

Ford Championship presented by Wild Horse Pass

Tuesday, March 25, 2025

Chandler, Arizona, USA

Whirlwind Golf Club

Gabby Barker

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: All right, hello everyone and welcome to the media center at the Ford Championship presented by Wild Horse.

Joined by Gabby Barker, sponsor exemption for this week for the tournament. I'll just open things up asking that. You received your sponsor's exemption from the Thunderbirds this week. What was just reaction to receiving the exemption and the news.

GABBY BARKER: Ultimately I was very surprised. I was always just trying to get myself into the Monday qualifier just with no status for me. I was like, what can I do to get myself into the Monday qualifier, whether that's giving back to the community just trying to find a way.

What was super funny was there was a group of people who happened to get on a makeshift phone call which was to talk about the children's clinic that I was going to be a part of that I already said yes to.

All these people are on the call and they start talking about the kids' clinic, and all of a sudden they go, no, we're kidding. Gabby, we're here on this call to let you know we're going to give you the sponsor's exemption into the Ford Championship.

I mean, tears are rolling and everything was just like, am I really getting that sponsor's exemption? They were super excited, and I'm just fortunate that the Thunderbirds were able to give me the opportunity to get out there and showcase my game in front of the world, alongside the best players in the world.

Q. That's an awesome story. I did not know that. You're also the first female Native American professional golfer. Talk about how excited you are this week not only teeing it up for yourself, but as representative of your culture.

GABBY BARKER: It's very unique, especially being here with Gila River. It's a great opportunity to have that



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connection to them and the culture that I have. Indian Country has always been super positive and uplifting in every aspect of my life, including obviously golf specifically.

To be able to go out there as a Native American woman and to be able to showcase this alongside other amazing women and to have Gila River support the LPGA is just beautiful.

Q. Could you talk a little bit about your background in golf and your journey up this point?

GABBY BARKER: So I started golf when I was six. I wasn't really a big golfer until I hit maybe 13, 14 years old. I played every sport under the sun, basketball, tennis, everything like that. I just kind of fell in love with the game. It became a team sport for me, which now it's not. It's completely different.

So something little like that can spark a kid's interest is exactly what happened to me. To be able to go out there with a group of friends and be able to play the sport that I love is great.

It took me to great places all over the world and to Texas Tech where I figured out maybe professional golf could be in my eyesight for the near future, and that's exactly where I'm at right now.

Q. I've heard you played here, Whirlwind Golf Club, before. Where are your thoughts on the course and what it's going to take to have a low score this week?

GABBY BARKER: One, having the LPGA here at Whirlwind Golf Club, my home course in Arizona is just spectacular. You show up one day a week ago and this course is already in pristine shape. Now with the grandstands, all that, it's absolutely beautiful.

It's going to be a great challenge I think for the LPGA players this week, and I'm looking forward to how the course holds up and just super excited about it.

Q. First of all, myself and everyone else from Whirlwind Golf Club are super pumped to see you out



there. Super proud of what you have achieved so far. You've had a little bit of a difficult year up to this point. I wanted to touch base on that. You had an incident during the LET Q school, and it was really cool how you handled that. Especially myself being a professional golfer, to see stuff like that can completely break you, and now you're standing up there about to play on the biggest Tour in the world. Can you just quickly let everyone know what happened and where you are now?

GABBY BARKER: Yeah, so the story about what happened at the beginning of the December, it was LET Q-School, and unfortunately I had been working my tail off to be able to perform well at Q-School. I went all the way to Morocco. Paid the money, flew there. Unfortunately happened to miss my tee time. I have no idea. I had 12 hours of sleep. I don't know if it was jet lag or what; just didn't wake up. It was a whirl wind.

I don't think I've cried that much in my entire life for something like that because it was such a good opportunity to go out there and travel the world and experience it, sorry talking about it still hurts.

But now it's like I don't think I would be where I was without that. Golf is hard in itself, but looking back it's like, okay, I know that I've overcome so much stuff, whether it's life, golf, other challenges, and to know that I made it through all that is just like a pat on the back.

It's kind of crazy.

So, yeah, I wouldn't be there without it; I wouldn't be here without it.

Q. Love you.

GABBY BARKER: (Smiling.)

Q. I wonder, could you talk a little bit about the relationship you might have with Notah Begay?

GABBY BARKER: I love the story. So back when I was at Texas Tech I was playing really well and my coach knows Notah Begay really well. They grew up in the same area in New Mexico. He reached out to Notah and goes, hey, I have this girl, she's native, she plays for me, and she's playing really well. I wonder if I can connect you guys.

He kind of gets a little skeptical about it, like, a native girl playing in college golf? It's never heard of. You get the rare occasion, but the fact that my coach is really excited about it gave him this, who is this girl?

So he goes to the world ranking golf stat ranking and starts scrolling and scrolling and trying to find my name. He's like, I don't see her name on this. At the time I was No. 1 in the country and he had no idea.

So since then it's always kind of this great relationship that we have we've built in terms of he's been my mentor and giving me all access to his brain in terms of hitting golf shots or learning the business side of golf.

So ultimately, I owe a lot to Notah. He has definitely helped me and gave me this journey of golf as a career. He's been sitting right beside me.

Q. Actually just talked to Notah yesterday. He says hi. He also said that you're a wonderful representative of the Native American community. What does that mean to you to hear that from him?

GABBY BARKER: Probably more than you know. It's sometimes scary personally to be able to be the first, and that's what I kind of lean on him for. He was the first before I was in the men's world.

So for me as a woman golfer it is, it's challenging. I definitely get put in the spotlight a little more than I would like. It's beautiful to be able to share about my culture and be a represent for Indian Country and really any Native American community out there.

Any way that I can help push our culture and the boundaries of what we have set for us, that's what I'm willing to do.

Q. How does your game feel going into this week?

GABBY BARKER: It honestly feels good. I've been working since November to be able to prepare for LET, and that went wrong, but I'm still -- I was like, okay, something is going to come up. Something is going to happen. Just trying to get my get wheels turning.

That's why I was so excited to get this sponsor's exemption, because my game is trending in the right direction. I'm hoping that this week is kind of where I showcase it.

Q. I know that you were involved with the youth community day. Our Girls' Golf program was there. Obviously we are working hard to get more girls into the game. Just talk about what getting more girls and being an inspiration means to you.

GABBY BARKER: You know, I definitely believe that girls need to be out doing golf, because I feel like it has given

me such a, I don't know, like an opening to getting to meet new people, the relationships, and building confidence, and being able to walk up to a golf course that is mainly surrounded by men and just feel comfortable.

So to see all the girls out there just having a blast and just living in the moment, sometimes I want to go back and feel that way, too. I think it's beautiful to see all these girls just loving the game golf.

Q. One of our slogans for the program is "Little Girls, Big Dreams." Can you just reflect on your dreams when you were younger?

GABBY BARKER: First it was basketball, but in relation to golf, everybody dreams something that they do is going to be really big and dramatic. To be able to now look back at little me and say, I played in the U.S. Women's Open. Nobody -- that's an accolade that not many people can talk about.

For me to be out here and just for one say that I am a professional golfer is ridiculous. Little six year old Gabby probably wouldn't have thought that.

Q. You may not know, but curious if you've heard of the Laurie Piestewa Games that take place here. They're national Native American games bringing thousands of Native American athletes here to the valley every year. They don't have golf yet. They have everything else, so that might be something?

GABBY BARKER: Maybe that's something to work on.

Q. Might want to lobby for that. They have native girls doing weight lifting, basketball, everything except golf.

GABBY BARKER: I think that's something we can work on.

Q. I know obviously you have plenty of competitive experience playing on the Epson Tour, especially the desert out here. When you look back on the Epson Tour, do you feel more prepared to tackle an opportunity like this having so many competitive reps under your belt?

GABBY BARKER: Definitely. I think Epson Tour is the breeding ground for bringing in amazing talent to the LPGA. I know friends who I have been playing against for the last couple years, and it's like you can see them just grow on the Epson Tour just watching them. Even for me. I can't physically see it, but I can see my friends doing it.

To see them out here on this stage, that's exactly where

we all need to be. Epson Tour is giving us the foundation to become really, really good golfers.

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