

# NW Arkansas Championship

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Rogers, Arkansas, USA

Pinnacle Country Club

## Maria Fassi

### Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: All right, welcome inside the media center here at the Walmart NW Arkansas Championship presented by P&G. I am pleased to be join the by former Razorback Maria Fassi. Welcome home.

MARIA FASSI: Yes.

**Q. Welcome back home for you you. What does it mean to have this event back in your backyard once again?**

MARIA FASSI: It's awesome. Of course, being back in Hog country is always good. Even more so now that I'm a resident in Northwest Arkansas. I get to host some people at my house for dinners. I get to sleep in my own bed. Have a full closet and not a suitcase. You know, it's always the little things.

Super happy to be back. I think it's a lot of people's as favorite tournament, and of course for all us former Razorbacks it's even more special having so many people support us and come out and cheer us on.

Very happy and grateful here.

**Q. Long-standing tradition in this community, on this tour; this is the 18th edition. Just seeing the evolution from when you were at school, what has it been like to be a part of the fabric of this event?**

MARIA FASSI: It's insane. I think not only seeing like the tournament side grow, but just the community get more involved year after year. I don't know how that's even possible. Every year it's like you get surprised for the better.

Every year I think the tournament is great. I don't know what else to expect, but then somehow the following year it gets better. So, yeah, it's been super cool to see in the last eight years how much it's changed, how much more companies and people have gotten involved on and off the golf course with stuff through the tournament.

And, yeah, I love that the Razorbacks have the ongoing tradition of having at least one of their players compete in this event. I know when I was in school it was a huge deal for me and I got to do it a few times.

I'm actually paired with one of the Razorbacks this week. Yeah, just very excited to kind of get out and play. Like I said before, just see the support from the people.

**Q. Something that you took on over the past couple years is your foundation, Fassi & Friends. I feel like that's grown every year along with this tournament. What are some of the events you've had on the docket for this week and how much has it meant to you to see the growth of your own foundation in the venue now call home?**

MARIA FASSI: Yeah, I mean, this is our fourth year of the foundation. We had very successful event last night at Top Golf. A lot of new faces, which you always love to see new people. A lot of familiar faces as well, which means a lot because their continued support has helped us change a lot of families' lives and encourage people and kids to learn a little bit more about golf, get comfortable in what maybe could have been an uncomfortable place for them to be.

Yeah, today we have a Fassi & Friends Festival as we call it. Expecting over 130 kids to come learn about golf but mainly just kind of have fun, loosen up, interact with each other, help each other out, learn from people's differences, both physical intellectual, whatever it is. It's been so cool to see the foundation continue to grow.

I couldn't do it without all the amazing people I have behind me, sponsors and individuals that donate. It's pretty cool to see a lot of the people kind of make my dream their own as well.

**Q. Being a former Razorback, what do you hope Maria takes from this experience? What do you hope other Razorbacks on the team, what do you try to teach them about professional golf?**

MARIA FASSI: I think for Maria specifically, she's a phenomenal golfer, one of the best in the world, one of the best in the country currently in college golf.

I know from talking with her and practicing with the team



from time to time that professional golf is definitely in her future and it's something that she wants to pursue.

So for me, I think when I play one of the biggest takeaways, I actually got to play with Michelle Wie one of my first years, and I kind of finished and I was like, man, like we hit the good shots were very much the same.

I could hit a very good shot on a par-3. I could hit, I don't know, a good shot onto a par-5 in two or whatever. But then like the misses, I was like, wow, they are so much better than me.

I would miss it and it would be in the water or OB or whatever. Michelle would have a one-handed finish and it would be 30 feet from the pin.

For me, that was a huge learning curve to know that it's not that professionals are better, they just know how to miss it better. They know how to recover better. They're smarter than an amateur. I know Maria is an extremely smart player and plays to her strengths, but I hope that she can take away something that maybe she doesn't expect to see.

Like I know for me, that wasn't something that I thought I would like kind of take away from. But it was like the biggest thing I noticed, right? So I think for her, whatever that might be, I hope that either through me or just even the practice rounds she got to play with other players, she's learned a thing or two about course management, about how to handle yourself on the golf course.

I think getting to play in front of so many people like we will this week, I feel like that's also a great opportunity for her to get comfortable, you know, playing in front of a big crowd, having to hit shots between roars from other holes and stuff like that.

So I think all those things are going to be great for her career, for the rest of her amateur career and when she decides to turn professional.

Again, I think the biggest thing are to me is have her enjoy the week. I know her dad is going to be on the bag and they have a very good relationship and he's a big part of her career.

I hope they both enjoy this experience and that the other girls on the team get inspired to maybe be the ones playing next year.

**Q. I think you're coming off a tied 19th or something like that. What about your game is trending? I think maybe except for one round, you would've been just**

**right there. Have you thought about how to get rid of that one bad round?**

MARIA FASSI: Yeah, last week was a good results week in the sense of it's probably one of my best finishes in the last few months. It's been a tough year.

But, yeah, I was actually battling an injury. Didn't really expect much. I feel like that helped a lot as well. I only played nine holes before the tournament started. Had to pull out from the pro-am.

It wasn't an ideal preparation week in that regard. But I think what we've been doing golf-wise and mentally really helped me push through.

I've been working with Joe Hallett this year, Stacy's coach. I feel like he's really helped me understand my game a little bit better. He's really helped me make things more simple and just be able to trust myself a little bit more on the golf course, even after a bad swing or a bad golf shot.

So I think all that has really helped. I hadn't necessarily seen the results I wanted, but for a little while I've been feeling like I could post the numbers that I did in Cincinnati. I'm looking forward for a good challenge again this week.

**Q. What was the injury?**

MARIA FASSI: Well, I couldn't move my neck. I was tin woman as my physio was falling me. You know, just like looking left was almost impossible. Looking down was very painful.

So not ideal for when you're trying to play golf. But my whole team, we did a good job of kind of trying to look after myself as much as I could during the week and be ready for Thursday.

Unfortunately Saturday I think I got a little bit tired, a little bit tight again and showed on the score. But we were able to get work done and ready for Sunday, and I was happy to climb up the leaderboard and managed to get a top 20.

**Q. Just a quick follow on this being a hometown event for you, getting to sleep in our own bed and such. On the road, so when traveling on the LPGA Tour there is a lot of events that are just a part of a bigger piece of a puzzle. You have seen from your days at Arkansas to here, you've seen what the community does and what Shauna and the women's golf team does to embrace this event. Talk about not only this event, but the smaller market community events and how you as LPGA players really embrace that back to them?**

MARIA FASSI: I mean, I think we are extremely successful in smaller cities. Toledo, Meijer, are all smaller towns. The stands are packed; people are always there. Arkansas being of course one of them.

It's so cool to see how involved the people get with us. I think too, that that is because we get involved with the community as well. I know earlier this week we had some players go to the food bank and kind of help distribute some economical and material assets to people who were affected by the tornadoes we had here recently.

I think there is a lot of things, even with The Bite over there on 16 and 17 holes, you can have a lot of our local restaurants and female-owned restaurants. People who maybe wouldn't have the opportunity to be part of an LPGA event, they get to be a part of it.

So I think we both just work together. You see the players get so involved with the community as well. I don't know the percent but probably very, very high of the percent of people that stay in housing and they stay in housing with the same people for their whole career.

I have a friend getting married later this year and she's inviting her housing from here to come over to her wedding. That's how involved and comfortable the people here make this feel, and the community.

So I feel like it's -- it kind of goes both ways. It's I think a little bit of that southern charm and southern hospitality that just make foreigners and locals feel at home.

I think when we're comfortable we're a little bit nicer. So I think, again, both players and the community are just kind of working together to make this event awesome.

**Q. Following up on that, on the community and feeling special and welcome, the 17th hole out here, one of your favorite holes on tour?**

MARIA FASSI: Yeah.

**Q. So when you're walking on 17, hear the woo pig sooie. Talk about that hole and what it's meant to you. You had some Fassi & Friends kids walk with you on that hole. Talk about in this week.**

MARIA FASSI: It's the loudest hole on tour. It's extra special I think for former or current Razorbacks. We get to call the Hogs. For me it's very special because like you were saying, I get to share that with a lot of the kids from my foundation.

A lot of them, you know, probably won't have the

opportunity to play inside the ropes or probably wouldn't ever the opportunity to become professional athletes, but if they can have this experience with me and through me, I know it makes their day and makes my day even more so than theirs.

It's so special. Every year, I think, I don't know, first year we started with five, seven kids, and I think last year we had 20 or 30 kids that were one day walking with me. Sorry LPGA.

But it's fun. I think that the people really enjoy it as well. I know the kids really look forward to catching me on 17, especially since we get to call the Hogs. The whole state gets behind the University. Seeing their support not only when I was in school but as a professional never ceases to amaze me and humble me every day that I get to experience their love.

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