

Women's Olympic Golf Competition

Saturday, 10 August 2024

Paris, France

Le Golf National

Lydia Ko

Esther Henseleit

Xiyu Janet Lin

Press Conference



next 18 holes was going to be some of the most important 18 holes of my life. One of the things that I had said earlier in the week was I don't know if there is like another Olympics for me, and I will say there is no -- this is my last Olympics. I'm going to say it in front of everyone.

I think that was at the back of my mind. I just didn't want to like publicly tell anyone because I knew that being in this kind of position, it was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. So I tried to stay patient out there and I don't know if it was actually a good or bad thing that the wind was really calm today because it could potentially bring out some really low scores from people that were a few shots behind like Esther and Janet. I just tried to focus on my game.

I kept telling myself, I get to write my own ending and that Simone Biles had said and I had heard in her documentary. I kept telling myself that, and I wanted to be the one that was going to control my fate and the ending to this week. To have ended this way, it's honestly a dream come true.

Q. Is retirement impending for you?

LYDIA KO: I mean, I know I'm playing The Scottish Open next week and the British Open the week after. There's still so much golf to be played this season. You know, I have great days and I'm like, I want to play as long as I can, and then I have days where I wake up with a sore low back and I'm like, I don't think I can make it anymore.

So I don't think there is a specific date and now that I've got in the Hall of Fame, I don't know if that affects anything.

But for now, I just want to enjoy this moment. But you know, golf has given me so much, and I know that my ending is sooner than when it first started. So I wanted to really enjoy it, and while I am competitively playing, I want to play the best golf I can.

I think this takes a little bit of weight off my shoulders but at the same time, I've seen a lot of progress these past couple months, and I'm excited to see how I can finish in my last major and finish this season, and assess and see where it goes from there.

THE MODERATOR: I would like to welcome the Gold, Silver and Bronze Medalist from the Women's Olympic Golf Competition.

It is my pleasure to introduce the Gold Medalist and new Olympic champion Lydia Ko from New Zealand; Silver Medalist, Esther Henseleit from Germany; and Bronze Medalist, Xiyu Janet Lin, from the People's Republic of China.

Lydia Ko is now a three-time Olympic Medalist after earning the Gold today; the Silver in 2016 and the Bronze in 2020. A 20-time LPGA Tour winner, she is now a member of the LPGA Hall of Fame with her Olympic Gold Medal.

Esther Henseleit earned the Silver Medal today during our Olympic debut. She is a two-time Ladies European Tour Champion, and is a former LET Order of Merit winner.

Xiyu Janet Lin earned a Bronze Medal today in her third Olympic experience coming the second player from the People's Republic of China to earn a medal in the Women's Olympic Golf Competition Following Shanshan Feng in 2016.

Q. I will attempt to speak English to Lydia. You said at the start of the week, winning the Gold Medal would be a hell of a way to get into the Hall of Fame. What do you think of it you?

LYDIA KO: I repeat those words. It's a hell of a way to do it. You say those kind of things and until it really happens, it's not really factual. You know, it's something that you keep going towards, too.

Being tied for the lead going into today, I knew that the



Q. Some tears when the National Anthem was being played. What was going through your mind at that stage?

LYDIA KO: I got emotional listening to the Korean National Anthem in Rio and then the American National Anthem in Tokyo so I knew that I was probably going to be a little bit of an emotional wreck on the podium listening to hours. We don't have our National Anthem on repeat on our play list, well, I don't. So it's not something that you listen to every day.

But when you do listen to it, it makes you feel so connected to home, and I saw so many Kiwis out there with the New Zealand flag and I know so many people back home rooted for me, even though the time difference is not super ideal. But listening to that, I was able to take all these things in and I tried really hard to not try too much on national or worldwide television.

Q. This is for Lydia in English. In regards to the Hall of Fame, you went through a bit of an emotional journey with chasing it in 2023 and then this year, you decided to accept that it might not happen. Athletes don't like being told that it might not happen so was it difficult to reach that point of acceptance that it might not happen and how happy are you to not ask anymore questions about it?

LYDIA KO: Yeah, you asked me that question yesterday, so I'm glad that that's gone.

When I lost in the playoff in Bradenton, I was gutted because I know how hard it is to be in contention. I know how hard it is to win. Obviously Nelly played amazing, and the finish she had to get in the playoff, she did everything she could and I was just more disappointed in how I had finished in the playoff more so than just purely losing. But I struggled a little bit in middle of this year, and I felt like I had lost a little bit of direction, and it helped me realise that, hey, it potentially might not happen.

There were two key people that is said, you know what, if it doesn't happen, it's okay. You've had an unbelievable career and just because you're in the Hall of Fame, that doesn't make you any different, and that was my mother and my husband, and they said, hey, like whether you're in the identify or not, like we're still so proud of you, and the things you have accomplished has been so much more than like I could have ever asked for.

So I think they made me realise that, hey, you know, what even if it doesn't happen, like that's just my fate. I'm going to do my absolute best to keep putting myself in contention

and in good position going into the final days, but whether it happens or not, like I think there's a golf God somewhere that controls it.

For it to have happened here at the Olympics, unreal. I do feel like I'm a mythical character in a story tale. It really couldn't have gotten any better than I could have imagined, and I've had so many grateful things that happened in my career so far, and this really tops it. I couldn't have asked for anything more to be honest.

Q. In 2016, you got to watch Shanshan Feng earn Bronze and now that the torch of Chinese golf has been passed to you, and you've held a lot of young athletes on the LPGA Tour, what does it mean to be the bronze medalist at the Paris Olympics?

XIYU JANET LIN: It's actually funny that when I was about to fly to Paris, I called Shanshan, and you know, Shanshan is Shanshan, she's just happy every day.

She's like, "What's going on?"

I'm like, "I'm so anxious," because I feel like this year, I haven't been doing lots of good. I mean, I've been doing some good but my game hasn't been like super sharp. I had my own struggle. And I said to Shanshan, "I don't know, what should I be thinking going into this Olympics?"

She just asked me. She said, "Well, this is your third. So what finish you think that you will be happy with yourself?"

I'm like, yeah, "Just get a medal."

She's like, "Yeah, let's just do it then."

I feel like that conversation was very important for me and it narrowed everything down and I feel like this week, it's just very different to any other tournament in many ways. There's no cut, but then also you're playing for your country and it's a tough golf course. It's almost like a major setup, and I feel like also, it reward a second and third place, which normally it doesn't.

And then I just felt like after I talked to her, I was trying to think what she had done in Rio to win the Bronze Medal. I felt like she really enjoyed the week. She smiled at everybody and she waved at all the fans that cheered for her and I just feel like I'm going to adapt that and I think that's what I've done this week. We had a great week both on and off the course and also having my fiancée and the families and agents, lots of people here with me, it's amazing.

So I feel like I just pulled in Shanshan and that win me a

Bronze Medal.

Q. In the lead-up to Rio there, were so many naysayers about Olympic golf in the media and a lot of people didn't want to go, and you were part of it, and you won a Silver Medal. And then a progression in Tokyo, without fans, and now here in Paris to win Gold, your third consecutive medal.

What does it mean to be the first golfer ever to win three consecutive medals, male or female, and additionally to be such an integral part of the progression and the evolution of Olympic golf that has come so far in eight years?

LYDIA KO: It's honestly been really cool to see. I think when a sport is introduced to the first time in over a hundred years, which is the case for golf in Rio, people aren't sure what it's going to be like, and I think even the athletes aren't sure what it's going to be like. Is it going to feel the same as our majors is it going to feel just like any of our other events. You're not quite sure what it's going to be like.

Rio and Tokyo, yes, we had some unusual circumstances with Zika and COVID, and I think this is kind of the time naturally where golf is getting more settled and really stamped into the Games itself and with nothing outside of the things that we can control happening, we had some of the biggest crowds that I personally have played in front of, and it's been such a cool feeling walking up over the bridge on 1 and seeing all those people waiting and excited to see us and just hear the celebration of sport and the celebration of women's golf as well.

It's been great to see how it has progressed and I know there's been -- I don't know fits gossip or real comments that there may be a team format for L.A. With more of these being incorporated, I think it's going to become a goal and dream for many junior golfers growing up. I've had an unbelievable experience in my three Olympic -- competing in my last three Olympics. I hope that they are inspired, and kids in China and Germany and all of these other countries players that are here representing this week and last week are going to be inspired to be here or playing Brisbane or L.A. in the future. I think that's a big key. All of us are here as athletes and trying to do our best, but at the same time we want to inspire the future generations, and I think this week has been exactly that.

Q. Was there a time during the round where you allowed yourself to think about a medal or had you not even gotten to that point today, and if you did, did you have to reset at some point?

ESTHER HENSELEIT: To be honest, not really. I was so

far back coming into today, and I mean, I had a great start, and after nine holes, I looked at the leaderboard and I think I was maybe in second, and I was more surprised.

But I was always saying to myself, well, I think it was still four groups behind me and they can still make a lot of birdies. Especially coming in, you get some chances. 18 is a great chance.

I knew I just had to keep playing aggressive, playing my own game, and I mean, I played really well today. Kind of had a bit of a struggle at the start into the back nine, but yeah, I managed to make some great pars and then to finish birdie, birdie, is incredible.

But even then, I thought they might still get past me and I don't know what's going to happen. So it not sunken in yet. I think I'll need a few days. But it's amazing to be sitting up here with two of the best golfers in the world, and I think I'm the first European to get an Olympic Medal. So that's definitely very special.

Q. You had 45 minutes watching it play out. What was that like? You said it had not sunk in yet. But I guess, were you thinking, you were secured a medal, basically, and getting to share that time, what was that like?

ESTHER HENSELEIT: It was really cool. I mean, after my birdie on 17, I was really calm. Going down 18, I managed to actually enjoy everything, to look at the crowds, and sitting in the clubhouse, knowing that I had a medal, and then to share it with my fiancée who is on the bag this week, definitely special.

I mean, we were saying, if there's one person who I would want to finish in front of me, it's probably Lydia. And I mean, yeah, there's some players that you know they are not going to mess up coming down the last two, and she is definitely one of them. I was just kind of happy sitting there enjoying my Silver Medal.

Q. Another question for Lydia in English. How did you feel playing the golf course having a five-shot lead compared with 14, 15, 16, 17, when the lead was one?

LYDIA KO: Yeah, I had been really steady and patient all day. I think making that birdie on 7 was crucial for me because it kind of put me bag into red figures for the day and I could just kind of build on from there. I hit a great tee shot on 13, and to be honest, I didn't imagine it going in the water, and it wasn't like that poor of a golf shot.

And you know, in ways, I said it's a good thing I had a comfortable lead but I wished that had not happened at

that moment. You know, I know that especially from 15 onwards, it was going to be a very crucial finish.

So I didn't want to get that to go straight to my head, and I think 14 being a pretty attackable par 5 helped because I didn't have like a very difficult hole right away to kind of feel like I needed to get that. I made a par on 14; so at least it kind of calmed the nerves. But I don't think even making the double on 13 made me like too anxious.

I think I was a bit more anxious on like 15, 16, because there was a little bit of water in play and I had already hit it in the water on 15. So I talked to my golf ball a lot when that ball was in there, and normally I don't really, you know, say anything to the ball because, one, it doesn't listen to me and it won't listen to me. So even if I say "Go" or "Sit," it's not going to do as I say.

So I think there was a little bit of anxiousness going through those holes because there is water in play and at the same time I didn't want to back off and hit a tentative approach to it because you just never know what's going to happen.

So I just stayed patient and stuck to my game plan, and you know, 18, that tee shot and the second shot was probably two of the most important shots in my life because I knew if I laid up to that position that I was going to, worst case, I was probably going to make par.

So hitting those two shots on the fairway calmed the nerves and from there I think I was kind of able to take everything in. I just said to myself that I'm going to keep focusing and focusing until the ball drops on the 18th hole because I've had so many interesting things that have happened in my career that I wanted to focus until the very end, and then just say, okay, now it's done.

Q. Just to be clear, because the leaderboards are different, did you know you had a five-shot lead and did you know that with Esther's great finish the lead was down to one?

LYDIA KO: I knew that I had a five-shot lead because I saw the leaderboard on 11 or 12, and then, you know, I think I realised that I only had a one-shot lead when I saw the leaderboard on 14 because when I was on 14, I think that's when Esther had made her birdie on 17. That's when I said, Oh, this is not the most comfortable position.

You know, it's nice when you have a five-shot lead going in with like four shots, but at the same time, I think if I was in that position, I knew I needed to focus even more, and like every shot really counts.

I holed two or three good 3-footers, and you know, we practise a lot of that when we are training. But you don't realize how important those are until you're in those kind of circumstances and you have multiple in a row.

I think when I started holing them, I felt like I got back into my own rhythm of things and going down the last, I knew that I had a one-shot lead. So being on the fairway was really important.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, ladies and gentlemen.

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