

Ford Championship presented by KCC

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Gilbert, Arizona, USA

Seville Golf and Country Club

Lydia Ko

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: All right, welcome back inside the media center here at the Ford Championship presented by KCC.

Pleased to be joined by Lydia Ko. Welcome back to the Phoenix area. We were just talking, since 2019 playing. What is it like to see the LPGA back in a community that we have such a presence in over the last couple years?

LYDIA KO: Yeah, I think we had the Founder Cup in Phoenix for a really long time and had a DriveOn event here last year. I wasn't able to make it last year.

So it's good to be back. A little different area, like 30, 40 minutes away from where we used to be. It's cool to come to a different community, and I feel like there is a big community here, just even going to the gym seeing a lot of the members and residents that live inside the country club.

It's great to go to new golf courses, and I feel like it's an even playing field for pretty much everyone unless you're from the area or maybe unless you're like Alena who's more familiar to this place.

But, yeah, nice to have some warmer weather today, too.

Q. Been a little bit since we have seen you at the Blue Bay LPGA. I know you've been up to some things off the course, but what have the last few weeks been like for you? What was it like reflecting after the Blue Bay LPGA?

LYDIA KO: Yeah, spending a couple weeks overseas was really nice. Blue Bay was another one that we hadn't been back for a really long time. Played really well. I think the last time I played there or one of the years I was 5-over through the first five holes, so I had a much better start, yeah, just golf in general over that week.

When you come back from Asia it's always -- jet lag is little bit more difficult than when we go to Asia because it's hard



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to time the flying time and all that.

Luckily I had a couple weeks to be able to get through the jet lag, all the travel stuff that your body goes through, and do some practice and get ready for this week.

Q. And this course is obviously new for a lot of people here. Have you been able to practice yet? What have you seen from this golf course and what do you like most about it?

LYDIA KO: Yeah, I played the front nine on the first day and the back nine yesterday, and then going to play the back nine again in the pro-am today.

The golf course is in really good shape. I know there was a little bit of rain on Sunday. So, you know, maybe it's not as firm as it would've been without it.

But even compared Monday to Tuesday I felt like the course had dried out a little bit. I think that's what we're going to see throughout the week.

Yeah, I can't really decipher whether it's like a good golf course for a longer hitter or a shorter hitter or somebody that hits it left-to-right or right-to-left, but the course is nice. It's got a good mix of holes and a lot of like middle irons to like hybrid kind of length irons, shots for me, so I think being precise with those is going to be very important this week.

Q. How much fun has it been the past few events you played feeling like you're going to win every time you tee it up? You have been playing such solid golf. How much fun has it been for you to be back in that peak form, where when you tee it up people are afraid?

LYDIA KO: Winning in Orlando was great, especially at my home club and winning in front of members I see every other week outside of that tournament week.

Sometimes when you win you feel like, yeah, you can do it, but then to back up another great week in Bradenton -- even though I wish it had gone even better -- to still have another good week on top of that was really good for the



confidence and set myself in a better momentum going into this season.

I played okay in Singapore. I played well again in Blue Bay and gave myself another good chance. I think if I keep giving myself good chances, I think being very real and honest about what are the aspects I need to work on and what needs to get better to keep posting good scores and keep giving myself chances, I think being honest with myself and having good feedback and reflection with my coaches is going to be really important, not only when you're doing well, but when you're not doing well, so that you can kind of overcome those instances more quickly.

Q. A little bit away from this week, Judy Rankin is being recognized with a lifetime recognition award by the GWAA and the PGA. What has Judy really meant to women's golf? She's covered you since you came out. How well have you got to know her over the years? How much does she mean to women's golf as a whole?

LYDIA KO: It's pretty great. I think one of the biggest thing is at The Chevron Championship, all the past champions are there and we have a champion's dinner. I've been lucky enough to be able to attend that champion as dinner since having won it in 2016. She's obviously a past champion there.

I think sometimes when our generation or a few generations behind some of these former players, you don't realize how great they were. Obviously Judy was an unbelievable player.

Then she stayed and still stays with the game by covering. And I think as a player you travel a lot. For her to do this even outside and after retiring from competitive golf, I think that just shows how much passion and love she has for the game.

I think because of people like her, women's golf has grown so much. I think we do have to thank people like Judy that have kind of set path for all of us.

Q. You played the back nine. Wondering what you thought of, if you can recall 16, 17, 18, jus coming down the stretch, the island green on 17 and those three finishing holes?

LYDIA KO: My caddie said, oh, the 17th is similar to TPC Sawgrass. I saw it in the picture and I was like, oh, yeah, it's literally just a green and all water around it. A little bit of fringe, but not much.

So I think it's going to -- those three holes are going to play

a huge factor coming down the stretch; 16 especially if it's downwind. Yesterday I was only like 20 yards short of the green, so that could be easily a drivable par-4.

As always, there is drama at TPC Sawgrass; there could be drama there for us on the 17th and 18th. I think again, depending on the wind direction, players could be reaching it in two and have eagle opportunities as well.

So I think there is going to be an exciting finish, and hopefully I'll be able to be in the mix of that.

Q. Has there been a day since the TOC that you haven't thought about the Hall of Fame?

LYDIA KO: I don't think I fall asleep or wake up in a day thinking about the Hall of Fame. I think people around me think about it more than I do. To be honest, last year I thought a lot about it, just because you're so close.

Being in the Hall of Fame was never really a big goal of mine because I didn't think that I was maybe capable to be part of those players that's already in the Hall of Fame.

After such a great year in '22 I think it was the first time I was like, oh, maybe I could be a Hall of Famer. Obviously we all know that last year didn't go as well as I would've liked.

But, yeah, like I said before in other interviews, being one point away seems a little easier than two. Sometimes it's just easier said than done. Some players win for their first time in ten years. It's just not that easy.

Clearly Nelly is showing that it is pretty easy winning two weeks in a row, but when I'm out there I'm just trying to play the best golf I can. Obviously had a chance to be able to win again at Blue Bay, but Bailey played amazing. I came off the round saying I still played well. I could have been better, but I don't think I could have played better than how Bailey played.

Sometimes other players just play better than you. All you can do is do your best. But I'm just going to keep giving myself good opportunities and good chances, and I think instead of setting my goal to just be in the Hall of Fame, like while I'm competitively playing I want to win and compete at the highest level as much as I can.

Not just kind of set my end goal as the Hall of Fame. I think sometimes that makes you more narrow minded and makes me feel like, okay, I just need to win one. But I want to win more than one as long as I'm still playing.

Q. Just one quick follow. You mentioned being

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honest with yourself about what areas of your game need to improve. What is that area?

LYDIA KO: I think my ball striking has been a lot better the last few months than maybe when I was struggling the most. But also spending a lot of time -- my short game, it's very easy to think, oh, this one area is bad because your stats are not as good.

I think you have to be honest and go like why is this stat not good? Is it because of something else? Just being able to see the overall picture, and that way you get a better gauge of where your game really is at I think and you're more dialed in on what areas you need to specifically work on.

Q. Talking to your sister yesterday, kind of along the lines of not thinking of some of those big time goals, taking it a day at a time, how does the work on your mental game and the mentality that you have has really contributed to what we've seen so far this year and also just not letting that pressure really seep in? How much does the work you've had on your mental game help in that capacity?

LYDIA KO: I think I just have a little bit more of a different mindset going into this year. If I'm having to make more sacrifices or maybe an hour less sleep or whatever, it's just the small things. I think I'm more willing to do it, and also willing to take time off if it makes me feel like I'm going to play at a higher level at one of the events I'm trying to peak at.

I do feel like I'm in a better place mentally. I didn't play well in Singapore, but my sister and my husband was there. My husband said he felt so happy seeing me like not get so frustrated over a bad day. The first day I had a birdie-free round. Nobody wants a birdie-free round. You want bogey-free round, definitely not birdie-free.

He said I looked like I was in a better place. Obviously getting that kind of feedback from the people that are close to you is great. I think that gives me I think more motivation to keep working on the right things with my mental coach and keep doing what I'm doing and do other things to just keep improving.

Q. So Yeon, your career has overlapped for many years. With her announcement that she is retiring after The Chevron, hoping you could speak a little bit about So Yeon the player and then also the longevity of top female athletes isn't as long as for a lot of the guys. What kind of decisions -- or what factors go into those decisions for LPGA players?

LYDIA KO: Yeah, I think So Yeon came with a bang and won the U.S. Women's Open, and to my knowledge that was her first win on the LPGA. I think that was before she was an LPGA member.

And she was in that playoff or something with we Hee Kyung I think. So she's been around a really long time. I'm glad that I was able -- I was one of those generations of players that got to play alongside her and see her be the No. 1 player and win majors and compete against her.

She's one of the players that has a lot of good work ethic, and I think that's why she is one of the best female golfers. I guess like I can't really speak for the men's because I've never been in their shoes. There are maybe a few more things that people -- players may consider as being a female, whether it's wanting to have a family or wanting to do other things outside of golf.

I know So Yeon has studied and gotten her degree and I feel like no matter what she does, she always wants to just become a better person. So even though she may be retiring from golf, I feel like she's probably going to do big and amazing and successful things outside of that.

Golf is just a chapter of her life. Everyone I think is very supportive and excited for her and Chevron being a former champion of The Chevron Championship, obviously it's a great finale for her and her last event.

But, yeah, I mean, it's hard to say because everyone retires at different ages and maybe if the women's LPGA Senior Tour kept growing and is as big as maybe how the PGA TOUR -- the Champions Tour is, then maybe there could be another reason why like female golfers could play a little longer. I don't know.

Everyone is excited for her. I'm sure she's excited for her next chapter in life. I'm excited that I can be there at The Chevron Championship at her last event.

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