

Cognizant Founders Cup

Thursday, May 12, 2022

Clifton, New Jersey, USA

Upper Montclair Country Club

Sophia Popov

Quick Quotes



Q. Sophia, you came over here, and you said, "it's been a minute." Just take me through your thoughts after day one at the Cognizant Founders Cup.

SOPHIA POPOV: I think by "it's been a minute," I meant I just haven't been playing very good golf, and under-par kind of wasn't my thing the last few weeks, so it's been really nice. I think today I got a feel for kind of the way I want to hit the ball again and the way I want to shape it. That feeling when you get over the ball and you are actually excited to hit it because you kind of know what it's doing.

It was a good round. I had one little rough hole on 8, but other than that, it was very solid overall. It's just exciting for me because it's been a minute.

Q. It's been a minute, as you said, but at the same time what's it been like to kind of get over that mentality of when you find yourself struggling on the course to still find yourself positive and competitive as you geared up for this week?

SOPHIA POPOV: I think for me I've been working on a couple of things for a while now, and it's kind of one of those things where you have to give yourself some time before it really clicks and to trust it, and it's hard.

Sometimes I'm very impatient with it, and I get on the golf course, and I kind of expect myself to go and shoot low right away because I'm hitting it well on the range, but you have to get a feel for it. You have to stand up to the ball and just feel the right things. I think that's something that's hard to describe, and that just takes a while to happen.

I think, like I said, this is the first round in a while where I've really had that feeling where a lot of things clicked off the tee box too. I made quite a few putts on the front nine especially, so that was really nice. A nice feeling.

Q. When did you feel that click? Did you feel it in prep or today on the course?

SOPHIA POPOV: Honestly more today on the golf course. The first few shots that I hit, I came off to a good start. I hit a few shots exactly the way I wanted to hit them, and I go, okay, this feels good, this is what I've been trying to do the last few weeks and just haven't quite got that timing or had that timing right.

So I could feel after those first few holes I go, okay, I think today is the day. You can be pretty aggressive and go for some of the pins because my game felt good. Yeah, I think within the first few holes I really felt it.

Q. Did you prep for this course any differently than you may have in the past when it comes to kind of Northeast courses itself?

SOPHIA POPOV: I have an affinity for Northeast courses. I was obviously born in the Northeast. Maybe it has something to do with that.

I really like try-lined golf courses. Ones like these that are very simple, straight forward, like right in front of you. Not easy, but something where I can visualize my shots a lot better.

I think sometimes when you play on some of the more open golf courses, it's hard for me to picture those shots exactly the way I want to hit them because it's not lined as tree-lined as this course is. So maybe that helped a little bit, and then it's Bentgrass.

I grew up on Bentgrass, and as much as I love the West Coast swing, I was kind of happy to get off of whatever we were playing on, whether it was Bermuda or --

It was just something that also is a big challenge for me sometimes. That helps.

Q. You had six birdies today. Four on your front nine, which was the back nine. You had three on 14, 16, and 18. Nice little stretch of golf there. What was going so well for you?

SOPHIA POPOV: I think that, like I said, I was hitting it better off the tee too, so I was putting myself in position.



When you hit these fairways, you get a little bit of roll-out and hit some shorter irons in too, so I think it's very key to be hitting the fairways and just giving yourself opportunities.

I gave myself good angles at that, so that on top of it and then just making a few putts. I think I've been putting well the last four or five weeks, but I've been putting for par all the time, so it's definitely different to have some looks at birdie and then making a couple because that gives you a feel for actually going under par and giving yourself the opportunity maybe to go under par overall.

Q. I was just about to ask, is there a different kind of feeling during this round when the putts started dropping that it isn't just going for par? It's for going even further under par. Did you feel that momentum starting?

SOPHIA POPOV: Yeah, definitely. I think that today I also kind of just allowed myself to do that. I think sometimes I think it's fairly common amongst golfers. Sometimes you have a little bit of a mental block that stops you from scoring. Sometimes you're a couple under par, and it maybe gets in your head a little bit, and you make one or two small mistakes, and you are right back at even.

I think today actually I allowed myself to just to keep going and keep being aggressive. I would rather take one short-sided shot and maybe make bogey as I did, but stay aggressive and make more birdies instead.

So I think that's what I was doing well today, and it's kind of a little bit of a mental switch in that sense.

Q. Is that what happened on 8?

SOPHIA POPOV: On 8 I just chunked it really hard. I think my 6-iron went, like, 120 yards, but I did have to wait for ten minutes to hit my tee shot. Turning 30 this year and ten-minute wait. Not ideal.

Q. Some factors.

SOPHIA POPOV: Some factors.

Q. Heading into tomorrow, what will you take away with a round like this that you seem very rejuvenated after? More of a relief.

SOPHIA POPOV: I'm also excited just to actually have an afternoon off and kind of relax a little bit and re-energize because I think the course also kind of takes it out of you a little bit, the energy. I practiced a lot the last few days actually just to get my game in shape, so I'm actually

looking forward to a little bit of a break, but I think -- I don't know.

One step at a time. This is a good round, but Matthew Wolff said the other day in an interview -- he said, "I was hitting it terrible in practice and playing well, and I'm just trying to enjoy myself out there and just have a good time." And I think fun has been I wouldn't say an issue for me, but I just wasn't excited about going out on the golf course that much, and today was one of those rounds where I was actually excited. I was enjoying it. I was having a good time with my group and with Max.

I think I just want to do the same thing tomorrow. Whether it ends up with the same score or not, I just want to have a good time and actually enjoy myself.

Q. And Max is on the bag this week?

SOPHIA POPOV: Max is on the bag.

Q. You helped him in preparation for this event a little bit. Talk a little bit about what that experience was like.

SOPHIA POPOV: Yeah, I probably should caddy more often before I go out and play because it really helps me, but he goes and just shoots 6-under after not practicing at all for about a month, and it was very -- it was actually cool for me to see. He was just very relaxed about the way he went about things and just went out there, hit the right shots, left himself in good positions.

I think that was partly the caddying too, of course, but I think we helped each other a lot. We know each other's games very, very well, and so I love to have him out here. I would love to keep him on the bag for as long as I play golf. I know that's not an option really, but it really helped.

Q. You mentioned your putting was good today. How did you find the greens? They looked a little fast just from watching. I'm interested to know.

SOPHIA POPOV: They were actually pretty speedy. I actually 3-putted on No. 2. Par-5, No. 2. I had an eagle attempt from about 30 feet. I would say 30 feet. Then I 3-putted, and none of those 3-putts were really bad, but it's just the greens were getting really fast, and they're firming up. I think they're quicker than the last few days, and it took me a couple of holes maybe to adjust.

I think you just have to be aware of where you are putting yourself. You have to be in the right spots on these greens and being below the hole makes it a lot easier.

