

FIR HILLS SERI PAK Championship

Wednesday, March 20, 2024
Palos Verdes Estates, California, USA
Palos Verdes Golf Club

Hannah Darling

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: All right, welcome back inside the media center here at the Fir Hills Seri Pak Championship.

I'm pleased to be joined by this year's sponsor's invite from the Therese Hession, Hannah Darling.

Hannah, welcome to your first LPGA Tour event. How has it been feeling the last couple days as you have been roaming the grounds and getting involved with the event?

HANNAH DARLING: Yeah, first of all, I'm so excited to have the opportunity to play this week. It's an honor to be here for my first LPGA event. I'm so excited.

I have to say the last few days have been a little bit overwhelming trying to get used to things and learn the ropes. I'm the new kid on the block so everyone is kind of looking at me like, who are you?

No, it's been fun. It's been great. Yeah, I'm happy that my dad was able to come from Scotland to watch the event. He made the trip, so it's been great to see him. I haven't seen him since I was home at Christmas, so it's been good to see him and fun to be out here.

Q. Who is with you this week? Can you go into details of what the overwhelming parts have been like and what's different than you preparing for a college event.

HANNAH DARLING: Yeah, first of all, when we play a college event everything is pretty much taken care of for us, and our coaches do so much work behind the scenes that you never even see, picking hotels, car rentals, all that stuff.

Then this week obviously I had to take care of that myself, and we had a nightmare with the car rental so ended up ditching that.

Yeah, I think just having to take care of yourself for the first time in a while, as I said, college we're very spoiled in way



with everything that's done for us.

But, yeah, it's been nice. This is what I've dreamed of doing for a long time. I think every young female golfer wants to play on the LPGA Tour at some point. Having the opportunity to play here this week and learn when it doesn't really matter, because I'm not out here trying to -- I'm obviously trying to play well, but the main thing for me is have some fun.

There is no expectations, results that I have to make this week, so being able to learn what it's all about out here with no expectations and outcomes, it's a lot of fun.

Q. You gained the sponsor's exemption because of your play at the Therese Hession and your matches there. What was it like when you learned you'd be playing in this event, and what do you remember most about playing Palos Verdes in that capacity to now?

HANNAH DARLING: Yeah, first of all, when we played it a month ago, from what I've heard, it's the most rain that California has had in a few years. The course was a little different. A lot softer than it is now.

It was a bit of a whirlwind when we played it. We realized we were going to be playing match play instead of stroke play, and that was a lot to come around to.

When we played the tournament we were told, you got to handle adversity better than anyone else. That's the message the coaches kept giving us.

We just went out and we won each point as it came. In the end, the team won by one hole, which was crazy to learn. And then the winning team obviously was able to nominate one of their players to play in event. I've been playing pretty well throughout the season and won three of my matches in the match play, so I was honored that the coaches decided to pick me.

So, yeah, it was kind of a surreal moment. I remember phoning my parents very excited and telling them all about it. I told the team and they're also excited for me.



When we were here, I had the team behind me and this time it's different. They're not here. The support I've got from my team at the University of South Carolina is unmatched. They're family.

Yeah, I wish they were here with me this week, but I know they're supporting from a far.

Q. Gemma is in the field this week. Anyone like her or anyone else you reached out to for advice? Have you seen anyone that you've been blown away by?

HANNAH DARLING: Yeah, Gemma reached out to me last night. I've not actually met her properly, but reached out and sent me a really nice text. So that's been really nice.

I also know alumni in the field this week from South Carolina, Ana Pelaez. She's playing. So I saw her last night and spoke to her a little bit.

I mean, I think I wouldn't say I know that many people out here, but the people I do know are definitely a huge support. Yeah, hopefully I can see them a few times this week and just have some nice chats with them, yeah.

Q. Hi, Hannah. How are you?

HANNAH DARLING: Good. How are you.

Q. Good. Good. What was that incident with the hire car?

HANNAH DARLING: Yeah, to be honest, it was about two hours worth of back and forward. Ended up with them not accepting a UK driver's license from me or my dad. Then the card got declined and there was no reason for the cards to get declined. So we got an Uber to the host family.

Thankfully our host family this week actually Zoey and Dave Carney (phonetic) they have been the nicest people and they're letting us borrow one of their cars for the week. It was a blessing in a disguise, but they've been great and supportive this week.

So, yeah.

Q. Walking into an event like this, is it more kind of inspiring for you to be involved in this kind of company?

HANNAH DARLING: Yeah, I think it's definitely inspiring. I think more than anything, I'm just very grateful for the opportunity. As I said playing on the LPGA has been a

dream of mine for a very long time, so to get the opportunity to do so under this situation is a lot of fun.

That's the message for the week, is go have fun, don't worry about how I play, and just go take it all in. Yeah, I mean, it's going to be a great learning opportunity to do this now under these situations rather than in a few years when I'm trying to get a paycheck to make a living.

Q. What's going to be more -- you've obviously played the Augusta National Women's Amateur a couple times. What's going to be more nervous, packing it up at Augusta National which you'd done a couple years ago for the first time, or teeing it up on the LPGA Tour?

HANNAH DARLING: I think when I played at Augusta a few years ago I was a little bit younger and naive, so I don't think I had quite prepared for the situation that Augusta was going to bring.

This year I'm definitely more prepared. I've played in some bigger tournaments. None as big as this, but it's going to be fun. Just going to take it as it comes. I don't think there is any reason to be nervous.

Definitely the first tee shot I will be nervous. That's just kind of who I am. I'm just going to take it all in and try and enjoy it.

Q. You've been winning golf events for years now. Seems like you've been around for a long time. What's the kind of progression you've seen in your game? It's obviously all trending in the right direction. Has it been quicker than you expected or...

HANNAH DARLING: If I'm honest, I would say it's been a little slower than I thought it would be. I came into university two and a bit years ago and just won my first college event. Played great, and coming off a really hot summer in Scotland, Curtis Cup and stuff.

Been a little bit of a struggle. Been trying to figure out some things. When you move halfway across the world there is things you have to figure out to take care of yourself day in and day out. I don't have my mum here looking after me anymore. That's a big adjustment in itself.

Trying to play golf off the back of that is a little bit different. I won my first college event three weeks ago at our home event, so that's given me a bit of a boost. I've always known my game is there playing in college. I've had quite a few good finishes, so I've always known it's there.

But it's up-and-down, and that's how golf is. You hear a lot of players talking about that, it's up-and-down. I'm just

learning as it goes and trying to get a little bit better every day.

Q. I'm just curious, you have such a huge stretch coming up here. What is your schedule like after you leave this week going into Augusta National?

HANNAH DARLING: I have a red eye on Sunday night and class at 2:00 pm on Monday. That's the only schedule I can think about.

But no, I've got a week off next week. I call it a week off. Still got class and practice. But a little bit more chilled week to catch up with exams and stuff that I missed, and schoolwork.

Next Sunday I'm going to drive to Augusta, pick up my mum um from the airport. My dad is here, so he's sticking around, and going to pick my mum up from the airport and see her again and appreciate being back with family.

Then we'll go take on Augusta and see what we can do.

Q. How are you a different player going in this year technically in terms of strengths of your game than you were last year at Augusta National?

HANNAH DARLING: I think I would say I'm more experienced, but I would say my golf game has matured a little bit more. I would say my first year I played I was a little bit immature in a way. I didn't quite know how to -- I knew how to play a golf course like that, but just didn't know how to strategically plot my way around.

I think I'm learning about my game a lot more, and I've played a few harder golf courses over the last few years, so knowing kind of some better ways to handle myself on a golf course.

So I've definitely understood that. Champions Retreat is one of the tougher golf courses we play as amateurs, so that's going to be a lot of fun.

But, yeah, I think I'm also -- I'm carrying a little bit more belief now than I have in the last few years. I mean, getting my first college win, to me, seemed like a very big thing. It seemed like an obstacle that I was going to have to overcome to feel like I could get that belief.

But my game is still the exact same still the exact same player. Just going to go hit each shot as it comes and have fun. That's what it's all about.

Q. What is your earliest memory of the Masters?

HANNAH DARLING: Trying to think. I think the -- wow. Kind of struggling to think on the spot.

Obviously I remember -- probably one that comes to mind is Justin Rose and Molinari played in a playoff. To see a British player do that, and obviously got Tiger a few years ago who won, that was unbelievable.

If you look to the Augusta National Women's Amateur you had Jennifer Kupcho win it a couple years ago. That was the first playing of it. I remember that. It's really cool. This is going to be my third year. It's cool to have played it three times, just all the history that that brings.

You know, Maria Fassi, she was obviously in the last group with Jennifer Kupcho, and I believe I'm playing with her tomorrow, so that's going to be a lot of fun.

Q. Curtis Cup as well, particular with Catriona there as captain. Great for the young girls, wouldn't it?

HANNAH DARLING: Yeah. Really looking forward to that. Catriona has reached out to me a few times. This will be my third Curtis Cup, so I am probably carrying a little bit more experience than other players that might make the team.

Yeah, I'm really looking forward to the Curtis Cup. It's definitely one the best weeks of the year.

Yeah, excited to, yeah, hopefully try and make that team and head to Sunningdale.

Q. Was I right in recalling when you were about eight or nine you weren't particularly that interested in golf, were you? Was it your brother that was more of the golfer?

HANNAH DARLING: Not really. I think it was -- well, my brother did play golf, but when I was seven or eight I got to the stage when I was trying to do all these different things and I decided to just try golf.

At that point my brother stopped playing golf and I was playing golf more and more and fell love with it. I always loved it, but didn't have as much exposure until the age seven or eight.

Q. Came on in leaps and bounds since then. How old are you now?

HANNAH DARLING: I'm still 20.

Q. To be 20 and on the verge of three Curtis Cups and LPGA Tour debut and a -- you would've taken that as



an eight year old, would you?

HANNAH DARLING: I think so, yeah. I think so. You kind of get wrapped up in it when you keep playing, but to look back at the things I've done, it's been a pretty cool few years.

Q. So my question is: There is another player this week who is also still in college, Rose Zhang, who won that same tournament you did the year before and shortly made her LPGA debut. How does that affect you as a collegiate athlete also looking to make her LPGA career debut at such a young age?

HANNAH DARLING: Yeah, it's definitely cool to see what Rose has done. It's pretty spectacular. She's an amazing player, great person as well. I spoke to her on the range the other day and she's got finals this week, which I have a little bit of sympathy for.

It's cool to see what she's done and try to emulate some of it. She had an incredible college career. She's an incredible athlete, so cool to see what she's done and play alongside her this week, yeah.

Q. So quick question: With all your busy schedules and college schedule as well, I just wanted to ask what advice would you give our other athletes who want to be better at balancing that dynamic between athletics and student studies?

HANNAH DARLING: I think a huge part is time management. There is enough time in your day to do whatever you want. It's just actually being committed to that and being a bit more disciplined I would say than others.

I think the other thing is one thing I'm starting to realize is the relationship you have with your professors at school is a big thing. Keeping them up-to-date with everything you're doing. I spoke to them all before I left and told them I was playing, and some were more excited than me I was playing this week.

I'm a sports management minor, so a few of my professors knew what I was getting myself into. They're very excited.

It's being dedicated and disciplined, and also enjoying what you do. If you don't enjoy it you're not going to want to be disciplined. So I think it's all of that. And having fun.

Q. Outside of the rental car fiasco, what's been the most unexpected part of playing an LPGA event for the first time?

HANNAH DARLING: If I'm honest, I think I would say it's how much I feel like I fit in here. I don't think -- I think the expectation, the vision I had before I came here is I'm going to see all these incredible professionals. I walked past Nelly Korda yesterday and, oh, my gosh, it's Nelly Korda.

But I really feel like I fit in. I played a practice round yesterday and just my game, it seemed to me like my game is not there yet and I need to keep working, but my game is there and I need to believe in myself and go enjoy myself.

That is the same with any amateur. The college game is so strong and you're really fighting to get up to the top of the leaderboard. There is so much talent in college right now. I think just, yeah, believing. It's right there.

Q. Unfortunately with college you still have classwork next week. What do you have to look forward to after your red eye to catch up on?

HANNAH DARLING: So our team is playing an event, Old Barnwell on Monday and Tuesday, so I'm going to potentially go support them. See how I'm feeling, how jet lagged I'm feeling.

Then Augusta National Women's Amateur the week after. My mum unfortunately couldn't be here this week because of work, but she is going to be on a plane next Sunday to come see me.

So it's going to be so nice to be just reunited with her. I'm very close to my parents so to see them after a few months, it's great just go enjoy being around them and my team again.

Q. So as a fellow collegiate athlete, there is a lot that we miss traveling in all the tournaments. Is there anything that you wish you didn't have to miss like from all the traveling and tournaments? Anything you wish you could stick around that college for?

HANNAH DARLING: I think it's just -- I think the best thing being part of a team so far has been being with the team. They really are family. We've got seven on our team, two Americans, five from Europe. We're just family. That's all -- the only way I can describe it.

We have our ups and downs as any group of seven girls is going to have, but there is much love in that group. I think that's the one thing that when I turn professional I'm going to miss the most. It's definitely the one thing I miss this week the most when I'm traveling without them.

Yeah, I mean, obviously there is the social life of being at college and stuff, but to me, I think there are so many great opportunities in college sport that you never really miss the social side of it, what you're missing back at college because there is so much good when you travel that you never really even think about it.

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