

# Hilton Grand Vacations Tournament of Champions

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Orlando, Florida, USA

Lake Nona Golf & Country Club

## Lydia Ko

### Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: All right, get things started here. Pleased to be joined by Lydia Ko.

I want to kick things off. The first event of the year, how are you feeling going into the 2024 season?

LYDIA KO: Yeah, I would say it's a pretty short and quick turnaround since Grant Thornton. That's a lot later in the year than we're used to playing in the calendar. Obviously this one is right after New Year's. You feel like, okay, do I have more time and it's like two weeks in and you're trying to prepare.

In a way it's nice that the first one is a home game. I can pretty much roll out of bed and be here. And I mean, I rode my own cart during the pro-am today because we were allowed to have carts. Yeah, it's a great start to I guess the season. I think it's a fun way to start the season where it's a little bit more light and you're getting to meet people that aren't necessarily in this industry.

Yeah, I'm excited. Hopefully a little warmer weather the next few days.

**Q. What was it like prioritizing how you were going to get ready for the season after the short season, after an incredible performance with Jason Day in Naples?**

LYDIA KO: I think the three weeks I had off before Grant Thornton was a mini off-season there. Obviously gutted that I didn't play myself into CME, but it was an extra week for me to kind of relax in ways, just see on TV and on YouTube the highlights of the girls playing.

That was in a way like a longer off-season with just one tournament to kind of split it into two, but you have to play with what you get. For both Grant Thornton and here, it's not like you're automatically in and just because you want to play you can play.

That's an Invitational and this one you have to win in the



last couple years to be able to play. That opportunity is not there for everyone, and you might not be able to play every year. I'm grateful to be able to be back.

Last year I opted to go on my honeymoon, which was no regrets. That was exciting. Great to be back and play in front of our members as well.

**Q. So obviously you have a house here. How often are you here now? I know you spend a lot of time in California now.**

LYDIA KO: I've actually been here the last two-ish months. Only time that I was away was for like ten-ish days when I was in Asia, back in Korea.

Other than that I've been spending a lot time here and planning to spend time here after Bradenton as well. Going with the schedule, sometimes if we're in between Asia and then like California, maybe it's better to stay out that way.

But if I'm in between two New Jersey events, obviously I'm not going to go all the way over and come back on the east coast. So nice to kind of have options of two great golf courses, three great golf courses to practice at this way and that way.

Yeah, I've been spending a lot of time here and it's been great to go out and play with some of the girls. Last week Leona and Lindy and Nasa, we played a few days trying to get a good I guess preparation into the event and how we're going to play this hole.

When you play throughout the year you don't think of it in that strategic way because you're playing your home course. Because we know where the tees will be and approximately where the pin positions are. We're like, okay, would you hit driver here or 3-wood? I think there is a little bit more thought into the preparation of this event.

But yeah, it's been good to spend the warmer -- cooler warmer parts here the past few months.

**Q. What are your courses in California?**

LYDIA KO: I was able to get an honorary membership at Lake Merced having won there. I also practice at Olympic



Club there. They're super close to each other and when I'm over there, we're not that far from there so it's really convenient. They're both very -- both championship golf courses, so I've loved being there when I'm there.

And then here, we all know how top class it is out here as well. So I think I'm very grateful that I can practice no matter where I am, practice without having to worry about the facilities and environment.

**Q. What do you feel like getting that win at the end of the year did for you and your game you can carry over?**

LYDIA KO: It was such a fun week. I played the practice round with Jason on Tuesday and I played so bad I was like, oh, I should have just had a longer off-season. I wanted to like do our tour proud, and obviously some of the PGA TOUR players, we've met, I'm sure the players have met before, some are new.

I wanted to be like one of the 16 players they're like, hey, the LPGA players are really good. Their swings are good or they hit it so much further than we thought.

I played on Tuesday and I'm like, oh, my God, I'm embarrassing myself. Luckily on Friday I played better. You know, Jason was obviously the best partner to be out there with.

He's so nice and he's so good that I think all of the players I played with I learnt a lot. To just see like how they can hit these shots was super cool.

But for me, it wasn't the season that I had envisioned going into 2023, but I had a really good start and really good end, and in ways I joke, oh, maybe I shouldn't have done it in the middle.

I think all those weeks and those up and downs are what brings the results in the end. I'm hoping that that's good momentum going into this year.

**Q. How much did your work and starting to work with Si Woo Lee, did that impact or was that contributing to your success at Grant Thornton?**

LYDIA KO: I think it's just progressing. Sometimes the things that we're working on, like I do a really good job of it and sometimes he's having to tell me the same things over and over again.

I think we are -- we all have our habits and comfortable things we always go back to. Those tendencies are probably something that I've had even when I was like 12

and I'm probably going to have that when I'm 32 and retired at 52 playing golf. Like still the same kind of tendencies.

I just got to keep working on it. We're just trying to flush it out little by little. It's been very different because I've never really worked with a coach that's outside of the U.S. before and I'm here.

So we're trying to make it work, and even on Monday we did a FaceTime lesson and I feel like we're moving in the right direction. He keeps it simple and not new ways to fix I guess the problems every time.

**Q. How often are you able to meet in person? When was the last time you were actually together?**

LYDIA KO: When I was in Korea for a week I saw him a couple times after Grant Thornton, and he was here with me for a week prior to Grant Thornton. He came over and I think the next time I'm going to see him is in February.

So it's a couple months from the last time I saw him until the next time, but we've been doing as much as we can with the time differences, FaceTime lessons, so I'm glad that I live in an era where technology is helping us and we can use that to our advantage.

**Q. What attracted you to him and wanting to work together?**

LYDIA KO: I've actually had like pointers from him before. Weird to say last year, but it's like 2022 I had a few pointers from him. In September I got pointers from him as well.

He's had a lot of success with not only Jin Young but other KLPGA players as well. Also Tom Kim on the PGA TOUR.

Before I saw him my mom and I saw a lot of his YouTube Live lessons. Sometimes I'll watch that or call or text him and be like, you said that in that lesson. Does that work for me, too? Yeah, you know, it actually does, or no, that's not for you.

So it's kind of nice that he is somebody that's out there and you can kind of source information and get his lessons even though I'm not getting the direct lesson.

But it's just trying to figure it out, like obviously I don't want to go too long without having seen him because it is different. Some things you just can't catch on video.

But Jin Young has made it work so I'm going to try and go that way. It's a way for me to also become more

independent and take ownership of my swing and my work, the work that I put in.

So it's been good. I think in ways I do try and get like -- rely on and get worried that I can't see him. I think I just have to get past that phase as well.

**Q. Are you waking up super early or practicing later in the afternoon to match up with the time difference a little bit better.**

LYDIA KO: He's right now in Vietnam at their winter camp. I think it's 12-hour difference here. My earliest lesson is 8:00 a.m. I'm not waking up at 6:00 for a 7:00 a.m. lesson.

I've done an 8:00 a.m. or 4:00 p.m. he's kind of been more flexible with his time and he said he would rather it late or super early, like at 4:00 a.m., at 5:00 or 6:00, that's when the players that are in Vietnam, they start training and getting ready.

So I thought like six a.m. would be good and he said, no, let's do earlier, 4:00 or 5:00. So it works out better for me, and sometimes I wonder if he even sleeps. (Laughter.)

**Q. Do you notice having a swing coach so far away, has this given you maybe more agency over your own swing to kind of maybe just have your eyeballs on it and being more responsible for fixing things and not having someone continually there looking at you all the time?**

LYDIA KO: Yeah, I think we tried to keep it simple. Obviously a few drills he's given me the past couple months, but a few days ago I said, hey, what are the two drills you think I should do? He would send me a video of how to do those two drills and just to make sure they're engrained in my head and I'm doing it properly.

Last time he was here, my trainer was here as well, so we could all kind of sit together and then Si Woo would explain, hey, these are things we're working on in the swing. This maybe -- like I may have this tendency because of this kind of weakness, so we're all on the same page, which is really good.

Normally I don't do a lot of practice swings. I like to hit the ball and kind of get it done, but Si Woo I think emphasizes doing a lot of practice swings because it's engraving and putting one extra repetition without you hitting a golf ball. So I've been doing that a little bit more often.

In some ways, like I think, yeah, I have been like trying to take more ownership of what I'm doing and what I'm working on, but then like not making it too complicated

either.

Some days I'm going to hit it better than other days. I take swing videos and send to him and it's really easy feedback. Took one this morning and sent it to him.

I think it's a lot simpler than I would've imagined to be. In ways I'm realizing I think I overcomplicated it for myself at times.

**Q. Was there something you picked up at Grant Thornton in your game that maybe gives you confidence going into 2024?**

LYDIA KO: Like I can only compare myself to that Tuesday because I remember, I texted Si Woo and was like, I'm hitting every shot apart from straight, or like apart from at my target.

And then so I sent him some swings. Then like even then we did nothing new. Some of my tendencies he said prior, that was happening, and it was also around that time of the month and I was, oh, now I'm playing with Jason and I've got to like -- it's the time where my rhythm is all over the show.

But I think over Wednesday and Thursday, because it was a Friday start, I was able to just kind of flesh a little bit by a little bit. Sometimes I think it is important that you play in like a competitive situation to be able to trust and know what you're working on does work.

I feel like I hit some really good shots coming down the stretch and I think that gave me the confidence to say, hey, I'm going in the right direction. I just got to keep working on it and having -- I think I'm learning a little bit now and understanding that some days it's not going to be perfect and sometimes I chase like 14 fairways, 18 greens in regulations but golf is not a picture-perfect scorecard.

**Q. Big year with the Olympics. How will you tailor your schedule to peak for the big things?**

LYDIA KO: Yeah, I think as of now I'm playing Evian and taking a few weeks off before the Olympics. Obviously there is a few tournaments that I would love to play, but just logistically you have to weigh your options.

The Olympics is very important for me, to be able to represent your country. It's been the two weeks that I was there in Rio and Tokyo was like some of the best weeks of my life.

I think second place and like third place, oh, it was a good week, but you don't talk about it. It's pretty cool when you

get a medal for coming second and third. That's the great thing about the Olympics. Every player that's there, every Olympian that's there has something to celebrate. That's a win itself.

To say that I'm an Olympian, it's crazy. I joke sometimes I'm not an athlete but an Olympian. I'm super excited for Paris. LA is another five years from now. I don't know if like I will still be playing by the time LA comes around. I'm thinking maybe this might be the last hoo-rah, and -- fairy tale ending to that would be collect every color of the medal.

No, I'm excited to be able to represent New Zealand on any day. It's something I'm very honored and grateful for.

**Q. What's the sweet spot for the number of events you play?**

LYDIA KO: I think I played from my rookie year playing 25 to 27 to obviously COVID year, you can't really count that, but the year after was when I started playing like 20, 21.

Last year I was trying to have a schedule similar to that, but because I was trying to get as many CME points and try and play myself into CME, I added a few tournaments here and there that wasn't on any schedule at the start of the year.

But this year I don't know if it's like the way everything is constructed, I'm playing almost similar amount of events as like when I was a rookie. Like I was, oh, I want to play these, that's like 25. So I think I'm just going to go with the flow and not be too rigid.

Obviously have a good idea what other events I want to play and just kind of take the Olympics and the majors and making sure I'm fresh. At the same time, you don't want to come in with too big of a gap. I think playing your way into things is just as important.

Yeah, I said if I win twice early in the year, like I might not play the 25 and might be a little bit less. I want to give myself as many opportunities as I can, and I think being in the Hall of Fame was not really a big goal of mine, but 2022 it was like a gift of a year that like in one year I got five points.

I was like, wow, how did that happen? Now I'm at the front door. Whether it happens or not, that's secondary. I don't want the regret of thinking I left something behind.

I want to put my 100% in it, whether it's my practice or scheduling. If it happens, that's great. If it doesn't happen, just not meant to be.

I think that has just been the mindset I've tried to take on from this year onwards.

**Q. You talked about at the very beginning how short of a turnaround from last year to this year. What's the challenge of having such a short off-season and rolling right into the next years?**

LYDIA KO: In ways I think it's kind of like a double-edged sword. You don't have a super long time since you last played, and luckily the last time I played it was like good, that you feel like that momentum could potentially still be there.

But in ways you think, okay, you play from January to November or December now, and even though you may play 20 or some players play 30 events or less, you're still -- even like the off weeks aren't really off weeks.

You're still practicing and not getting the full recovery as much as you want. For me, ever since I turned pro I always took like minimum two to four weeks off completely not touching my clubs and then practice for another three, four weeks and getting into the season.

So our schedules have changed. Some great additions to our schedule and obviously I'm grateful for this event to be on, but you do feel like you could have had maybe a little bit more time to rest, and also a little bit more time to I guess practice.

But some ways you just got to get the season started, and that way you're able to know like, hey, these are things I need to work on. I think I need to rest for a little bit more.

So these next two weeks are a good gauge. We all have a few weeks off in between Florida to Asia. That's going to be a little mini off-season as well.

**Q. You talked about the middle of last year. Any lessons that you learned going through this stretch last you're that you are trying to apply this year?**

LYDIA KO: I think last year I really thought like my long game was the issue, and it is true that for a couple weeks that I was really struggling with that.

I think because I thought that my long game was a big problem, I spent a lot of time practicing that. I spent less time in my short game. When I looked at my stats, my driving stats haven't been that great the last few years even when I won three times in a year or I have not won.

Obviously the more fairways I hit and the more greens I hit,



that's going to give myself as many birdie opportunities as possible. But sometimes it's just not that and like I said earlier, it's not about like being perfect. Sometimes you're going to be in the rough and you hit -- you create a shot that's like better than maybe if you were in the middle of the fairway.

So I got caught up on sometimes the wrong things, and I think I sometimes need to take a step back and really assess where I am and what I really need to work on. Short game was definitely an aspect, so I'm trying to not get too caught up in one area.

I think that way you always need a balanced scale. Like you don't want the see-saw going one heavily to the other side.

**Q. So I was looking back at 10 years ago. You've been on the scene a long time. What do you see with the state of American women's golf right now? You've seen a lot of changing of the guard, ups and downs. You got someone like Rose coming on the scene. Some other ones breaking out. What do you think?**

LYDIA KO: Probably you guys have like gone through the statistics, so know numbers and exact things more than me. I am very lucky to be able to play alongside the best female golfers week in and out.

There is so much talent here and a lot of the guys here at Grant Thornton were talking about how impressive each and every one the players here are. I think women's golf and golf in general is at a very high point.

I think when I first came on tour, I think I've been lucky where I came on tour at such a young age I feel like I'm between two to three generations and not one generation. A lot of the people that were on tour while I was playing have babies or are retired, so I'm like, is it time for me to go?

I think it's great to see that like as a competitor, you're playing and you're not sure if the world No. 1, Lilia Vu will win or it might be a name that we are not as familiar with.

I think that's just the name of the game. It's like golf, you just never know who's going to win. We're definitely seeing a bigger variety of players, and obviously a lot of American players that are playing really well.

Sometimes well doesn't necessarily mean, okay, they're winning multiple times, putting themselves in contention a lot. I think golf is in a great state. Obviously because it is an Olympic year it's going to be the battle until the deadline of like how many players within the top 15 obviously are

going to get in.

I feel lucky that I don't have to worry about that as much personally. Put I do hope that -- I do have a fellow Kiwi that can represent New Zealand. That's a sidetrack. That just shows how exciting it is. I think women's golf is going to keep growing, and it's not only just Americans, but just all over.

I think you're seeing a much bigger variety of players. I think this is only the start and it's going to just keep building and building.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you for joining us, Lyds. Have a good one.

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