

The LPGA Drive On Championship presented by Volvik

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Ocala, Florida, USA

Golden Ocala

Maria Torres

Press Conference



AT GOLDEN OCALA

THE MODERATOR: Good afternoon and welcome to the virtual interview room for the LPGA Drive On Championship presented by Volvik at Golden Ocala.

Without further ado, we're joined by University of that Florida alum and Gainesville native, Maria Torres. Thank you for joining us.

MARIA TORRES: Hi. Thank you for having me.

Q. You were a five time champion at the University Florida and the 2016 SEC golfer of the year. So nice accolades. Just 35 miles from the UF campus this week.

MARIA TORRES: I know.

Q. Now that you're back in Gator country, what are some of the best memories that come to mind from your time at Florida?

MARIA TORRES: Everything. Last night like being here in Ocala got me to thinking of so many different, like my entire four years. Last night before going to bed I like laying down and I was like, oh, I remember this and like when we were like practicing or even going to classes. It was nice, that memory lane. I'm excited to go back.

Q. You ever play in Ocala or in a neighboring city around here during your time there?

MARIA TORRES: Yeah. We used to play this course a couple of times in the year to practice and get our rounds, qualifying rounds.

Q. This course specifically?

MARIA TORRES: Yeah.

Q. So you've been here before.

MARIA TORRES: Yeah, I didn't remember a little bit, but playing the holes I could see like -- I could remember what we used to play.

Q. Very cool. So during the pre-season when you would compete against yourselves to set your lineups or roster for the year you guys would play here to determine that?

MARIA TORRES: Yes.

Q. That's pretty cool. Do you remember what years that was?

MARIA TORRES: I think my four years we used to play...

Q. Every year?

MARIA TORRES: Yeah, depending on how the schedule was and the classes and everything we could come out here to Ocala and play.

Q. When you look back on your career at Florida and you see where you are now competing on the LPGA Tour, what's it like to return to central Florida as a professional where you really developed your game to get here?

MARIA TORRES: It's amazing. Like I said before, like after this tournament I'm going to Gainesville, so I'm kind of excited. Like I been thinking of, okay, when we finish on Sunday, like seeing everybody at that top of the course, my coaches, and even the tutoring center that I used to spend a lot of time there between the classes and the practicing.

But I'm excited.

Q. Very cool. Are you just going back to hang out with the team and little celebrity appearance?

MARIA TORRES: Nah. I just want to go see everybody, meet the new Gators, the baby Gators, see my coaches, everybody, the places I used to hang out. It was in the tutoring center. I know it sounds really -- but, yeah.



Q. You're the only person that anybody will ever hear say they're excited to see the tutoring center.

MARIA TORRES: No, it's the people. Like you go and study and then I would go talk out in the front desk. I needed a break. (Laughter.)

Q. Well, you mentioned that you played the back nine today in your practice round. The Aon Risk-Reward Challenge hole this week is Par-5 12th which is tribute to Augusta National's par-5, 13th. First of all, how awesome has it been to see the dedication of Aon to the LPGA Tour members with their prize to the winner of the Challenge at the end of the season?

MARIA TORRES: That's awesome. Like the first year we did it it was two years ago, and like I didn't know how that works. After seeing the reward you're like, okay, you need to get it going. (Laughter.) So it's kind of nice that they did that. They're trying to kind of help us, like in this the sense -- also like if you get a score like a low score it's going to help you for your score in the day, so you get two rewards.

Q. Exactly. Second question to that, what did you think of the par-5 12th when you played it in the practice round today and what kind of challenge does it present?

MARIA TORRES: The tees are back. It's challenging, like the greens. You have to know where to stop the wedges. It's going to be a key for that. And also if they put it in the front if you're going to go for the green you have to -- like if you miss it with the wood then you cannot stop, you will have to go chip around. So it's going to be an interesting hole.

Q. Little water...

MARIA TORRES: Yeah, the back of the green it goes like down, so you're going to be chipping. It's an interesting chip with the greens are going downhill. So, yay.

Q. Watch your speed.

MARIA TORRES: Yes.

Q. Let's rewind to last year. 2020 you captured a best finish of T-9 at the Marathon Classic. Obviously what a strange year 2020 was. What did you learn about yourself specifically and how did the year help you prepare for this year and beyond?

MARIA TORRES: So last year it's like there was a little like patience and resilience, like changing the rules, now we have this COVID, the pandemic that's a big situation from

the normal that you would like go to play, you didn't have to do tee times. You were going to -- like you couldn't go to restaurants. Now you have to like stay in your hotel.

And even the Europe part was really hard for me. Like I'm a really calm person, but that was like going to the golf course and coming back and you cannot go anywhere, it was kind of challenging.

And also like trying to -- when you go back home trying not to -- like you want to see your family but because you were in tournaments you didn't want to -- you didn't know where they were before, so just staying away from the family, that was kind of like -- it was a really challenging year for everybody.

And this year like I just -- it was going to be the same thing because we still have the pandemic going on. But golf game, well, you kind of keep tweaking things around.

Q. Absolutely. You made your first start of the 2021 season last week at Gainbridge LPGA. Made the cut, played the weekend, cashed a check. It's early in the year, but where do you feel your game is at and what is perhaps one aspect you're really looking to improve?

MARIA TORRES: Right now my game I think is rolling, like slowly getting into it and getting the timing of playing tournaments again. So I think slowly but like steady I'm trying to work on the routine. I've seen some stuff last week that I need to keep working on, like having like the same preparation every time, more consistent. So that's right now what we're working on.

Q. Your story is pretty well-documented when you first earned LPGA Tour status at the 2017 final qualifying tournament to become a 2018 rookie. But you did so by having to prepare in your homeland of Puerto Rico which was struck by Hurricane Maria in 2017. Have you been able to go back much to Puerto Rico and contribute to some of the relief efforts, and what is it like back home?

MARIA TORRES: Back home the hurricane, with the hurricane in 2017 is so much better. I think right now we're just dealing with what everybody is dealing with, COVID. But thank God we're better. Yeah, I go back and forth many times. Yeah, I'm still living in Puerto Rico, so we have like -- I've been in the cause with (indiscernible). They do different stuff for Puerto Rico and everybody around, so it's kind of nice.

Q. And they help out with the relief efforts?

MARIA TORRES: Yeah, with the relief and also with the --

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

we had earthquakes, so between hurricanes, earthquakes, and COVID, yeah, we needed help. Hopefully we're getting back.

Q. What is it like when you do go back home? I know you mentioned between COVID and having to be conscientious of your interactions with family and your involvement with them to make sure they're safe and healthy as well and just to be back home and practice. What's the feeling when you're traveling and then you come back as a professional golfer?

MARIA TORRES: Thank God most of them have already the vaccine, so I know they can still get it, but it's better. They are with the vaccine, so I kind of do the same thing. I go back home and practice and do my stuff and we go to restaurants outdoor or stuff like that, but it's really minimum.

Q. Keeping your distance from everybody. Last one I have for you, and if anybody has any questions feel free to comment in the chat function, otherwise we'll let you out of here on this one. March is Women's History Month, so in honor of that, which women outside of your family inspired you and why?

MARIA TORRES: That's a hard question. I would say my family.

Q. It can be in golf, but if it's outside of golf, that's a good thing, too. Someone that may be just a female that you looked up to during your life or maybe you've met and they inspired you in some way.

MARIA TORRES: Well, that's hard. Let me think about it. I promise it's not going to be long. I have to say another athlete, Serena Williams. Her resilience and how she comes back from like struggles, health and everything, I think. And how she dominates. But the amount of age, like how old is she for the sport. So I have to say her.

Q. And that's a mom, everything she went through.

MARIA TORRES: Yeah, when she gave birth and the health problems she had. It's amazing how she overcame that and she's playing now and healthy.

Q. Is there any quote you've heard from her or mantra or saying from her that maybe has stuck with you over the years?

MARIA TORRES: I wouldn't say a quote, but it's just the look that she gives when she's competing, like she's giving everything, and it's amazing. Like the way she wants to kind of destroy you. (Laughter.)

I don't know how to say it polite, but, yeah. It's inspiring and amazing for being everything, a mom and everything she has been through.

THE MODERATOR: Absolutely. Maria, thank you for your time today. Best of luck this week at the LPGA Drive On Championship at Golden Ocala.

MARIA TORRES: Thank you.

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