

Hilton Grand Vacations Tournament of Champions

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Orlando, Florida, USA

Lake Nona Golf & Country Club

Jessica Korda

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: Here with our defending Hilton Grand Vacations Tournament of Champions winner Jessica Korda. That was a great way to kick off your 2021 season.

Different course, different conditions, but still I'm guessing it's always fun to defend a title.

JESSICA KORDA: Yeah, it's super nice. In the six that I've won I don't think I've gotten to defend at the same golf course often, or defend some at all, so I think this is a thing that I'm used to.

This golf course is great. It's going to be really fun to see actually how the celebrities fare with it. It's definitely a lot tougher than where we played last year.

Q. Talk us through the last playoff hole there. We had a small crowd for the first time in a long time. You had your family was there. Often don't get to have family around. What was that experience like and just starting to maybe feel some normalcy come back?

JESSICA KORDA: Yeah, it was super nice. Winning in front of a crowd again was just amazing. I mean, just the energy that they bring from every hole and every shot, you don't realize how much you miss it until it's gone. That was one of the things that I think we all missed so much.

And then obviously having my parents there, it was my dad's birthday week, so it was just great, great to do it, and playing in the final group with my sister was also super fun.

All in all I really enjoyed it. (Laughter.) You know, hopefully I can do it again. If not, somewhere down the road.

Q. We're a year later and we know what the goal is. You said the course is different. We heard from I think it was Gaby Lopez yesterday that it's going to be an eye opener for the celebrities. It's a very different golf course. How does Lake Nona differ from what we've seen the last few years?



JESSICA KORDA: The easiest way to say it is it was a resort golf course to a championship golf course. They miss off the tees, it's way more penalizing. Definitely not as open as they saw before. The greens are firmer and faster. The greens were definitely fast last year and the golf course was in fantastic shape, but Lake Nona is just a championship golf course. It's tough. It's tough around the greens.

I think one of the things I always told them, I turned around and was like, Just putt it. Don't even attempt it.

So I think we'll just see a lot of -- hopefully we have a lot of volunteers on the sides because the rough is high this year.

Q. They'll need some help, huh?

JESSICA KORDA: Yes.

Q. What's your experience here at Lake Nona? Have you played it much before?

JESSICA KORDA: We played here last year for the Gainbridge and that's really about it. I haven't been up here to play. Totally different weather than when we were here last. It was a lot warmer. This is definitely a bit cooler, and the golf course, you can see that it's kind of turning over into that overseed.

When we were here last it was just the primetime of everything. It's in great shape and we're excited to play.

Q. How late were you up last night watching your brother in Melbourne?

JESSICA KORDA: I made it only to 11:30. I got to like, whatever, couple games into the second set, and then once you put the 5:00 a.m. alarm clock I was like, I got to go to bed.

So I woke up somewhere midway, maybe 3:00 am, checked, saw he won, and went back to sleep and texted him this morning.

Q. That is awesome. Is your dad down there with him or is he down there by himself?



JESSICA KORDA: Nope. He's got his USTA coach, Dean, his physio, and his girlfriend, that's it.

Q. Well we're all wishing him luck.

JESSICA KORDA: Thank you.

Q. In this event every player says, oh, yeah the amateurs don't bother me, but some handle it better than others. You went out with Brett and Larry last year and shot 60. How do you block everything out and play as well as you do in this kind of environment?

JESSICA KORDA: I think I struggled the first year for sure. I have a different mindset in the pro-am versus a tournament round. I think that that was what I was struggling with. I obviously wanted to talk to them and get to know them and pick their brains, but it's also a golf tournament.

I wanted them to have a fun time. I don't know. I had this guilt of going back and forth of being super serious and not. Last year I found a really nice balance between the two, because I already knew what to expect.

I think I'm paired with Annika, so obviously I won't be having those same feelings of, oh, I'm playing with an amateur or celebrity. So it's going to be great, but it's definitely an adjustment in the head.

Q. You've had early success in the season a few times in your career. Where do you feel like your game is heading into the start of this season?

JESSICA KORDA: About the same as every year that I start. I have no idea. I work hard in the off-season. I haven't really played a ton. I definitely enjoyed the break and I body needed it, so I just tried to start out with less expectations and try to just put one foot in front of the other.

It's a long season. We play all the way until November. Like I said, just one foot in front of the other and see what we come out with.

Q. Do you look at this first event as a time to assess where you are, look at it as a warmup to the year, or this is the officially kick off to the season?

JESSICA KORDA: No, official kick off, but also trying to figure out where we are. I mean, competitive juices flowing and it's so different than when you're at home. I can't switch into the competitiveness as much as I can out here.

So I always get really excited the first couple days and definitely kind of shake some rust off.

Q. You did have a heck of an off-season. Absolutely gorgeous looking wedding. Congratulations.

JESSICA KORDA: Thank you.

Q. Good to have that weight off your shoulders and have it done?

JESSICA KORDA: Yeah, no, it was fun. We had a great time, and just glad that that planning process is over and done with and now it's just back to golf.

Q. What was the most valuable thing you learned playing in this event last year, playing at Nona?

JESSICA KORDA: I mean, the more you play a golf course the more you know it. I struggled a lot on the greens here last year. There is a lot of subtle breaks to them, a lot of dips in the greens that if you don't really know the golf course you can kind of get stuck in the wrong spots here.

So definitely the more rounds under the belt that I can get here the better. But, yeah, definitely just learning the golf course more.

Q. And you mentioned getting a pairing with Annika. What's the value in that for you?

JESSICA KORDA: I'll let you know tomorrow. (Laughter.) I mean, I get to play with a Hall of Famer, an amazing ambassador for women's golf, someone that's pushed the needle for us for such a long time, and continues to do so.

I'm excited. I've never played with her. I was there at her retirement many years ago at a U.S. Open, and that's really about it.

Q. Just to piggyback that question about playing with Annika, how well do you know her? Do you know her a lot? And this is her home course. Do you think you can pick her brain a little bit?

JESSICA KORDA: I'll let that be organic tomorrow. I don't have a set plan for it. Just obviously have a nice chat out there. I'm sure we'll be there for a couple hours, so we'll have plenty of time.

I just know Annika from being out here and her presence out her and some Solheim Cups. Yeah, she's been great. Like I said, she's a pioneer for women's golf and it'll be great to be able to play with her tomorrow.

Q. Just curious who has been your favorite celebrity that you played with, either at this event or just in general?

JESSICA KORDA: I mean, last year I requested Larry Fitzgerald, and that was really cool to be able to play with him. He actually plays down in the Jupiter-Palm Beach area a decent amount, so it's been nice to say hi to him and be able to play with him last year.

I don't know. I feel like everyone I've played with has been so great, so I can't just pick one person, other than obviously Larry, because that is the one person I did request.

But, yeah, everyone I've played with has been so, so great.

Q. And then just personally, mentally, what did shooting 60 do for you?

JESSICA KORDA: We keep talking about it because I never realized that I was shooting 60, especially because like Larry started to pick up a lot starting on like 13.

I was like, Why aren't you finishing? I don't understand why you're not finishing. Then I think I made the eagle on 18 and he just about tackled me after that. I realized like looking up at the leaderboard -- I think that was the first time I had seen a leaderboard -- that I was moving up, and then I kind of looked at my scorecard and I was like, Oh, there is a lot of circles on here.

18, obviously making birdie there was just awesome. Larry chunked it into the hazard and refused to tee up another one because he was so nervous. He wanted it more than I did I think almost. And Brett was awesome. I had a great picture of me basically with my scorecard with them cheesing right next to me.

It was just a cool memory to have. Not only to shoot 60, but also to shoot it with Larry and Brett next to me.

Q. Do you have that scorecard or a ball or anything?

JESSICA KORDA: I think I gave the ball to my dad because it was his birthday. So I did give the ball to my dad. I don't know if I got the scorecard, to be honest.

Q. There is not a lot of focus usually on title sponsors; your focus is on your performance this week. But you're coming back as defending champion of this season opener. New venue, new title sponsor, new look and feel, new surroundings. Do you think about that as a college-educated businesswoman aspect of

things and the importance of the inevitable changes that take place regarding title sponsors and support that the tour has received in recent years?

JESSICA KORDA: Yeah, I mean, it's awesome to be able to move forward. Like that's the whole point, right? We want to keep moving forward and pushing women's golf forward. This is just another step that the tour is taking alongside their sponsors.

I'll play anywhere. Just give me a chance. I just want to play. And, again, that's another thing that we learned through COVID. We want to play golf. We want to play in front of fans. Wherever you put us, we'll show up.

Q. Is it strange not driving to the same venue? I know you said there have been several instances in your six wins where you haven't returned to the same course.

JESSICA KORDA: I told my sister she's defending this week. (Laughter.) I was like, This is where you won. I think I played fine here last time, so hopefully with kind of my learning experience from then, I can do something with it this week.

Like I said, it's the first week of the year. First tournament of the year. It's kind of a free for all, so we'll see.

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