

CME Group Tour Championship

Thursday, November 21, 2024

Naples, Florida, USA

Tiburón Golf Club

Lydia Ko

Quick Quotes

Q. Okay, here with Lydia after the first round of the CME Group Tour Championship. Opening round. Just talk about how you felt like it went out there.

LYDIA KO: Yeah, you know, you knew it was going to be breezy out there today, so I wanted to make sure I stayed patient no matter how I started my round.

I made a good birdie on 2.

Then made a mistake on 4.

I was able to bounce back with a couple birdies on 5 and 6.

Overall I didn't really put myself out of position and I played really solid and gave myself a lot of good looks for birdies.

No, it's a good start to the week here.

Q. Last night, incredible honor to be honored for Hall of Fame recognition, as well as Heather Farr. Just talk about the night and how you saw it as a whole.

LYDIA KO: Yeah, Rolex does an unbelievable job of celebrating not on the players, but everybody really involved to making the Tour what it is. It's a special night. Obviously we normally have it tonight, but they moved it forward for Wednesday.

I just love being there, even if I don't receive an award, to be there to celebrate the other winners.

Yeah, you know, last night was very special, especially getting the award under Heather Farr's name for perseverance. To also get recognized by Nancy and Annika for the Hall of Fame was special. I didn't expect it as everybody saw in me crying.

But, no, so grateful to have so many people just support me, and these kind of memories and the relationships and friendships I've made through my time on Tour, those are things that I'm always going to take forever and not what I



shot today.

So it's just a night full of gratitude and all of us just thank Rolex for having this opportunity to be able to celebrate and kind of finish the season on a high.

Q. Speaking of the Perseverance Award, can you take us back a year ago to this week and what you were doing? Did you work on your game that week? What was your main focus in your game at that point?

LYDIA KO: You know, I took a few days off after Pelican, which was my last event until Grant Thornton. I actually don't think I played golf that week. I was just in Florida. When I saw it rained on Wednesday I was like, well, at least the year I'm not there I'm not in the rain.

So I was trying to see the positive out of the disappointment of not being here.

No, now I'm able to represent CME Group and Terry, but even before then Terry had been such a big supporter for me. So I just reached out to him and I was like, you know what? Thank you for continuously breaking his records and our records and the support he's given to our Tour.

Now being able to represent CME, I'm excited to be back here. In a way mentally I feel like I am defending because I wasn't here last year. It just shows that just because you have a great year like I did in '22 where I became Player of the Year again after seven years doesn't necessarily punch your ticket to being at the Tour Championship at the end of next season.

So that's the hard thing about off-season and the new season coming up, because it is a clean slate for everyone. But I was very motivated. And to win the Tournament of Champions and that lead me to being back here is great.

I just want to enjoy this week, especially in front of the CME family.

Q. And then it was so special having your now-husband there in 2022 to see you win, and of course at St Andrews as well. He is going to come later this week?

LYDIA KO: He actually flew on a red eye and got here this



morning.

Q. Oh, he did?

LYDIA KO: But unfortunately, fortunately, he has a day job, too, so he's in the room taking meetings until like probably 9:00 pm because of the time difference to the west coast.

There was a weather alert yesterday saying there was high winds and I was like, hey, if it's dangerous just don't come. He was like, I got to come.

This is a special place for us, and he's going to come back in a few weeks again for Grant Thornton as well. Excited to be able to come back to a place that we shared some happy tears together.

Last time he was here he was my fiance and it was my last win before our wedding, and then now we're going strong and almost to our second year anniversary. So time flies. Now we have a dog, which is crazy to think, even at that time.

But, yeah, this will always be a special place for us, and I know there has been multiple times where he kind of said where he felt like it was his fault if I didn't play well.

2022 CME Group Tour Championship was always the example I gave him. Hey, I won and I played well when you were here. I think that kind of made it a little bit more relieving for him.

But I think as the third person and as an outsider it's hard because you can't control anything. That's something that also my sister says. Sometimes she says maybe I packed her the wrong bar and she didn't play well.

You know, I didn't realize that until the people around me told me that. I was like, well, I've never really been in their shoes before, but thinking about it that's so true. It's almost harder being so close but not being the one that's in control.

So just grateful for them to be here.

Yeah, time has gone by so fast. Ayaka asked me how many years I've been on tour. I was like, 11. (Laughter.) It's just I can't believe it because I can still remember my rookie year playing here or playing here as I guess as I just turned pro in 2013 as well.

Q. You always seem to pull it out here. What is it about this golf course at that suits you so well?

LYDIA KO: I think I've been trying to play smart golf. If it is a hole that is difficult or I'm out of position, you know, just trying to take my medicine and go from there.

It's not the narrowest fairways, but if you do miss a fairway it's penalizing. So just being smart around this golf course. I think that's how I played well here in the past so that was kind of the game plan come into this week as well.

Now that I feel more confident with my ball striking and have a better idea of what my ball flight is doing it's definitely more comfortable on some of these holes to aim left and cut it over.

You know, I just feel mentally and just with my game I'm in a better position right now, so I just feel more comfortable out there.

But the course isn't easy. I set a goal of shooting 3-under today and somebody shot 8-under. I was like, okay, maybe I need to make a few more birdies.

It's a course that can get away from you as much as you can shoot some low scores, so I'm just trying to stick to my game plan and go from there.

Q. Last night what was the trigger for the tears? Was it the flowers or the hugs or did Annika or Nancy say something that set you off?

LYDIA KO: Must've been pollen inside. You know, it's kind of weird, right, when you see highlights of yourself and you tear up.

But the video -- actually before I went on stage, I got a very similar video after the Olympics that the LPGA was very kind enough to make for me. It was the putt where I sink my Olympic gold putt, but goes into my first win and kind of shows my whole career.

Like it's weird because that's the only really video I've been watching, but I think it's because it's just like given me like flashbacks of all those moments. You know, the things in between as well that I can vividly remember.

Like I have actually sat in the car and like watched that and like shed a tear as well. So that was already -- like the engine was already starting before I went on stage.

I wanted to say, okay, I got to do well in this speech. I prepared for it and I don't want to be mumbling words up there. When Tom caught me by surprise and I saw Nancy and Annika, it was just -- I look up to Nancy and Annika and some of the other players that congratulated me, like Meg and Seri and Webby.

To think that I'm in that prestigious club with them, it's honestly hard to wrap my head around that. But just how welcoming they've been. Every time I win or play well, Nancy texts me like messages with like so many hearts and she's just become more than just someone that played generations ahead.

She's been like an aunt, somebody that's taken me in and I have really relied on. I've been fortunate to actually been able to spend some time with Juli Inkster and Pat Hurst the past few weeks before Pelican.

To hear some of their stories it's funny, but back of my mind I'm like, oh, my God. I'm in the Hall of Fame with her. It's just crazy.

I think it's just a mixed emotions and me thinking, do I really deserve it? Like I don't know who set the guidelines, but it's just a lot.

And my life hasn't changed, right? I'm in the Hall of Fame and it's not like I grew two inches taller or my shoulders got any wider.

My life hasn't changed. But to be recognized as a Hall of Famer in the sport I play and the job I do and in something I love, I'm just very grateful.

So it's just a mixture of reasons I think for the tears.

Q. Speaking of flashbacks, some of us remember when you won the Race to the CME Globe the first time and you were up in that little building over there. I think you made a champagne joke when you were 17. Do you let yourself at this point in your career think back to that moment and to those moments early?

LYDIA KO: Yeah, that was, I mean, probably one of the or the first time I'd been in a playoff. With Julieta Granada and Carlota Ciganda. And I mean, I had won that season, but coming into the year I think it was the first time that we had the Race to the CME Globe, you know, the chance to win the million.

I was trying to see the cash inside the clear box at the time. I was like, is that \$1 million? It was a very new environment for me.

I think coming into the week I of course wanted to win, but I was still so young that I just -- I don't think I was able to understand the scale of what it is to win the Tour Championship, the season standings at the end of the year.

And I wish in ways I could go back and experience that again and just have that joy. Obviously I couldn't drink, but celebrate some other way. Yeah, time has flown by, and I still see pictures of me with the globe and the championship trophy, like sitting on the box with my glasses.

I feel like I've grown up a lot since then, and it's definitely -- it was a start to me getting confidence and playing well here. You know, like fast forward, I won again in 2022. Yeah, it's been a special place, and I would love to relive it, but relive the good in ways.

Q. You mentioned the internal goal of minue-3 to start day. The course received rain overnight and was quite windy this afternoon. How do you feel posting that with the afternoon round, and how does that set you up for tomorrow? Did you feel the course dry down over the day? How does that change throughout the day?

LYDIA KO: Yeah, I think it was nice that I got to play a little later today because it was meant to be cooler in the morning. Normally you worry if you play later the wind is going to pick up throughout the day.

Actually it was meant to be like 12 miles an hour in the morning and then only get up to like 12 or 13 in the afternoon, so really didn't make a huge difference in that standpoint.

But throughout the day I did feel like the greens were getting firmer, more so than the fairways itself. The fairways are still quite soft so I'm still having to hit some longer clubs into some of these holes than maybe some of the previous times I've played this golf course.

But I think with the weather forecast projected to be fairly nice and breezy again tomorrow, I think it's going to slowly dry out the golf course more and more.

It's going to be tricky because a lot of these holes, the greens are very sectioned off so to be able to get really close to them you kind of either have to have a shorter club in or utilize the slopes really well.

So, yeah, it's going to be difficult, but it's the same for everyone. I think this is the type of golf course where it's not like one fights into this type of golf course.

We've seen various of winners here, from longer hitters to people that hit it really straight and et cetera.

So I love that, because it's like an even playing field and that's what Terry did by giving this opportunity of the \$4

million. Doesn't matter if you're No. 1 or 60, we're all playing for the same thing.

I think it's going to be exciting. It's always an exciting finish here. Hopefully I'll be able to hit and play my fair share of good shots and be in contention and finish the season officially on a high.

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