

# Hilton Grand Vacations Tournament of Champions

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Orlando, Florida, USA

Lake Nona Golf & Country Club

## Gaby Lopez

### Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: We're here with Gaby Lopez ready to kickoff the 2022 LPGA Tour season. You had six or so weeks off. Welcome back. Do you feel nice and refreshed as you get ready to kickoff this year?

GABY LOPEZ: Hey Christina, yes, I am fresh, just happy to be once again on the LPGA for my seventh season. It seems like it was yesterday my first day, and I'm really excited to continue this journey doing what I love.

THE MODERATOR: Two years ago different golf course, but still you were able to take the title here. That was quite a marathon, so many playoff holes. Tell us about what it's like to be a Tournament of Champions winner and to carry this tournament on your resume.

GABY LOPEZ: I think I didn't really realize what it meant to me after couple months later, couple tournaments. Being able to play with the top elite golf players on the LPGA in one tournament and be able to be recognized by Hilton and all the sponsors is just a blessing.

I think that being the champion of champions, it's a great feeling. It's good validation for the hard work that we put in, my team and I. I'm ready to keep on going to come back to this tournament because I think it's one of the most special ones that we have on tour.

THE MODERATOR: It is a special tournament, and it's a new special this year. We had a great first several years down in Orlando, now we're here at Lake Nona. You had the chance to play here last year with a different tournament and now with practice rounds. How does it look out there? How does this course shape up for the Tournament of Champions?

GABY LOPEZ: This golf course is such a championship golf course that I think it's going to demand every single part of our game. Off the tee it's a huge challenge even for us.



I think we got a couple narrow tees, and especially for the celebrities, they like to hit bombs all over the place, and I think it's going to be quite a challenge.

I think the women are going to have a bigger chance in my opinion for this tournament, so whoever hits it straight err is going to have the biggest chance.

THE MODERATOR: Questions.

**Q. You had a great finish to the season, three Top 10s in the last four starts. What's the challenge of having an off-season and keep that momentum rolling this year?**

GABY LOPEZ: Yeah, I had a pretty good stretch end of last year. I feel that I had a pretty good start and then okay middle part and then a good finish.

I feel that being able to just grind mentally and emotionally, that's what put me through good couple tournaments at the end. I wasn't hitting the ball any good towards the last stretch, and kind of being able to reconnect with my coach and just tidy things up, not making huge changes, I think that was probably the biggest takeaway for this year coming up.

I feel that whatever is working, going to keep on doing that and just tidy up a little bit of posture and fundamental parts of our game that I think we tweaked a lot during the season because it's a long year.

Really excited to see Gaby in bigger stages, see Gaby performing even better when she has to at CME last year. Being able to see this growth on myself, not only technically but also internally, I think that's a huge part for me.

**Q. You posted to start the season on Instagram, and you said, Surprise me, 2022. This is your seventh season out here. What would be a great surprise for you this year?**

GABY LOPEZ: Of course my -- one of my biggest goals is going to be able to win a major championship. I do believe that I'm getting closer to that stage where I can perform much better under pressure situations, and I feel that I'm believing in it way more than I was at the beginning.



I feel that when you see yourself grow and grow and just making a little better mistakes in tournaments under pressure, that's when you see, Okay, I'm going toward the right goal and the right ending.

I think being able to see Gaby internally grow, I think that's probably going to put me in a good position this year.

**Q. Very few tournaments like this. It's very unique in format. As you talk about your evolution as a as player, is this helpful or is it a distraction when they're yelling for their favorite country music singer or whatever the case may be?**

GABY LOPEZ: I'm a nerd in any sports game. I like to pick Marcus Allen's mind. I like to play with Ray Allen and all these celebrities. They're not only good and great golfers, but also amazing MVP players and Hall of Famers and superstars in each one of their sports.

Being able to learn from them is a huge takeaway. I think we're never able to ask them so close exactly what was going through their minds at the biggest stages of their sport, so to me it's a very special event, and that's probably why I love it so much.

I can learn so much even from the great Annika until Marcus Allen, from Roger Clemens, so many celebrities. They all have the same thing in common, and it's the mental toughness, right?

So I think the mental toughness and being able to accept and visualize and imagine all those part of their games is what -- it just makes the whole thing one. And to me, being able to keep learning from them, it's huge.

**Q. We hear a lot of great things about this golf course from amateurs and pros. When they leave, they're satisfied. It'll be challenging, as you said, but do you find it to be a pretty straightforward layout compared to others?**

GABY LOPEZ: He mean, yeah, what you have in front of you is exactly what you're going to see. I think probably one of the biggest challenge is going to be the slopey positions on the greens, on par-5s, and even on 18 you have a tricky green to hit it close.

The greens are rolling perfectly well. The gardeners and the crew here at Lake Nona Country Club have done an amazing job and I can't be more grateful for that. I think the layout is going to be different for sure, and off the tee and on the green is going to be fast. It's chilly. The ball is not going very far.

I think it's going to be a challenge every step of the way.

**Q. You mentioned the gardeners and the greenskeepers. On our walk over here we happened to walk by 18 just as they were taking a photo and you had to pop in and say hi to them. That is something you try to do everywhere we go, certainly learning from Lorena. What does it mean to you when you get the opportunity to thank them? Without that crew out here very early in the morning, late at night, we wouldn't have this amazing golf course.**

GABY LOPEZ: Yeah, I don't think they have the appreciation enough, and I think they deserve way more than when we do. I feel that if all players just connect to them and being able to tell them, Hey, thank you so much for waking up so early and going to bed so late. Like you said, they're a very, very special part of this golf tournament and anywhere we go.

Most of them are Hispanic or Latin or Mexican, and I like to tell them I represent them as well. I'm here representing Mexico and Latin America every step of the way. Being able to have something in common just like that, it just feels great.

**Q. Two questions: The first one, you talked a little bit about growing internally, mentally. I'm wondering what Lorena has shared with you over the years that has helped you the most in that regard?**

GABY LOPEZ: Yeah, there are a couple little secrets, but probably one of them is being very brave and positive out on the golf course when you are in such a pressure situation. Being able to link nerves with a positive emotion.

Most of us and a lot of players, and I feel that it's really hard to be able to feel nervous and to be happy and to be optimistic and very positive whenever you probably miss a shot and you have to come with a positive attitude to the next shot.

For her it's always been, Hey, the more nervous I get the better I play. I've been trying to kind of play into that game, into that role. That's probably -- when you see Jin Young Ko, you see Nelly, you see all the top players are really embracing the moment, and for me it has been just linking a very good situation for me in the past what I'm presenting in the moment.

**Q. And have you drawn on your victory at the Tournament of Champions in the last couple years? Do you think back on those moments when you're playing?**

GABY LOPEZ: Oh, for sure. I do. I like to journal and I look back to that week. One of the things that I do recall a lot is just being very certain of what I'm doing. When you're under pressure you hit it where you want to hit it instead of what you don't want to -- you want to avoid.

It's really easy to say, but when you're in the moment and you have the wind and you have the lie that's uncomfortable, being able to refocus and get yourself very centered to say, Hey, that is exactly what I want to do, when you do it and it happens, it just brings so much inner fears and inner force that it just makes you much stronger.

**Q. Awesome. One more, if I may. I know that you have a lot of additional statistics than normal. Wondering what you have looked at in the off-season that you've identified as areas to improve.**

GABY LOPEZ: Yeah, one of the things that I've been very careful with has been my wedge game and conversion under 130 yards. I feel that's exactly what we tried to improve last year, and we actually achieved that.

To me right now it has been to be more consistent under six feet. I feel that it could be very biased. Every situation is different, of course, under pressure or not.

But left to righters, six-footers, downhill is exactly what I'm working on.

**Q. I know you've played in this event before, but is there a certain celebrity or athlete you're hoping to reconnect with or hoping to meet for the first time this week?**

GABY LOPEZ: Yes, I do. I had a really good relationship since the beginning with Marcus Allen. He's been texting me and on he's been on my bag all the time, and Ray Allen as well. I think those two are really special people. You see them talk interviews and see them -- they're exactly how they present themselves on the media, social media. When they come up to you and text you, Hey, how are you -- it was actually really funny. Last year I didn't get to see Ray Allen -- I'm sorry, Marcus Allen probably the whole week. I got Sunday night to my room and I get a call. I say, Hey, how are you? I get, Hey, this is Marcus. How are you? I'm like, Hey, Marcus, how have you been?

I changed numbers and he didn't know that and didn't have my last number. It was just really special for him to take the time to call me and, Hey, like just want to say have a good rest of the year. Just really special to be able to connect with them and keep having the connection and the relationship.

They're amazing people. So humble and I think they're very special to the game of golf and women's golf. Being able to have them here, it's a treat for us.

THE MODERATOR: Thanks so much Gaby. Appreciate your time. Have a great week.

GABY LOPEZ: Thank you.

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