

Cognizant Founders Cup

Tuesday, May 10, 2022

Clifton, New Jersey, USA

Upper Montclair Country Club

Lakareber Abe

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: You are one of the sponsor invite for this week at the Cognizant Founders Cup. You are coming off a win at, if I can say this correctly, the John Shippen Women's Shoot-Out presented by Cognizant. Take me through what that experience was like for you yesterday and kind of how you got into that tournament.

LAKAREBER ABE: Well, I got in. Summer Woods called me a couple of months ago and was, like, 'hey, we're going to put together this event and try to have some Black women play, and there's a sponsor invite up for grabs for the Cognizant.' That was the same week. I was like, 'oh, I would love to play.' Let me see if it fits into the Epson Tour schedule and everything else I had going on, and it just so happened that it fit out.

Yeah, I was really excited to play. Just to have a chance to compete this week and kind of measure my game and see where I needed to improve and compete against the best in the world. It was an incredible opportunity. I kind of looked at it as another round to just have fun and do my best and see what happened yesterday. Lucky enough, I pulled it out and get to be here for the rest of the week.

THE MODERATOR: The creation of the John Shippen and the creation of this women's shoot-out, especially after last year, has really brought to the fold of growing the game of golf as well. What did it mean for you to be able to not only win this type of event, but to see what it has created in the golf space?

LAKAREBER ABE: I think it's incredible. I've grown up playing junior golf, amateur golf, college golf, and just to see more faces like me in a concentrated space -- I mean, we've been there, but you never really see more than one or two at an event. I've been at events, and I'm the only Black woman.

Just to see it in concentration is I think incredible, and I think it's good for golf, and I think women's golf is growing, and that's important, and to see more faces that look like me I think is equally as important.

THE MODERATOR: I think I saw there was a playoff hole yesterday. What was that like being able to kind of to know that a sponsor exemption was on the line here?

LAKAREBER ABE: I bogeyed the last hole, so I had to go to playoff, and I was just trying not to be too disappointed and just be, like, you know what, it is what it is. Unfortunate, yes, but let's just do our best and have fun and see what happens.

When it's playoffs or match-play, kind of a shoot-out format, you really can't dictate what happens. It's just kind of like -- kind of lucky. You do what you can. I was, like, if she makes birdie, who cares? You did your best. Just hit every shot as good as you can.

THE MODERATOR: What was it like to be able to win that and then be able to get ready for Upper Montclair where you suddenly, you know, 'I got to get ready for this week,' or what was going through your mind?

LAKAREBER ABE: Honestly, I was just excited I had a couple more days because I have been trying to find a New York slice of pizza. (Laughing). Then I really wanted a bagel sandwich.

Yesterday I finished. Kind of got everything done. I was, like, okay, I'm getting a slice of pizza. I just did that and went to dinner with some of the people from Inner Sports and just relaxed. This morning I woke up, and I was like, okay, time to get ready and figure everything out.

THE MODERATOR: Time to hit the course. It's funny. We just had Marina Alex in here, who is from New Jersey, and she just gave off three places for pizza, so I'm assuming if you need a good place around here --

LAKAREBER ABE: Just ask? Perfect.

THE MODERATOR: Just ask her. Have you ever played near this course before? I know you played at Mountain Ridge for this event, but Upper Montclair, have you heard of this course? Where do you stand in getting ready for this week?



LAKAREBER ABE: Well, pretty early. I have never played on this side of New York. I have played in Long Island, so if the courses are decently familiar, I've seen it. Whatever. Playing at Mountain Ridge I hope helped and getting a look of how the course may look.

Yeah, I'm going to kind of take a look at it today, see what it's like, and then just try to keep telling myself golf is golf. Yeah, I'm excited.

THE MODERATOR: How many LPGA Tour events have you played?

LAKAREBER ABE: This is my first one.

THE MODERATOR: I thought that was the answer there. We see you week-to-week on the Epson Tour. What's the difference in mentality that you have right now? Are you trying not to have a difference in mentality?

LAKAREBER ABE: Honestly, the last few rounds I've played my goal has just been to have fun and kind of be where my feet are. I'm going to try to do my best and do the same thing this week and just enjoy it and see what happens.

THE MODERATOR: "Be where my feet are," I enjoy that phrase. With that as well, being able to tackle what goes into your work of prep when it comes to a brand new course, a whole new setting, and kind of being thrust into what is the Cognizant Founders Cup?

LAKAREBER ABE: I guess this week seems a little shorter because I played yesterday, and I just have one today, and then I only can practice I think tomorrow. So just trying to get as comfortable as I can on the course and see what kind of shots I need to hit and then do a lot of work on and around the greens and then just tee it up on Thursday.

THE MODERATOR: What have you been working on recently on the Epson Tour? I know you have been out there for a little bit, but what have you been working on recently, and what have you seen from your game the last couple of events?

LAKAREBER ABE: A lot of short game. A lot of putting for me. I've been working on being more confident in my putting process and being able to accept whatever results come from it. For me I think that's the biggest key I've been trying to work on.

Q. Just being the University of Alabama alum, there's quite a few of you guys on tour.

LAKAREBER ABE: Yes, there are.

Q. Have you seen anybody yet this week that's talked to you, kind of give you some advice?

LAKAREBER ABE: I texted with Lauren yesterday. Just asked a couple of questions. Then I just saw Emma from afar today. We kind of just gave each other air hugs and 'I'll see you later.'

I'm definitely going to sit down and try to ask them just for help on how to manage everything, what they think about the golf course, how to play and all that stuff. Yeah, definitely I'll lean on them probably a lot.

Q. Does that make you a little more comfortable knowing you have at least a support system out here, you're not just flying blind?

LAKAREBER ABE: It's awesome. I think there's four or five girls that I played with, so it is nice to just kind of already have some familiar faces out here and people I've spent a lot of time with.

Q. Seeing those women have a lot of success out here, how inspiring is that to you?

LAKAREBER ABE: Very. I think one of the things is when you are around people that you have -- when they're people you've been around for a long time, if they can do it, you can see yourself doing it as well. It definitely gives confidence, but it's also really fun to see some of my closest friends succeed and their dreams come true as well.

Q. Speaking of dreams, you're one of 21 LPGA-USGA girls golf alums in the field this week. How do you feel like girls golf helped you compete in your first LPGA Tour event?

LAKAREBER ABE: I think growing up being around a lot of young girls in a sport. A lot of girls drop out of sports, so seeing a lot of girls continue to play golf and being around them and being able to compete against them is a big deal I think. In any sport to have a lot of girls involved because that's how you get to stay in sports, and that's how you see the value in sports when there's other people your age, your friends keep playing too because it's hard to stay in something if you don't have a good social circle.

So I think girls golf really tends to that avenue of sports and preparing us to play and allowing us to have fun playing.

Q. We were talking about the numbers before. We actually have 80 currently on the Epson LPGA Tour



and 21 in the field this week. What does that mean to you just representing and the growth of the game?

LAKAREBER ABE: That's incredible. I didn't know the number was that high, but I think it's also a testament to the girls golf program and how you have allowed us to see the value in playing a sport like this, and how you have introduced a lot of women to the opportunities that they have through golf.

Q. How does it feel to know that younger girls golf players are going to be watching you and looking up to you this week?

LAKAREBER ABE: I think it's pretty cool. Someone else kind of asked me about it, and I was just, like, I just hope that I can set a good example and let them see that golf can be fun, and you can enjoy it, and it should be enjoyed, and even we get to this stage, it's still just a game. So, yeah, I think it's pretty cool.

THE MODERATOR: What is kind of your expectation or your goals for this week as you prepare for the Cognizant Founders Cup, and knowing that it's been a quick week for you, but what are you going into it focusing on?

LAKAREBER ABE: Literally just having fun, enjoying the walk, and being where my feet are. That's it.

THE MODERATOR: Sometimes when it comes to kind of that competitive mentality too, it's one of those sometimes you've got to kind of let that go and just, as you said, "be where your feet are." What does it take for you to drop that -- I don't want to say you're not competitive, but to drop that super hyper focus to be able to enjoy yourself wind chill you're out there?

LAKAREBER ABE: Well, I'm two weeks into this journey. It's a newer adopted mentality, but I was telling my friends just joking. I was, like, yes, sometimes I'm just, like, hey, Lak, where are your feet? They're on the third fairway. Just keep going. I'm just trying to find little games I can play in my head and deal with them like that.

THE MODERATOR: What kind of made you want to make that switch?

LAKAREBER ABE: I just noticed I had been putting a lot of stress on myself, and I had a lot of expectations, and it wasn't helping me to perform my best, so I just talked to -- I actually talked to my really good friend on tour, Jillian Hollis. She was just, like, 'hey, read some of these books.' And so I have texted her back and forth, and I have been trying to just learn as much as I can and kind of just get in a better frame of mind, and I know she's kind of gone

through that journey herself so these been really insightful.

Q. One more question about girls golf. Since you started to now, when you go back and help with the programs and all that, do you see an increase -- more girls for sure, more diversity? Do you see more Black women, more Latina women?

LAKAREBER ABE: Definitely, I think so. I think if you look at junior, amateur golf, college golf, there's a lot more diversity, and I think the depth of women's golf has grown tremendously over the past few years. I definitely think it will continue. You'll continue to see that trend for years to come.

Q. Do you see yourself as a role model for these girls in a way?

LAKAREBER ABE: I guess a little bit, but I'm also -- I always laugh. You know when you are 17 and you see a 25-year-old and you are, like, 'oh, they have it figured out and they know what they're doing.' Now that I'm that age, I'm, look, oof, they didn't have anything figured out.

I hope that I'm doing the best I can, but I try not to look too much into it and just try to do my best and be myself every day and hopefully that's enough.

Q. Do you get some questions from these girls that surprise you?

LAKAREBER ABE: Yeah, it does, and you try to answer it to the best of your ability and then move --

Q. Like what?

LAKAREBER ABE: It could be anything like the jump from college to professional, should they stay, should they go? What colleges they should go to? What they should look like in a college? How to prepare for college. It's really anything.

I think just like when I was that age, you're kind of just looking for any answer that will help you make the best decision.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports