

Hilton Grand Vacations Tournament of Champions

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Lake Nona Golf & Country Club

Lydia Ko

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: Very pleased to be joined by former champion and Lake Nona resident, Lydia Ko here to the Hilton Grand Vacations Tournament of Champions. Talk about getting to play in your own backyard and the uniqueness of that.

LYDIA KO: Yeah, I spent most of January here at Lake Nona so it's been nice to be home. Honestly it's been a lot warmer than this is the last couple days. It feels like I'm at a whole new place to be honest.

This is a great way to start the season, just to be able to roll out of bed and you're already on the golf course. Always exciting to play the Tournament of Champions here at Nona.

Q. I know a lot of people say this is a hard course. What are some of the different challenges of this course?

LYDIA KO: I've been a member here for quite a while now and I still sometimes read the greens the other way round. I think there are subtleties on the green and quite a bit of grain.

And just because the greens are a lot faster and the course is in pretty pristine condition, the course does play a little bit different to maybe the middle of the year.

But I think more than anybody else, I feel like the Nona members should at least know the course a little bit better. There is no tricks to it. What you see is what you get, but you do have to hit a lot of good shots and you do get rewarded being a little bit more aggressive and going for pins, especially the smaller sections.

So just being really smart, know your way around the golf course is really important, and that's what I did really well in '24.

Q. How would you assess your game heading into the



season and what are some of the things you've been tweaking in the offseason?

LYDIA KO: Yeah, you know, honestly, the new season comes by, comes around really quick. I feel like the Grant Thornton Invitational was not too long ago, so to say the off season is done, I'm a little sad.

I think you really don't know how you're playing until you really tee it up this week. Luckily for us after this week we get a couple weeks off before Thailand, Singapore, and China, so I think this will be a good way to kind of assess my game and see what else I need to work on.

I've had seasons where I've started the season off well and I've finished well, so I don't think just one event is a reflection of how this season will be.

But I feel like I'm trending in the right direction. I wouldn't say I'm in the most sharpest shape, but I do feel like I made progress, especially in the last week or so. Hopefully I can put that into play and just take a lot in for the rest of the season from this week.

Q. Obviously very exciting news coming out about you being part of the new crop of WTGL members. Talk about the excitement of getting to be on that stage?

LYDIA KO: Yeah, you know, I've seen a little bit of what the men have played. It's obviously a very new and different concept. I think golf has grown. Where it really used to be only like a 72-hole, stroke play format, starting with the events like the Grant Thornton Invitational and in different ways golf has really expanded.

In a lot of countries screen golf has really developed because they're access to play golf courses are quite limited. So I'm excited to be part of the WTGL. Obviously it is still a very new product only going into the second season even on the men's side, so I feel like we're kind of getting lucky in the sense of we're coming in as it's getting a bit more solidified.

I've always loved team golf. Not really sure who my

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teammates will be, but to be in that kind of environment is always fun. So to say I have three pretty awesome teammates, I think that's going to be the best part of it.

Q. You played here when it's warm. I don't know if you've ever played here when it's as cold as it is this week. What are the differences about Lake Nona playing in warm conditions versus bitter cold?

LYDIA KO: Yeah, the golf course isn't short so when it is cold it is playing substantially longer just because the ball isn't carrying as far. I think I hit everything short today, so hopefully I'll be able to adjust a little bit better tomorrow.

You know, when I won here I felt like it was pretty cold and we had spots of rain in 2024, but nothing this cold. We had snow in Florida last year and I thought it was one of those random things that happen every ten or so years.

You know, we're pretty much getting to below zero in celsius us here, which maybe in other parts of the country they would be thankful, but when you're in Florida it is a little bit of a surprise.

Yeah, it's just the golf course is obviously playing longer. I'm wearing these pants that look like comforters, so at least I'm staying somewhat warm for relatively how cold it is.

Q. 39 players in this field, all-time high based on all the winners last year. What do you make of the talent level and the fact there were so many first-time winners or so many separate winners last year?

LYDIA KO: Yeah, the streak that we had was unbelievable last year. Every year it becomes a little bit more difficult to win. To have so many first-time last year was also very impressive. At the same time you got to realize some of these rookies aren't really rookies. They're people that won seven times on the LPGA and have had success in other tours as well.

So they are not as like I guess inexperienced as maybe when I first came on Tour. But I think all of us just playing really well and getting so competitive, it drives us to become more and more consistent and I think we motivate each other to contend a little bit more and just keep playing better golf.

But, yeah, the year that we had last year was pretty historical and I think Jeeno was the only one that won multiple times. Yeah, it's hard. I'm glad I got the wins early in my career. But, yeah, I think I'm still driven to play the best golf I can. As difficult as it is, I still feel I can compete at a high level. I'm hoping personally there will be more

moments of me hoisting trophies at the end of Sundays.

Q. Hall of Fame pairing for tomorrow with Annika and Charles. Can you give us insight into what it's like living around Annika, seeing her on the range, maybe when you were even younger, interactions that you had with her that made an impression?

LYDIA KO: Yeah, it's pretty cool to be in this pairing. I was super excited. All of us Hall of Famers, Lake Nona residents. So if anything, I feel like we have the most upper hand when it comes to our group.

But to especially be alongside Annika, I think I played with her in tournament for the first time last year here. I was really nervous. Growing up she was literally the name that you saw every week. Unfortunately I wasn't on Tour yet when she was ending her career, so to have this kind of opportunity to compete alongside her is honestly a dream come true.

When I think of my retirement down the line, I don't think I'm touching my golf clubs unless I really have to, but Annika is out here practicing a lot, especially with her son, Will, out here practicing.

So it's pretty cool that even after all this time, the drive that she has to still want to win and compete at a high level.

I think that's why she's had the career she has. People like that are different, and to be alongside greatness is always really inspiring. It's really cool to just hit balls next to her. When I was in my teens I would've never imagined a moment like this, you know.

Q. Obviously the grand slam is a big goal of yours. When you look at the venues for this coming season, what excites you about the majors and Riv especially?

LYDIA KO: Yeah, Riviera is -- I think the U.S. Women's Open is always highlighted on I think all of our schedules, but being at Riviera is obviously a very exciting. I think it's the first time the U.S. Women's Open is hosted there, so it's -- I think it's a really good step forward not only for us, but for our potential venues going down the road.

Winning the Women's British Open at St Andrews was very iconic. Did I think I would ever win a Women's Open? No. Did I ever think I would do it at St Andrews? Definitely not.

So I feel like if I did win at the U.S. Women's Open at Riviera it would be one of those moments where I pretty much catch myself off guard, I just feel like I'm out of place.

I think the U.S. Women's Open has always been a career

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highlight. It's been something that I really wanted to win, and I think that inspiration came in Seri winning the '98 U.S. Women's Open at Black Wolf Run.

I am sure even if you're not Korean, but especially if you're Korean, seeing her take her shoes off and hit that shot I think was very inspiring to all of us. Being from Korea, like she's always been that kind of role model for me. I think that's why the U.S. Women's Open has always meant a little bit more than anything else.

I haven't played particularly well in a U.S. Women's Open. I think the only time I did was really at CordeValle. So really be nice to feel that pressure of being in contention and to say I am a U.S. Women's Open champion, that would be a dream come true.

But I also said that I think I have nothing to prove now to anyone, to the point that just because I don't win that one, it's not going to put a dent to my career. It's just going to kind of put the cherry on top of the cake.

As much as I really want it, I'm not going to make it feel like this is the end of it. It's not just white to black. There is still a lot of things I can appreciate and take from it.

Q. It's only been six months or so, but what's your take on Craig Kessler taking over the commissioner's job?

LYDIA KO: Yeah, I literally just saw him 30 minutes ago and I was like, can you believe it's been six months since you've taken this job? Maybe the longest six months of his life.

As an organization and as members of the Tour, we're very appreciative of him coming on board. He's been in golf from the PGA of America to Top Golf and many other ways. He truly understands the game and understands the players' perspective, but also the business side.

I think it's very difficult to kind of appreciate both sides of things. In that short time I feel it's been great to just get to know him better as a person, outside of just being the commissioner of our Tour.

But with the new media rights coverage with FM this year and some of the new events and partners like Fortinet, it's been very exciting. A lot of big movement in the last six months.

We just I think hired a new CMO, Chad as well. I think as an organization we're definitely moving and trending in the right direction.

Women's sport has literally been on a high for the last few years, so to take that momentum I think is very important. We have great leadership that can take us in that kind of journey and upward rise.

This last six months has been great, but I'm more excited for what's ahead. I still feel like there are areas that we can become better and stronger as an organization as well.

I'm looking forward to kind of seeing the growth even more.

Q. Speaking of the majors, Chevron has gone from Palm Springs to the Woodland to Houston where they play the Houston Open. Do you know anything about Memorial Park where Chevron will be?

LYDIA KO: Yeah, I know that it's -- the only thing I know is literally what you told me. I know the men I think play there a few weeks before us and I've heard a lot of great things about the golf course.

No, obviously was a really big move for us to move from Mission Hills to Houston, to Texas, especially when we had a lot of history with the Poppie's Pond and from the Dinah Shore times at the championship.

But I think it's sometimes hard to just leave all the good things that have happened in the past, but I think for you to keep growing and move forward I think those decisions and changes need to be made. Chevron is an unbelievable partner that has contributed and tried to support the LPGA not only in the purse but in other areas as well.

Having the junior event prior to our championship for them to get into it as well. So I think sometimes we only see it in a very one dimensional way. It's a little bit more complicated than that. You see how much the KPMG Women's PGA Championship has grown since the LPGA Championship days.

So those changes are needed, and hopefully we can stay at a venue where we can create that rich history again.

And, yeah, I don't know much about that course and I didn't play very well at the Woodland so I'm all for changing.

Yeah.

Q. Wondering as an Olympic gold medalist what it will be like watching the Winter Olympics coming up? Do you watch the opening ceremonies? Do you have a favorite winter sport?

LYDIA KO: Yeah, it's pretty crazy. These years come by

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very quick. The year mark last August was like I can't believe the Summer Olympics has already been a year and in Milan, it's here. I grew up watching a little bit just because of Yuna Kim from Korea. She was a figure skater and had a very successful career.

So that was kind of where I got into watching the Winter Olympics. But I was talking to Danielle Kang one day and we said, I wonder what sport we could make it in to get into the Winter Olympics. We couldn't literally think of anything.

It's obviously so different. We're all Olympians but the types of sports that compete there are so different to what we do. It honestly feels like a different world just because it is so unrelated but relatable at the sometime.

So I'm excited to watch a lot of the Winter Olympics coverage. We have quite a few New Zealand Olympians that have been doing well in snowboarding and definitely rooting our New Zealand athletes as well.

Q. Curious if there is any new equipment in your bag?

LYDIA KO: I have the new SM11 wedges, which I got last week. And I am not endorsed. I'm not endorsed. I truly believe the Vokey wedges are the best, so I just have those.

I upgraded my -- I shouldn't say upgraded, but changed into my 440K driver versus the 430 10k. It was a big move, which this too I'm not endorsed. I have no club deals. The 430 10k my coach said I almost have like an emotional attachment to this driver, so it was hard decision to make, but the numbers and the shot shapes that I've been seeing on the golf course with my new 440K has been great. Those two are probably the biggest changes I made.

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