

NW Arkansas Championship

Thursday, September 23, 2021

Rogers, Arkansas, USA

Pinnacle Country Club

Gaby Lopez

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: All right, everyone welcome inside the Walmart NW Arkansas Championship Presented by P&G virtual media center.

I am proud to be joined by Gaby Lopez, a University of Arkansas Razorback alum. What are some of the feels and emotions you have as you return to Arkansas, especially the way that this tournament was last year to where we are right now?

GABY LOPEZ: Yeah, it's awesome to come back home. It's officially my second home. This place has given me so many good memories, great experiences. I grew up as a solid player here.

The University of Arkansas program gave me so many tools to be able to be prepared for professional golf. I'm very lucky to call Shauna and Mike my head coaches and my assistant coach. It's great.

I mean, I'm so happy that we are back with fans. I'm so happy that we're able to interact with our host families. This community has been amazing to the LPGA, the caddies, players, and I feel that I'm in a very lucky spot.

THE MODERATOR: I know when you come back here it's always so heartwarming. This community really centers itself around the LPGA Tour. What's it like with all the structures back up? I know last year it was a lot different than what we're used to because of everything that had to happen with COVID.

GABY LOPEZ: Yeah, first of all, I just want to thank Walmart, P&G, my sponsors, just making this amazing event happen last year in the middle of a pandemic. I know it's really hard and takes a lot of effort and time and dedication bringing up such a great event and having one of the strongest purses in a regular event.

This year so far it's been such a blessing. Yeah, having the structures back, having the fans, having so many people to -- having the kids back, I mean, just warms my heart and tells me golf is still growing and people are still

very interested in this sport, which I think in the middle of the pandemic golf increased the amount of golfers, and that's great for us, for the LPGA, and for the sport.

THE MODERATOR: Highlighting your Razorback connection, you've been playing in this tournament since 2013 when you were a freshman playing alongside Stacy Lewis when she was No. 2 in the world. I saw a picture. I think you were able to play with Cory, who is one of the sponsor invites this week. What's that like for you to continuously come back every year and see not only the growth of the Arkansas program, but also the growth of golfers coming through that are playing this tournament?

GABY LOPEZ: Yeah, this is one of the huge blessings that the University of Arkansas offers to every college kid is being able to play a professional event at home. Being able to play alongside the No. 2 in the world when I was playing with Stacy and just kind of manage yourself in a bigger stage.

I feel that's such a unique opportunity that very few universities can offer. I'm very lucky that the program has grown so much since I got here. And being able to grow and mature as a player, also. It's so fun to be able to share memories with Cory, Brooke, all the girls coming up.

You see so many girls from the program just coming stronger and stronger and going to Q-School. You see Alana this week, probably she's not as mentioned as a solid player as she is, because she's an amazing and strong golfer and she just played great last week at Portland.

So you see how much this program means to us and how much this opportunity, this event has made is mature as a golfer and as a person.

THE MODERATOR: You were able to hopefully maybe put the clubs down for a little bit after the AIG Women's Open. What have the last few weeks been like for and what you have you been working on as you got ready for Walmart this week?

GABY LOPEZ: Yeah, I took a long break because I needed it. My mind, my body needed it after two weeks in Tokyo and two weeks in Scotland. It was just a little too much for travel.



So I think -- I've always told Cory and the girls coming up that listen to your body, listen to your mind. It's as important as playing and practicing. So, yeah, I been working on just kind of taking a little bit more -- making more solid my swing, just a little more angle positions. A lot of practicing on the golf course.

I feel that wedge play, this golf course depends a lot of the wedge play, and being able to practice that at home and being prepared for exactly this week is great to have that time off.

THE MODERATOR: This golf course allows for some pretty low numbers. Where do you think it plays to your strengths and what are you excited about this year at Pinnacle Country Club?

GABY LOPEZ: Yeah, I think that this golf course makes a challenge in every single area of the your game. You are got to drive it very well to be able to score low, and you got to have your wedges in play. You're going to hit your long irons. No. 11, that 190 par-3, so still you got to be very smart off the tee to be able to attack those par-5s.

You got to roll it good. The greens and the condition of the golf course is unbelievable. Yeah, I feel that the more experience you have on the greens, it's easier to fall in.

THE MODERATOR: For just another Razorback connection we talked about Maria will be coming in in a little bit. She just started her Maria Fassi Foundation to give back to a lot of the kids here at Northwest Arkansas. What does that mean to you? I know you're into giving back to the younger generation, students of the game. What does it mean to see someone like Maria to be able to start that foundation early in her career?

GABY LOPEZ: That's awesome. I'm very proud of her. Having a foundation, having just the connection with the kids, it's unbelievable. I hope that she has a team around her so she doesn't feel this much pressure, doesn't feel that it's too much work.

It's awesome that she has the time, she has all the tools to achieve that. Yeah, I just hope this game keeps improving, keeps growing into the new generations. I feel there is a lot of potential in the younger girls and the girls coming up in Symetra or Q-School.

THE MODERATOR: We talked about just kind of the essence of community and the essence of what this tournament means to the Rogers, Arkansas community. Have you been staying with a host family? Is it one of those that you've had that host family since -- I want to say

2013, but you were still in college -- but is that kind of the connection you feel to this place as well?

GABY LOPEZ: Oh, for sure. Being able to stay with the same family, being able to kind of connect. I feel that a lot of girls out here have a more than just a host family. I have a perfect example. My friend Nicole Broch Larsen. She comes back off weeks and stays with her host family for not only the tournament, but feels like she has a home in the U.S.

That's when what this community about, creating families, great relationships, and I feel that it's more than golf.

THE MODERATOR: We only have a few events coming up. We've got the home stretch in front of us. What does it mean to be able to come back to a place that you're so familiar with, you feel confident at, as we get back to the grind of a couple tournaments in a row?

GABY LOPEZ: Yeah, it's great. You know, it seems that it's a lot of hard work for me for this week, but it's such an easy event for me. I love it. It flows so much in my veins. I just love it. It's just an opportunity to be blessed once again. It's easy. Great golf course. Great community. The food is amazing. The staff, everyone that works here is just very giving to the sport.

Just very lucky and hopefully we can finish the year very strong.

Q. (No microphone.)

GABY LOPEZ: Yeah, I agree that playing the Olympic Games without fans it's such a different environment. Rio 2016 was just too much excitement for me. It was too much excitement. I was very, very happy. Too much adrenaline.

I feel that in the first tee I wasn't shaking because of nervous, I was shaking because I couldn't handle that I wanted to play so badly in this tournament.

But Tokyo, it felt like a regular event without fans. But also for me it was just more the experience of carrying the flag for Mexico in the opening ceremony. That was a highlight for me. Of course I wanted to get a medal. I was there for almost three weeks, so a little too long for me.

I was very excited to do that, but it was a dream come true for sure. Being able to carry the flag for the biggest event of sports in the world means much more than everything.

Q. Had some good rounds, but not great rounds. What's it going to take to put together three great



rounds?

GABY LOPEZ: Yeah, I think this time is very different. I get to know myself much more with having two wins on my back. I know I can't rely on that because it's in the past and I got to look in the present. It's still going to bring me confidence.

And having three good rounds here, it takes a lot of putts to drop, so I got to be good on my speed. I know this golf course can be played really low, and having that aggressive mentality. I'm going to try to birdie every single hole and see what happens.

Of course it depends of the weather, the wind changes, but try and stay aggressive, try to hit the right speed on every putt. That's I think is exactly what it takes to go low here.

Q. (No microphone.)

GABY LOPEZ: Yeah, I don't want to say it's hard. To me it's little easier because that's my personality. I'm a very open player. I like to sign balls in the middle of the round. I like to give a golf ball to a little kid or to anyone. To me that's not the hard part.

I know it demands a little bit more tome off the golf course with maybe interviews our press conferences, but I like it. I enjoy it. It's nothing that has been heavy or I'm carrying on my back. I just got to be more precise on my resting time. I got to be very responsible in when do I eat, go to bed. If I'm physically energetic, I feel it's probably taken care of.

Q. (No microphone.)

GABY LOPEZ: I'm feeling good. Thankfully, yeah. I don't have any injuries. I suffered a couple a couple years ago and having an injury is always hard. It's really tough.

But being mentally rested from the month off, that's exactly what I needed after so much going on in the last couple weeks.

THE MODERATOR: I think that will do it for us here. Thank you for giving us your time there.

GABY LOPEZ: No, thank you guys.

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