

# Hilton Grand Vacations Tournament of Champions

Sunday, January 21, 2024

Orlando, Florida, USA

Lake Nona Golf & Country Club

## Lydia Ko

### Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: Welcome back inside the media center here at Hilton Grand Vacations Tournament of Champions. Pleased to be joined by the 2024 champion, Lydia Ko.

How does it feel to be the champion in your own backyard?

LYDIA KO: Yeah, it's pretty cool. I think in ways I was very deliberate about my routine. I think when you are comfortable you sometimes go about your day just like any other day.

But I think this is a great and comfortable way to start the season. I haven't played particularly that great at this event before, so to kind of go in with a two-shot lead going into today was a little bit of a comfort cushion to rely on.

But I knew that it was going to be windy today and obviously the cold was going to be a big factor, so nobody was going to shoot like super low scores. So I just tried to be really steady. I'm sure -- I am 100% certain -- there were nerves coming down the stretch, but I felt like I tried to stay as patient as I can.

Paul was a big help in saying, hey, just breathe and keep the conversations going.

**Q. Can you just tell us how satisfying this is after the 2023 season? Does it feel different than your other victories?**

LYDIA KO: You know, I thought I would cry but I'm like, nothing is coming out. I don't even know what that means.

But I remember last year in Portland I think it was on my second event working with Paul and I missed the cut and I was like, hey, I'm sorry. Obviously I want to play the weekend and it hasn't been long and you don't want to set a bad momentum just for the team.

And he was like, hey, this is just going to make winning



sweeter. I think that's so true. As much as the season was not the way that I would've wanted going into 2023, I felt like I still finished really strong. That gave me good momentum to this year.

Just like how 2022 was an unbelievable year and 2023 was a huge question mark, like you can turn it around really quick. Golf is a weird game like that, where you can miss eight cuts and win the next week. Chanettee also did that last year winning in Portland.

So it's odd. I think there is no right answer for the game of golf. I'm just going to keep working at it, and I think in ways it's really good that I'm playing next week so that I'm not sitting on like the excitement just of the win and I can just keep working on my game and go from there.

**Q. You told Amy that you can't get cocky. I thought to myself, I can't imagine Lydia being cocky. Do you feel like you've ever been that way when you were No. 1 in the world?**

LYDIA KO: I don't think so, but it's more in the sense of, hey, I won, all is gonna be great. We all know that tomorrow is a new week and I still don't feel like I played perfect. Feel like I could have hit some better shots coming down the stretch as well.

It's just little by little. The win is obviously great. I wasn't sure if I was going to be back in the winner's circle, and to be back to the first tournament of the season, it's pretty cool and so much faster than I could have ever anticipated.

But it's just making sure that it doesn't go to your head. I'm still doing my practice swings in my room, doing all the things that I've done to get to this point.

I think they're all building blocks, and sometimes the results don't show right away. If you do a good job with the fundamentals you're going to grow and continue to get better.

**Q. Good signs at the end of the last year, winning at Grant Thornton, playing well in Asia. Did you maybe come into this week with more confidence than people might have thought you had?**

LYDIA KO: I'm not sure if I ever really go into a week like I



feel super confident. I think it was just good that I got to practice here last week because it's my home club. Monday didn't feel like a completely new environment. I think just to transition from the start of the season to the weeks prior, it was just so smooth because I'm literally in my own backyard.

It's just weird. Like I won in Boca a couple years ago, and honestly, two weeks before that I was playing so bad that I was thinking maybe I should like withdraw after -- like play the Tournament of Champions but then maybe not play the week after and just get ready for Asia.

I took the positives out of finishing top 10 that week and was like, hey, wasn't as bad as I thought it was going to be. I think that kind of mindset helped me to win in Boca.

So it's just weird. I think some weeks I feel like it's going okay, but then you go on the golf course and it doesn't feel right. Then some weeks I don't feel that prepared at all and then it goes good.

So I think it's a mental thing at times. Just kind of getting into a rhythm of things.

**Q. And then we always want to attach that a year like last year you're going to learn a lot about yourself. Did you? Was there a --**

LYDIA KO: I cry a lot would be something that I learned. I'm like, man, I got to get the faucet to stop crying. My mom says that, too, you cry a lot.

But it's just I guess like last year was hard because I won in Saudi, which was my first event of the season, and then I thought I would ride the high and hit a top 10 in Thailand. My ball striking started not being as solid from there onwards.

I think missing the cut at Chevron, yeah, it sucks to not play the weekend, but I took it as too big of a deal. I think so many great things happened that to hit me a lot harder. Maybe might have been better if I had just been a little bit more level headed and been like, hey, this is just not my week.

I just got to focus on what are the things I need to get better at. I think I was so impacted just by the result and I think that's what kind of -- that's what led me to a few months of struggling feeling like I'm walking on quicksand.

But having one under-par round and then backing it up with another under-par round the next day, those small things really mattered. You know, I think taking small wins is an important thing when we're out there.

**Q. You mentioned it a couple times, you got to the point where you weren't sure if you were going to win again. What gets you to that point and how do you pull back from that?**

LYDIA KO: I don't think it takes much to get you to a point where you are unsure if you'll win. I'm playing alongside the best female golfers week in, week out. You know that your B Game is probably not going to cut it. You need to put four solid rounds, and then, hey, you might be in contention or around the top of the leaderboard.

It's just I think when things don't go your way and you feel like you put in the right work but the results don't show, then you kind of start to wonder, like is my time ever going to come.

That thought has come across my mind before. I guess winning in Hawai'i, it was my first win in three years. I'm pretty sure in those three years and even in 2020 where I had a lot of Top 10s, I still wondered, oh, maybe I'm only going to have Top 10s. That might be the highest place I get to.

When you win I think it definitely gives you a sense of relief then just to say, hey, I can do it. But there is no I think way around thinking that it's easy to win.

I think golf is kind of -- we were joking about it, like golf seems like it's one of the random sports, only sports where random people think, oh, I could totally beat her, or if I played on tour I would win like three times in a season.

I said nobody is probably doing that about hitting home runs or being champion in other things. Golf in ways, because it is so relatable, people think it's easy, but it's not.

In my 11, 10, 11 years, I've seen the Tour grow so much and the level of play is so high that to be able to win like a week like today, is just pretty cool. But you know that you got to keep pushing yourself to your limits and working hard, because none of it comes easy.

**Q. Does it actually take a win to pull you out of that I'm-never-going-to-win-again mindset, or is there middle ground somewhere?**

LYDIA KO: For me I don't think there is a middle ground. If you have ten second-place finishes that's awesome. To even finish second that many times or even like ten second place, two, three times, that shows a lot of like level of golf you're playing.

But to win, I think there is like a different notch. To be able

to finish strong when there is stuff on the line is different. So for me personally, yeah, winning is coming second is like -- gives me different I guess realization to say I can win and be back in the winner's circle.

**Q. What was the lowest point last year for you?**

LYDIA KO: I think I shot -- I played really well in the first round of Arkansas last year, and then I put myself in good position and on the second day. I went to like the 13th hole or something and took me three or four chips to get on the green.

I struggled that day. I think I came back to the room and I was like, I have no idea why I can't back up like a good round after another one. I don't feel like the game -- my game is miles off. Why can't I put the score together?

Sometimes might be an ugly looking 2-under par and might like, oh, could have been a 5-, 6-under, but you shot 2-under. There are very different ways of doing it. I think then I was honestly like crying in my little room at Stay Bridge Suites thinking, hey, what's going to be at the end of this tunnel.

But I talked to my husband then and he was like, hey, why are you putting those expectations on yourself. In ways I was like, of course I got to put those expectation on myself. I'm not going to go out there feeling like I'm not going to play well.

At the same time, it's true. He's right. I can't connect my identity to golf all the time and feel like not as good of a person if I don't shoot a good score. If I'm honestly crying after every single bad round, then that's just a lot of energy burnt.

So I think I should have taken a much more positive mindset, but because I had been struggling, I think I was affected by the little things more.

**Q. Could you just put into words what it means to be one point from the Hall of Fame and hear 20 wins? That's a ton of wins.**

LYDIA KO: I think whenever the announcer on the tee says, hey, Lydia Ko, 19-time winner on the LPGA, I'm like, whoa, I won 19 times. That's really cool.

Like to have the first number change, that's really awesome. To be only part of the small group that has won more than 20 times is -- to be in that 20 club is really cool.

But it's just I think last year I was chasing the Hall of Fame. I felt like I could have -- with the way I was playing in 2022

I could back it up with another great year. Look where it put me, I just kept my card, if I hadn't won the year before.

But so I'm not really going to think about it much. I think we're all human. Like to say that it's not going to linger next time I'm in contention, oh, my God, if I actually do this I'm going to be in the Hall of Fame, I'm sure that's going to be one of the gazillion voices in my head.

I just got to strive to be the best golfer I can. If that leads me and if my career leads me to becoming a Hall of Famer, that's awesome. I'm just a South Korean born Kiwi playing this game of golf, and who knew I would be standing here and have played in the Olympics and have won on our tour.

**Q. Just speaking of Olympics, obviously an Olympic year, another chance to win another medal there. Knowing you're going to come into that stretch this summer with a victory in the first tournament of the year, how does that feel?**

LYDIA KO: It's awesome. I think the Olympics was probably one of my biggest goals going into this year. I played in the 2016 Rio Olympics as the No. 1 ranked player, and I think there was a lot of pressure internally. I was able to come off with a silver medal.

In Tokyo I was like, I already have a medal, so what have I got to lose. With that mindset I was able to play better and more aggressively and have a really good final round and won a bronze medal.

In my perfect fairytale story I would win gold and have the three collection of --

**Q. Pretty nice collection.**

LYDIA KO: -- three different medals. Sometimes it's literally a fairytale, and the Olympics is the best of best of each country, the best athletes there, and to be able to represent your country is just a win itself.

I'm going to enjoy it and Le National is very different to the other two golf course we played. It's going to be really tough, and I think the level of golf that is going to be played that week to win the medals on both men's and women's side is going to be very high.

**Q. Professional golf is week in, week out, new city, new golf course, et cetera, et cetera. When you have maybe down time, can you zoom out a little bit and realize how many young girls you might have inspired and how much impact you've had away from the golf course?**

LYDIA KO: I think the coolest part -- when you come to events like this and you see so many girls that want to get your autograph or take photos, that's when it really hits me.

I'm like, why are they asking for my autograph? I feel like I'm just like anybody else here in the room. I don't think I am that special. I'm just lucky to be able to do what I love doing, and the game of golf has given me so much.

For me to like take photos and give autographs, in a way I can give back, because I've gotten so much. And if I can inspire one more of these girls to have the dream to play right here at the Tournament of Champions in the future, that's my job well done.

I've got so much inspiration from the ladies I play alongside, and the players that have played before me I think because of all the work they've done and because of all the Founders have done, we're able to play in such awesome tournaments at such great locations.

I think it's part of the job, but doesn't feel like a job. It's the best part of what we do.

**Q. You mentioned weather being a factor. Any specific examples of how the cold or wind and even the rain earlier in the week made a difference in the tournament this week?**

LYDIA KO: I think the rain earlier and the rain we had over the past week prior to this tournament week made the greens maybe a little bit softer coming into the week. I think with the wind picking up over the weekend, definitely dried it out. The superintendents have been putting in endless hours to make the golf course immaculate. I didn't expect anything else.

With it being cold, obviously not hitting the ball as far, which makes the golf course a lot longer. I noticed that in the pro-am. I was like, man, I played here so many times but this golf course is long and like 40 degrees Fahrenheit. The golf course plays very different and we have to take that factor into consideration.

Sometimes we play in like 100 degrees and sometimes in 40. That's part of what we do. We have to adjust to it. I think fortunately for me, because I am a member here, I've been able to play it in so many different conditions that it didn't feel completely new.

**Q. You were talking about it being relatable, golf. Couple up and downs you had. Talk some particulars of your round. Ally was marveling at your up and down out of bunker on 13. How important was the one**

**on 15? Where there other moments that stood out to you?**

LYDIA KO: I think making birdies on 9 and 10 was a good momentum shift.

Birdieing 6, I was just so happy that I hit the green on 6 because I think in previous years I've gone playing like full rounds and have not hit the green at all.

So I was just like, yay, I have a birdie opportunity and I'm on the green. So coming off a birdie, coming off a hole where you haven't really played it well in the past and making a birdie was almost like a two-shot swing for me personally.

You know, I had a few good up and downs and I think my short putts were really clutch. Putting can get tough when it's windy. Even though might be two, three feet, they count. I was able to make the majority. That just kept the momentum going.

**Q. There was on the back nine a few of those, wasn't it?**

LYDIA KO: Yeah, I actually holed a really good par putt on my first hole because I crushed my putt. Trying to crush my putt but I was crushing a different golf club on that one.

So I made like a 15-footer for par on the first. Made a good par on 16. Alexa was birdieing quite a few coming down the stretch, and when she hit her shot on 18 I was like, wow, that looks really good.

Even though you have a few-shot cushion you want to make sure you get the job done yourself and hit quality golf shots and not let the focus get away from you.

**Q. One last thing. Proximity, because you live so close, by the 9th green or whatever, do you use your carton tournament days?**

LYDIA KO: Yeah, I actually -- my mom dropped me off on a golf cart. Every other day apart from today -- our electricity went out this morning. She used the blender and it then it -- yeah.

So apart from today, she dropped us off in a golf cart. It's almost that distance where you're not sure if you should walk or cart back, but I put the blame on my golf clubs and say I'm not walking back with my clubs, so we cart back.

**Q. So she's picking you up in the golf cart?**

LYDIA KO: She just came back so I'm pretty sure she



drove the cart back.

THE MODERATOR: I love that. Thank you Lydia and congratulations.

LYDIA KO: Thank you. Thank you.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports

