

FIR HILLS SERI PAK Championship

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Palos Verdes Estates, California, USA

Palos Verdes Golf Club

Lizette Salas

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 Lizette Salas, who's making her return to the tour since I believe the U.S. Women's Open in 2023.

LIZETTE SALAS: Yeah.

Q. Welcome back to the LPGA. I want to know about the journey and what the last few months have been like for you coming back to the LPGA and how you're feeling.

LIZETTE SALAS: Yeah, it's been a little bit of a rollercoaster. Probably been through probably some of the toughest challenges physically and mentally of my entire career. Learned a lot about myself, my body, and I learned a new level of fighting just to get back out here.

I'm just so grateful, not for the physical experience, but what it has taught me about myself, about how there is life outside of golf.

I was fortunate to be there for my family when they needed me, but most importantly, it's about people that believed in my recovery and the process, and really didn't let me alone, let me be alone.

So thankful for my trainer who has been there every single step of the way. My agent who was probably so nervous for the first six months, or the whole process. The doctors that I got to work with who are from The USC Hospital. And my family, my mom, who was there for me every single day. My nieces and nephews who really pushed me to get back out here and give it my all and play the sport that I love, and just really happy to be back.

Q. If you feel comfortable enough, what are some of those challenges and some of biggest lessons you learned from your time away?

LIZETTE SALAS: Yeah, I mean, I learned that the love for the game was bigger than I had ever imagined. I didn't think I was mentally capable of watching the Solheim Cup this past year in Spain, but I was there up in the middle of the night watching Team USA.

Like I said, I learned how to fight again, dig deep. The R word came into play a little bit just to -- maybe is this the time to hang up the clubs and focus on something else.

But I told myself I was going to be committed 110% to give myself a fighting chance, especially to play here at PV in front of my family, friends, coach, who has been so patient.

I just learned to give myself a little bit more grace, to be nicer to myself, to listen to my body. This is a grueling sport that not a lot of people can understand. We do this week in and week out and put our bodies through a lot.

Yeah, like I said, I learned so much about me, the capability that I have to keep fighting, to get up, one foot in front of the other, and make some goals that I could achieve for sure.

Q. I know this place has a special meaning to you. Like you said, where your coach is, where you practice. What does it mean to re-debut this year on the LPGA Tour at Palos Verdes?

LIZETTE SALAS: Yeah, it's an extra special thing to make my comeback debut at PV. It was one of the biggest goals that I had to make this the start of my 2024 season.

You know, I wanted to do it not only for myself, but for the team that has been there for me, my inner circle that has pushed me to not give up. Jim has been one of those people. This club has been such a significant part of my career, collegiate golf, and now in the professional world.

I didn't want to let anyone down, but I knew it was going to be tough. I'm just glad I'm here.

Q. I know you stepped away because of back pain. Could you walk me through when that first popped up



and what the official diagnosis was?

LIZETTE SALAS: Yeah, I kind of struggled with back pain on and off the last four, five years of my career, but not as bad as last year. We felt some significant pain in May, and we learned we have a couple of disc issues.

Then we learned it was a couple more things, little muscular stuff, which I'm thankful for the doctors that we got the diagnosis correct. And I was on crutches when my niece graduated from college. I was on crutches. I was not going to miss that.

And then it was like the day after the U.S. Open I kind of felt some discomfort, and then my body just decided to shut down. It was pretty scary. I don't wish that on anybody.

It's not only a physical pain but a mental pain just to -- you go through this process, like what did I do wrong, what could I have done better. It's a lot of self-analysis, a lot of figuring out what had happened and how can we not only overcome this pain, but not have to deal with it over and over.

So we've had some hiccups in the process, but nothing that's going to keep me away from playing PV, so I'm happy about that.

Q. I know you mentioned the dreaded R word.

LIZETTE SALAS: Yeah.

Q. At what point in time did that hit, and how did you walk away from that possibility?

LIZETTE SALAS: Yeah, I would say it was before -- so I stopped in July officially, and then probably about September I just thought my body was going to bounce back and I was going to be able to do at least the Asia Swing.

We thought, no, or we knew that was not in the works.

The Solheim Cup hit and that stung a little bit. We just thought, maybe this could be the start of the R word.

What's great about my team is they shut that down real quick. That is not going to happen. My parents, my nieces and nephews, they're like, we don't want you to stop playing. And I don't want to stop playing obviously.

We came up with a plan, and if it wasn't for that -- my own belief and my team's belief that I could still come back and compete at my very best then I was going to give it a shot.

So I don't even say the full R word. I just say R word. I'm thankful for my inner circle, the doctors that have treated me. I felt like a little lab rat for the first two, three months. It was not a fun experience.

But again, I learned so much, a lot about myself, and how much my team is just the MVP of this whole thing. Just very, very thankful.

Q. What was it like watching the Solheim?

LIZETTE SALAS: A lot of different emotions as well. I got a call -- I was very thankful for the call from Stacy. I knew I wasn't getting picked obviously. She did give me a phone call and told me. I respected her for doing that.

I said, you know, once I come back, don't leave me out of the circle. I still obviously want to compete at the highest level of women's golf. It's been such a significant part of my career.

But I was happy to see my teammates out there, Jennifer Kupcho, Danielle Kang, and just for Stacy to be such a gracious captain, and although technically they did not lose, it didn't go in our favor, they gave it their all and that's what I was hoping they would do.

Q. You talk a lot about the team and your family. For you internally, what's motivating you still at this point in your career where the R word is in the future now for you?

LIZETTE SALAS: Yeah, I think the way my brain works is if like someone keeps throwing -- like if a negative thought or a negative comment is thrown at me, I want to do whatever I can possible to reverse it.

So the more the R word and maybe you're done, it's like, no, I'm not. Like I want -- and it's hard to -- it was very hard to explain that to people.

It's like, oh, what are you going to do next? No, that's not a possibility right now. I know at some point I will have to hang up the clubs and go about my life.

But I want to give myself the biggest chance possible to make a full recovery and give it my all. Unfortunately I'm not as young as I used to be and I have to listen to my body.

I feel like we've done a good job as a team to be accountable for my actions and how I prepare and make certain changes for -- to make the best comeback that I could have.

Yeah, the more I hear something negative, I'm going to -- I get fired up inside is and say, now I have to prove myself wrong, that I don't have to give this game upright now.

Q. Lizette, you're such an advocate for mental health and have been really open about your journey with that. I this has been physical as much as mental. How have you given yourself grace as you've gone through this, and really from a mental health perspective, how have you kept it in check? Have there been things you've been doing, or it is just that tenacity of, you know what, I'm going to prove these people wrong?

LIZETTE SALAS: Yeah, it's been a combination of things. Like I said earlier, there is life outside of golf and I've witnessed a lot of life experience through my family. My uncle passed away during this difficult time or time that I was home. Couple really significant teachers have passed away also.

Just got to learn or gotten to realize life is bigger than golf. I've grown spiritually. I've always been a religious person, but more focusing on that and learning more about my inner strength rather than physically.

It's also just the people around me that have kind of opened my eyes to bigger things. I think in September I went to -- took a visit to Mexico with my parents and visited the home my dad was raised in. It just hit pretty hard just to see where we've come so far.

It's like I can't give up yet. Just to see how much they've fought for me, I can't let -- I'm going to get emotional -- I can't let this go right now.

So there are things that have happened that have kind of put some extra gas in the tank. Here we are. I'm so thankful for those beautiful experiences and I love golf, but I know there is more to life than just that.

Again, very thankful for what's giving me and I'm going to go and give it all I can for it.

Q. Kind of sounds like you're at a slight crossroads where mentally you want to accomplish a number of goals going forward, but your body may not let you and you're trying to acknowledge where your body is.

LIZETTE SALAS: Uh-huh.

Q. Where is your body right now and what are those goals this year?

LIZETTE SALAS: My body is intact right now, which is

good. We're feeling good.

You know, I think our goal is to get into a rhythm, getting back to tour life and back the competitiveness.

The goal is to not beat myself up so much. I've done that in probably my entire career. Obviously do I want to win? Obviously. Do I want to make another Solheim? Obviously. It's a process.

What I learned is get excited for the unknown. I think as an athlete we get focused on the end result, I want to get here. What I learned is that we forget how to enjoy the process and how to love this fight, that grind.

So I'm in that process right now. And, again, my golf is very boring, so I'm just going to go back to the boring golf of fairways and greens and try to make as many putts as I can.

Again, I wouldn't be sitting here if I didn't believe that I had the capability of performing with the best in the world. So just very lucky, thankful, and we'll see what happens.

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