

CME Group Tour Championship

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Tiburon Golf Club

Lydia Ko

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: All right, very pleased to be joined by two very special guests, Lydia Ko and Kai. Start off with the year you've had. When you look back on it, what are some of the points this year that you'll never forget or some highlights?

LYDIA KO: Yeah, going into the year I knew that the Olympics was probably going to have the biggest star in my schedule. No, I started the season off with a bang winning the HGV Tournament of Champions at my home club at Lake Nona.

Then I struggled from spring leading up into summer. I don't think there was a lot of expectations going into the Olympics just because I hadn't had many Top 10s going into that event.

But the Canadian Open, there it's already a special event for me. Had my first LPGA win. I was able to get a lot of confidence back. I think that led to the three wins in my four starts.

Yeah, it's been a special year. Adopted this handsome man at the Mizuho in New York, so it's been awesome. To be able to share these moments with my family and my team has honestly been a fairytale of a season.

Q. To be named for the Heather Farr Perseverance Award, voted on by your peers, how much of an honor is that for you?

LYDIA KO: It means a lot, especially because it is voted on by the fellow players on Tour. We all go through a lot of things, whether it's golf related or things off the golf course.

To be recognized for the journey that I've had, it's a huge honor.

I personally didn't know Heather, but the stories I've heard about her and the fight that she put on until literally her last breath, no, I'm very grateful to be able to receive an award under her name, for me to continuously be able to embrace Heather's spirit and the fight she put on her whole life.



Q. With this award, you've I think won every single award available to anybody at the LPGA pretty much. When you hear something like that and you think back over the course of your career, was that something you every expect to accomplish in the time you've been out on the LPGA Tour?

LYDIA KO: Definitely not. Even when you go back to my first Canadian Women's Open I was just excited to be able to play alongside the best female golfers. As amateurs we don't get that many opportunities to play on the LPGA and have starts, so it was just eye-opening experience for me.

But then fast forward another 13 years; did I think that I was going to win all of the awards that were possible? No. But I've had my ups and downs during my career.

Some of the best golf I've played and then struggled for like five, six years and then become Player of the Year again seven years later.

In ways I wish I had a more consistent career, but I'm still so grateful for all of these experiences, the losses and the wins. All of those moments build up to make me the player I am today.

There were a lot of tears that were shed. At the same time, there was a lot of laughter as well, and joy. So I am just so grateful for the experience.

I know that I'm on the second chapter, past the halfway point. I'm just excited for what's ahead. Just to say I'm a Hall of Famer in the sport and in the job that I do, not everybody gets to say that. I just feel very privileged to be in this position.

Q. And the last time we saw you at Tiburon obviously was with Jason Day and winning the Grant Thornton Invitational. How good did that win feel after 2023 and what do you remember from that week from the golf perspective as you tackle this golf course again?

LYDIA KO: Yeah, I was pretty disappointed that I wasn't here to defend here at CME Group Tour Championship, but great that I got to be able to come back to a golf course where I played well and have a lot of good memories at.



I knew who Jason Day was and what an incredible player and person he is, but I didn't know him personally. So it was just a whole new experience. I played an 18-hole practice round with him on Tuesday; I played so bad. Honestly I played so bad and I felt so bad to him that he was playing with me.

But when the tournament time came, like he kept me really relaxed. He asked me a lot of questions, which I was really grateful for. I was like, wow, why would a player like him that's literally gone through all sorts of experiences, why would he be curious about the way I do things or hit pitch shots.

So just unbelievable. To finish off a really difficult year on a high I think definitely made the four-week off-season a lot more fun and something to cheer about. You know, maybe that was a good momentum that led me to winning in Orlando.

But I remember I was like I texted Jason and I was like -- he congratulated me after Hilton. I said, hey, thank you for all the good juju. I'm excited to be able to share the time on the golf course with him again in a few weeks.

Q. Speaking of the Perseverance award, when you look back on your career, what was the lowest point and what do you do day-to-day to try to climb out of that?

LYDIA KO: It's crazy, because it's hard to like evaluate where my low points, what score I was shooting or what world ranking I was at. Like my mental lows as well. Sometimes I think I was playing some of the best golf but mentally I was not in a -- not in the place that I am now where I'm a lot happier and more comfortable, whether I shoot 68 or 78. Yeah, I still get frustrated, but then there was more complexity to where I was at with my mental state.

Looking back, those times were probably the most difficult because sometimes it's hard to discuss about those things. You know, we have such a small circle to start off with, and to share the difficult times, it's hard.

So it's, yeah, I don't know if there is a specific year or time, but I would say my mental lows were probably the toughest times for me.

Q. What do you do to get out of that? Was there a process, a routine you tried to go through?

LYDIA KO: I started working with my current mental coach a few years ago, and she has been an unbelievable help. Sometimes we talk about private things very unrelated to

golf. As much as we try and differentiate golf and the things outside of the golf course, they all kind of blend together. We're one human being with one brain. Everything kind of melds.

Unfortunately how I perform on the golf course affects me off the course and vice versa. My mental coach, being able to have somebody I fully trust and I can talk to things about has been great. I think she cleared and helped me clear those demons I had in my head.

The saying of literally you being your worst enemy, it comes from I think truth in ways. I think she has been a huge help for me in that case.

Q. Last week slow play popped up at the tournament. Do you think that's an issue on the LPGA?

LYDIA KO: I don't know if that's more of an issue on our Tour versus other tours. I personally don't have many experiences playing on other tours, but I believe that the rules officials and everybody that sets these guidelines are doing their best to make it fair for everyone.

Nobody, I mean, even if you're the biggest golfing fan, nobody wants to be out there for as long as possible. Sometimes like last week, it was a really difficult golf course with fast greens and undulating greens.

Even if you're playing well but you hit one shot out of position it's going to take a lot more time than the person hitting it in the middle of the green and two-putt.

And even two-putts around a golf course like Pelican didn't come easy.

Yes, it depends on the situation. U.S. Women's Opens tend to take longer because we have a bigger field. It is really one of the toughest tournaments we play all year.

So just is case by case. I think the slow play topic is talked about on every tour. I can't say that like our tour is slower than others just because I don't have that experience, nor knowledge, to back that kind of statement.

I'm sure everybody, whether it's the players, people setting these rules, are doing their best to like get us in there and get us out of there as quick as possible.

I don't think there is a single person out here that is a trying to defy that.

Q. Would you have a solution or do you think the way things are set up now are pretty fair?

LYDIA KO: I've never really thought about it. Some weeks, yeah, we play a lot faster. I honestly think the biggest thing is like just the situation. If it did take longer last week I think there are two factors. Golf course was tough, and the second thing is there were players trying to get their card or work their way into CME.

So like all these kind of situations I think play a factor. It doesn't mean that, oh, yes then you should take longer or not be able to take longer. I just think those are the variables that you have to take into account when we have longer rounds than maybe usual.

I don't know how long we took exactly, but I was lucky enough to be able to serve on the LPGA board and be a player director for three years. Before that time I would think things and say things. Why would they make that kind of decision? After serving on the board I realize there is a lot more to it than what we see.

I believe that everybody is doing their best, and as players we're always going to continuously do better to try and keep up with the pace of play. I don't know if one strategy or one way is going to instantly make a round 30 minutes faster.

Q. Wanted to ask about Kai. You said you got Kai at Mizuho. Can you tell us how that came about?

LYDIA KO: Week my husband and I had been Instagram eye shopping, looking at different breeders for months. I think for him, my husband, he said, sometimes the house feels lonely, because even for me when I'm at a house alone it's different with one person to two person and even when the whole family is there.

For a long time I pushed it off and said, hey, I don't think the time is right. Maybe we should do with when I'm a little bit more stable so that we have at least one kind of full time stability I guess routine person.

But we met Kai in New York and I knew he was the only Shiba left in the litter, at first he hated us because he tried to keep jumping the pen and like go away.

But after a while I think he got familiar to us and who we were and he started like playing with my phone charm like as if it was a teething toy.

I think I just got super like connected to him and I remember -- but we decided to not adopt him right away. I remember like the rental car return ride I started crying as I got to the airport because I was like, wow, like I'm never going to be able to like see him again.

In my head, I was already calling him Kai. I think his real name was like George or something. He doesn't look like a George anyway.

But I like started crying in the car as we got to the Newark Airport. I'm never going to see him again. And then my husband was driving and he was like, oh, boy. He was like, hey, you really, really think it's the right decision, we should adopt him.

A little later we decided to adopt him. He's been awesome. You know, questionable at times. But this is the first time I've had like my own dog, and I have a lot of learning experiences through him, patience.

And I was like, wow way, if it's this difficult with a dog I wonder what it would be like when you actually have a human baby. He's is much fun and keeps us really active.

I think more calm with time, which is something I'm trying to get better at myself. It's just been great to have another Goofy ball of energy and sometimes I can't keep up with his running pace as he runs away from me. It's been a great step for us and I feel like our family just got bigger.

My family and my in-laws all love him, so it's really cool that he's part of the Ko-Chung family.

Q. From a mental health perspective, did he help you in that way?

LYDIA KO: I think the first time he actually came to a tournament with me was at the Canadian Open, and the third -- I played really well the first couple days. The third day I had a mediocre day; finished with a bogey. Bogey finish on any golf course, any situation, is not the best place to be at.

And I remember I came back to my host family's house and he was there and he was like, oh, how was your day? My day was great. That kind of energy he had towards me, he was super loving and excited to see me. I don't get that much excitement anymore from him when he sees me.

I saw him and I was like, you know what? There is so much more to life than what I just shot and there is always tomorrow. That week was the first time in a long time I traveled by myself, too, so it was great to have company.

Yeah, he's honestly been great. I said this at the U.S. Women's Open too, but my husband once asked me an ultimatum. He said would you rather win one more major in the future and then not be able to see Kai or not know Kai, or would you just rather have Kai and know you're never going to win a major anymore?

You know what? I can still call myself a major champion. I would rather not win a major and have Kai in my life.

At the U.S. Women's Open I realized I have both, the best of both worlds. It's been great. A new life in my life and so many other great things on the golf course. So it's literally been a year of a fairytale. I'm just so grateful for this whole season.

Q. Earlier Nelly was talking about her success this season. She said she felt like it was so easy early in the year; felt like she gotten into a flow. How would you describe the state you were able to get your game into with your success this season?

LYDIA KO: With my game? I think there is no point where it was like super easy for me. Yes, I think there are periods where you don't really think about missing cuts and you're out there trying to shoot the best score you can and know that the worst score you're going to shoot is going to be X.

But I think like I said earlier, the Canadian Open was a big help because I hadn't had a Top 10 almost like two, three months. When you get out of the flow it's really hard to get back into it. When you're starting from zero you don't really have expectations.

When you start not seeing the results you're expecting, then it's harder because you're almost taking a bigger leap to go towards the direction you're bending to.

The Canadian Open, you know, leading up to the Canadian Open I did a lot of good work with my coaches. Just felt like my ball striking was so much better and I was seeing the shot shapes that I wanted to see. It's a fade for me for most cases.

I just felt a lot more comfortable being out there, just aiming left and just knowing the ball was going to come back right. So even though like I was not comfortable a month prior, I think it can be as quick as one event or one round that puts that confidence back.

Never did I think that just because I had a Top 10 at the Canadian Open I was going to win gold in a couple weeks, but that was definitely a big step for me. You know, we always say we're trying to peak at those big moments.

I just got fortunate that I literally peaked at the right time. I don't think there is no like right or wrong way to do it. I just got lucky with the timing of things. Things that I worked on for the past couple months were starting to show just before the big summer stretch in Europe.

Q. Do you feel like with what you've been working on coming into this week you're in a position to be able to peak here?

LYDIA KO: I hope so. I mean, regardless, I love playing in Florida. To finish off the season with three events in Florida and twice here at Tiburon is really special.

Yeah, I think like before like not making it into this event last year, I think I took for granted, that you know what, I always finish the season at the CME Group Tour Championship.

I think last year was like, hey, you know what? The level of competition is so much higher. I literally need to work my butt off to make sure that I'm qualified and playing here.

I think my mindset is a bit different just because I was like, you know what? It's not like automatic like I guess entry into this event just because you won the event the year before. It's a clean slate at the start of the season for everyone to get here.

It would be great to finish strong for our official season here this week, especially now that I'm a partner with CME. It's always special to be able to play well in front of your sponsors, CME and Rolex for me in this case.

Yeah, it would be great to peak here and I felt like I played a lot more -- I had more solid stuff on the weekend last week, so hopefully that translates well and transitioned into a few good rounds over the next few days.

THE MODERATOR: All right, thank you for your time, Lydia.

LYDIA KO: Thank you.

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