know, since I didn't have the platform I was just saying to myself, Just you know what, just keep it to yourself, and your family and your closest friends know it, but it's not -- it doesn't real matter a whether you tell it or not.

I think for me, it was the best -- or the greatest thing was to have a platform to tell the story. I think I've been wanting to put it out there and tell people what's actually been going on, because I think a lot of people just didn't know. Even a lot of my friends from back home or here, no one really knew.

I'm someone who keeps everything to herself, and also when I struggle with something I never let anyone know. I try not to show it. When I'm in pain I don't try to show people.

One thing that my mom, over the time she's gotten really mad at me about, because she's like, I need to know when something is going on. I think this is the first time that I could finally like actually express what was going on over the last like six, seven years.

I think that's -- when I saw that spot, it just really reflected that. I definitely had some tears going again. Yikes.



But, yeah, it was very just very fitting to exactly what I've been meaning to tell for a while now.

KELLY SCHULTZ: Thanks, Sophia. Roberta, sometimes for us with DriveOn spots it takes a long time to put a story together. I don't think we've put any DriveOn pieces together as quickly as we have with Sophia's.

Can you take us through this process, why it was so important to tell this DriveOn story now, and what it is about her story this really resonated with you and you think will resonate with others?

ROBERTA BOWMAN: Yeah. DriveOn is really about celebrating those moments of breakthrough, of success, of perseverance, of hard work. If you follow DriveOn, you know sometimes we have to work really hard to uncover them. It's a random comment here or there that creates a story.

In Sophia's case, it just rolled over us, and we just wanted to take this moment and really celebrate an incredible journey of perseverance and accomplishment.

I think the biggest challenge of course was obviously very quick production, but we knew we had this spotlight on Sophia and just wanted to keep it going as much as we could.

I think our greatest challenge honestly was how do you boil it down to 30 seconds and honor all of the complexity? The other thing I would say is Sophia doesn't really know it, but I have been stalking her on social media since the victory and I think I've seen every interview and they have been beautiful. They've told this wonderful story. People called it a Cinderella story.

I get it, and it was. But I think that every one of these narratives have a dimension that is beyond what you might expect. What I found in Sophia, two points. One, she said very clearly to Steve and I, This isn't a story; this is my life.

And that really hit me. We take such great motivation. But the other piece that hit me was it's a fairy tale for sure, but it's also a love story. And to hear not only Sophia's love for the game of golf, but the love that she is feeling now from every other player on tour who saw in her accomplishment their dreams come true, it was just a story that we had to do our best to honor and to tell.

I have to say, I love all of our stories, but this one I think resonates really, really broadly. So thank you, Sophia, for being available and trusting us with your story.

SOPHIA POPOV: Thank you guys. I loved it. I can't

believe you put something like that together in such a short time. I love it.

KELLY SCHULTZ: I think I'm going to touch on what Roberta said, too. Your first-person piece is talking to your sisters out on tour. I think that was something very special with your victory, is seeing all these players just resonate around you and being so excited for you.

What does that mean, and talking to your fellow players in your first-person piece, how important was it to, one, encourage others that this can happen for them, and, two, just to recognize the others that are going through the same -- similar journeys that you went through?

SOPHIA POPOV: You know that's one of the most -- actually one of the most important things for me. I hear every day when I'm on tour, and especially when I was playing on the Symetra Tour. There are so many girls out there that are extremely talented and I think would have though problem playing well on the LPGA.

It's just that you need to have that one or two tournaments that get you up there and enable you to make that step onto LPGA. I know a lot of them are struggling. It might not be a health thing, but it's other things, things at home.

You know, definitely there are so many stories I could tell from girls out there that are struggling with something. I think it's so important. It's funny actually, because since the win, my best friends out there just been testing me saying, I need your advice on this, I need your advice on this, I need advice.

I was like, Okay. Anything you need, obviously ask. But it's been very sweet. I had a player this week that she said, Fourth on the alternate list. Should I fly out to Portland? What should I do.

I'm just trying to be there help them, because I think they're realizing that any tournament I get into now this could be my week. I think that's the greatest thing that I think a lot of the players have learned from my week, is that any -- it can change at any moment.

I think that was very important for a lot of them to see that, because I think that will help them not give up. There are a lot players out there saying, I've been on Symetra for four or five years, and even though I been playing well here and there, I haven't made that step.

Well, it doesn't come -- like I said earlier, there is no timeline for everyone. It's not the same for everyone. For some it happens earlier; for some it happens later. I think that was important for them to see.

It was I guess important for me to show.

KELLY SCHULTZ: Thank you, and that really is something very special. I know a lot of players felt that, but I think that message went well beyond just players out tour to people who are trying to pursuing their dreams and realizing the difficulties that might come and that it can happen.

So really appreciate you sharing that.

I'm going to open it up for questions for those here on the call.

Steve, I know you have a question.

**Q. I do. Sophia, we been able to follow you, as Roberta said, on social media and all the interviews that you've given. How has the response been in Germany? Granted, golf is not a big, huge sport over there, but I assume it's been pretty good.**

SOPHIA POPOV: Yeah, it's been -- you know, it's been just a lot -- a bigger response than it had been in the past. In the past you've gotten a couple comments here and there but nothing crazy.

Now, it's -- you know, when I look on my social media it's almost like I can't -- I'm missing so many things because it's just so many requests that I can't keep up that I would love to answer. I am the kind of person I would love to answer everyone.

I notice that a lot them are from Germany, and that's really important to me, because I want to grow the game in Germany really badly because I think there is a lot of the talent there.

I think that because golf doesn't have a huge presence or because it's not seen as the same kind of sport it is here, I think a lot of kids are not as motivated to go on and also turn professional one day.

They're told from a young age on that education is more important and golf is just this kind of side thing that they can do until they're 15, 16 years old.

I want to change that perspective for them, and I just want it to become a bigger sport, for them to show it more on TV. So the media response has been pretty big and we've been trying to ride that wave. I just want to take advantage of that right now. It's definitely -- the response has been overall just very positive.

**Q. We've talked about the media reaching out and**

**your sisters on tour reaching out. Has anyone reached out that's surprised you?**

SOPHIA POPOV: You know, I think a lot of people have reached out that surprised me in different ways: people that I've met along the way that I haven't talked to in a long time; people I've worked with in golf from a physio standpoint or something that I haven't seen in a long time that have reached out. Those are surprising to me.

Obviously higher caliber golf players, too, whether on the men's side and the women's side, that have reached out to me and said, I just want you to know that you have our full support with everything that you're doing. I think that was really nice to see. It's tough out here and there is no way around that.

You want to find a certain comfort level to go out and feel like you belong, and I think for me, it's also kind of I felt like I broke that barrier to where I'm out here and I feel comfortable and I've made a lot of friends, and like I said, just a lot of players reaching out and making me feel like I'm part of what's going on out here.

I want more -- that's what I want to do for other players, too, just to make everyone feel like they belong. That's been the nicest thing for me as far as people reaching out.

**Q. We know that Martin Kaymer reached out to you shortly after your victory. Have you had any other men reach out?**

SOPHIA POPOV: You know, on social media I've had a lot of obviously -- in regards to just my win and obviously exemption status, I've had a lot of players reach out. On the European Tour, I mean, most of the German players have reached out to me, which is nice.

And then obviously Ian Poulter and Tommy Fleetwood message and said, You have our support. And Justin Rose, which is really great, because Justin has been a huge supporter of women's golf, especially this year with the Ladies Rose Series.

I think that -- I'm starting to see the shift a little bit there where you think there is a lot more support. Right now it's coming a little bit more from the European side. No surprise to me. I'm a European player, too.

Yeah, it's funny. I just went through my Instagram inbox the other day and I found so many messages I had missed. I had Sabine Lisicki, a German tennis player. I had her reach out, which was awesome. I'm a huge tennis fan, so I was like Oh! I was like totally fan-girling, and that's been really cool.



**Q. One more from me and then I'll leave it with you. We are celebrating the one year out from Solheim Cup.**

SOPHIA POPOV: Uh-huh.

**Q. Are I know you've spoken about how much you love team golf. How important would making that team be and what do you think you needed to between now and then to ensure you'll be on there?**

SOPHIA POPOV: It's probably my biggest goal from now on until in next year. I just love -- like you said, I love team golf. It's something I grew up with in Germany, too.

You know, I watched the Solheim Cup every two years, and it just always gives me the chills. Every time I look I'm going, Oh, I want to be part of that team so badly.

So, I mean, I'm going to try everything in my power to get on that team. I know it's going to require good golf. You just have to go out there, play well, and that'll take care of everything.

So there is no way around having to actually qualify and play well, so that's my biggest goal. That and obviously Olympics is also on the radar now.

**Q. You mentioned how excited you were to speak to Sabine and how thrilling that was for you. Have you come to terms with the fact yet several weeks on that you're so much more famous than you were a few weeks ago and your whole level of sort of fame has just transformed overnight with the win? What's that been like?**

SOPHIA POPOV: It's weird, because I think I had said to this Roberta at the very beginning when we first started talking about the DriveOn video, too, is that I think my personality is more -- like I honestly can't quite get into that role of being an a little bit more famous because I feel like I'm still myself and I don't want that to change.

I communicate the same way with everyone that I have been communicating with. It's just a little bit weird because some people that are like commenting on your Instagram things and you can't help but just look and be like, Oh, my God. This is crazy. Why are they even following me?

So that's been something I have to get used to a little bit more. It's obviously something that I'm enjoying, too. But at the same time, it's -- I definitely don't feel like it's changed me at all. It's just that of course here and there I'm fan-girling a little, which is awesome.

KELLY SCHULTZ: One of the special things we get to do when they launch the DriveOn spots is have some of our girls' golf members take part and get to see, and we use these stories as inspiration.

We have a few of them on today, and a couple of them have some questions for you as well. I'm going to go to Eliana first. She has a question.

ELIANA NEAL: Why did you start golf and when?

SOPHIA POPOV: Why did I start? So actually I was about four years old and my dad had to -- it was his day to take care of us kids, and I have two older brothers. He loves golf, so he took us out to the golf course.

Just threw us into a golf cart and said, Ride along. I quickly picked up on golf. I grew up playing ice hockey, too, and tennis. I had a feeling I think for having a racquet or something in my hand. I just really enjoyed it. I would walk alongside the cart and hit the ball ten yards at a time. I think I really liked that feeling, and so it was about -- I was about four years old.

Mainly because of my dad, and then I started playing in a junior practice team from when I was about five or six years old. I started making a lot of friends and I just wanted to go back and see all any friends every Tuesday and Thursday, and that turned into every day at some point.

So that's kind of how I got into it.

KELLY SCHULTZ: Thanks, Eliana.

Now, Sophia I'm going to warn you, the next question is coming from a really tough junior reporter. We call Ophelia our junior reporter, because I think she asks better questions than most of us.

SOPHIA POPOV: Okay.

KELLY SCHULTZ: Going to turn it over to Ophelia. Ophelia, I know you have a couple questions for Sophia.

OPHELIA BUNEL: Thank you, Kelly. Hi, Sophia. Guten Tag. My name is Ophelia Bunel, I'm ten years old, and I'm from girls' golf of Miami. I want to share it's an honor to get to speak with you.

Here in Miami each year Coach Stephanie has us write down our dreams, and then each girl says it on camera for the #littlegirl dreams program. Your dream as a little girl was to become a professional golfer and win a major.

You have overcome so many obstacles and then you finally achieved your dream. If you could say something to yourself as a little girl, ten years old like me, what would you say?

SOPHIA POPOV: That's a tough one. I think what I would say and I feel like you already -- you're already all of those things. Just keep believing in yourself and have fun. I think when I was ten I knew all I wanted to do was have fun, and I think that's the most important thing. Honestly when I won that major I was having fun all four rounds.

I think that's why it was very hard for me to describe my feelings when everyone said, Were you nervous? I said, Well, I was nervous, but we were having such a good time. The last time, you know, when I think back to when I was a junior, that's when I was having all the fun. I was playing and just went out there and had a good time and didn't think about my score.

I just kind of wanted to be with my friends, and that's what I think -- that would be the message to my ten year old self. Just keep having fun. Enjoy everything that goes with golf, all your friends and everything you're learning, and school and all that.

So that would be my message. But I feel like you're all of that already, so good luck.

OPHELIA BUNEL: Thank you. That's very inspiring. We all know that one of the keys to success are to have a group of people that love and support you around you. I saw when you did a Me Vs. Her segment with Madison Pressel, and when you caddied for Anne Van Dam I saw how close you guys were and how much they meant to you.

What does it mean to have a group of people around you that really supports you like that?

ROBERTA BOWMAN: We warned you Sophia. She's a tiger.

SOPHIA POPOV: The sweetest thing. No, that's very -- I'm glad you saw those, especially the Me Vs. Her with Madison. Madison has been a very close friend of mine on tour on the Symetra Tour, and still is now. She's a person that I communicate with almost daily.

I think when I first -- she was one of my first people that called me and she was in tears. I remember she said to me, you know, I know that she thought about quitting the game a couple years ago actually, and the whole time she's thinking, how can I keep going and how can I finance my career and keep doing this, but I love it so much.

She said to me, I'm so happy this happened, because it makes me not question why I continued playing golf or continue to play golf right now.

I think those friendships to me are everything on tour. I think that's the most important thing. That's why I say when you're young and you have your friendships on the golf course, those are so important. Those make you come back. Those are the ones that support you. And find your real friends out there. Madison to me has always been a very real friend, someone that supports me on a great level. No matter how she's playing, she cares a lot about how everyone else is going doing around her, too. That's so important.

So having friends is big deal, and obviously a big support system. My family has always been -- those have been my biggest supporters throughout the years, too. I honestly couldn't do it without them. Having a close group of friends on tour has been a very big help.

OPHELIA BUNEL: It sounds like you have a really great support system. Another person who had a really great support system was Shirley Spork, one of the original 13 founders of the LPGA. I have been blessed to get to speak with her, and she always asks what we are doing to grow the game of golf. What do you hope for in the future for girls' and women's golf?

SOPHIA POPOV: You know, I think I'm hoping to overall just grow the game. We need more girls like you and girls that love this sport, that push each other to become better players. It should be a competitive environment, but at the same time a friendly environment.

I think that's going to be really important going forward, that we all have a sense of community out there where everyone is enjoying being out there, you never feel lonely. You know, just have the good support system out there amongst each other. I think that's very important so that that continues on from when you're little until when you're actually pro one day.

OPHELIA BUNEL: Thank you, Sophia. It's been amazing to speak with you.

SOPHIA POPOV: Thank you so much.

KELLY SCHULTZ: We now have another question from Olivia McMillian. Olivia?

**Q. Thanks. I think Ophelia might be a tough gig to follow there, but I'll give it a go. Sophia, nice to see you again.**

SOPHIA POPOV: You too.

**Q. I just the week after you won the AIG Women's Open we played the women's amateur championship and Aline Krauter from Germany also took out the win there. Do you Aline very well and do you have any advice for her heading into I guess what will be a big year for her next year with women's majors and the AIG Women's Open?**

SOPHIA POPOV: You know, it's actually funny. At the beginning of the year Aline and I had a mini training camp in San Diego together. I hadn't known her that well. There is definitely a bigger age difference between us and she's still in college, but we were both on the west coast, and my coach in Germany said, Why don't we get together and have another three-day training camp.

I got to know her well. She has a little bit of the German-American ties. You can't hear when she speaks English. It's pretty perfect. I think we bonded over that. She reminded me a lot of when I was in college.

It's just so weird that we never thought about six months later or seven months later we would both be holding those trophies. I texted her immediately after and I said, Who would've thought? She said, Oh, my God. This whole thing is crazy.

And it's been very -- it's been awesome to see, and I told her, too, I said it's going to be a great year next year. Just go out there and enjoy it. I remember playing my first Open at Carnoustie in '11 as an amateur, and I had the greatest time. I remember ever pairing that I had every day because it was just the coolest thing.

I told her the same thing. I said, You're a great player and you're began be fine out there. All you have to do is just have fun. You can just enjoy every minute you're out there because you're playing as an amateur, and so that's what it is. It's an experience. I'm just excited to see what she is does next year.

Overall as a player, I think she's a good egg.

**Q. There is a nice bit of symmetry there. You obviously said that you made your Women's Open debut at Carnoustie, and Aline will do the same thing. Do you see yourself linking up with her at Carnoustie and playing a practice round?**

SOPHIA POPOV: Yeah, absolutely. I mean, I think that's the plan. It's kind of nice. Also you try to play with some of your fellow players from your home country.

I'm sure maybe Caroline and I or whoever is out there on the German side will take her under our wing and show her the course. I've been there I think three events there now, so I feel like I kind of know it. Although when it gets blowing I guess no one knows that course.

It'll be fun. I'm sure we'll play a practice round together and have a good time.

**Q. Thank you, and best of luck with your championship this week.**

SOPHIA POPOV: Thank you very much.

KELLY SCHULTZ: I know you're getting ready to play this week in Portland. You've had LPGA membership before. You've gone back and forth. Will there be a different feeling this week as a major champion teeing it up on the LPGA, and what do you think the nerves and emotions will feel like when you tee it up?

SOPHIA POPOV: Yeah, it's definitely going to be different. I haven't been in the position I'm in now. I know people are curious to see how I'm going to play. Those are all the thoughts that I'm kind of trying to erase out of my head.

I just want to go out ask play and do what I'm doing. The past couple weeks when I been practicing I've been playing well, so I'm just excited to get out there. The three-week break was enough, so I'm looking outside and I'm just hoping that this haze, the wildfires stop so I can start playing.

But, yeah, I'm excited to get going and see how this week turns out for me.

KELLY SCHULTZ: You've definitely earned this opportunity. So exciting to watch you win the AIG Women's Open. So proud of everything you've been doing since then. As Roberta said.

My last question I am going to leave for both you and Roberta. We talked about the inspiration that your story will have on other players on tour. As I mentioned, anyone who saw you win, it was a reminder of that not giving up and looking forward.

So I'm going to ask Roberta first, sort of what do you think people outside of golf can take from Sophia's story? And then Sophia, if you can follow and just say what you hope others who may not have ever touched a golf club can take from your story.

So Roberta, I'll start with you.

ROBERTA BOWMAN: Gosh, there are so many things. One thing I would say is that unlike a lot of other professional athletes, players on the LPGA Tour are making a huge bet on themselves. There is no safety net there. There is no continued income and contracts and things of that sort. You are completely exposed. I think that's also some of the appeal for some of the players as well.

But what I took from Sophia's story, the motivating power of the self-belief and how in many ways, the challenge has always been there. But to hear Sophia talk about seeing herself with the trophy and realizing that this was the moment where opportunity and that self-belief came together, and she stood tall and she is our AIG Women's Open champion, it's a story for the ages. And again, Sophia, thank you.

SOPHIA POPOV: Thank you. Yeah, I mean -- I don't know. I never know what I can say after you said that. Pretty much -- yeah, I think that's the biggest thing for me, is I think that you never -- like I think you just never know. I knew that after about the second or third day I felt like it could be my week and I felt all the fight that I had throughout the six years or seven years since I turned pro. Finally, my moment came.

And I think somewhere deep down I knew that. I think after about the second round I said, There is a reason why I'm up here and a reason why I played so well the first two days in the tough conditions. I think it almost resembled my pathway. It just hasn't been easy. It's been a very bumpy, rollercoaster of a ride. It was almost a very fitting tournament for me to finally break through.

I think you just have to wait for this opportunity and just know that it's going to happen, and you just don't know when that is. I think it's not just in golf. It's in any other job or any other dream that you have. Things change so quickly, and suddenly you have a job offer that you had dreamed of five or six years ago and your whole life changes.

I hear from other friends and family that that happened for them. They thought -- they didn't like their job, they didn't know where they were going, and then suddenly met a person on a train, and that person ended up being an opportunity for them to have a more successful career, something that they love even more.

I think that's what the message I think should be: You just don't know, and so just stick with what you love. It'll turn out. It'll turn out the right way.

KELLY SCHULTZ: Well, thank you so much Sophia. That is really so profound and inspirational for so many people. Not just young golfers and people that have watched the game for a long time, but saw your story and have been inspired by it.

I know they're going to continue to root for you as you got back on the LPGA and continue your career, and we look forward to many great things to come from you.

So thank you for sharing your story and we'll continue to all DriveOn.

SOPHIA POPOV: Sounds good. Thank you guys so much.

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