

NW Arkansas Championship

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Rogers, Arkansas, USA

Pinnacle Country Club

Gaby Lopez

Press Conference



MALLORY KINAHAN: We are pleased to be joined by Gaby Lopez ahead of the Walmart NW Arkansas Championship. So, Gaby, this is the 20th anniversary of the tournament here in Rogers. What is it that keeps you and other players on the Tour coming back here to Northwest Arkansas each year?

GABY LOPEZ: Yeah, well, of course being a Razorback and having played for the UofA, it's probably the biggest honor that I had as an amateur player. Being able to be a part of this program just kind of reminds me how amazing this place is. The community I think is exactly why the players are coming back.

I'm pretty sure that 99 percent of the field and the caddies are hosted by host families, and they have been for over the past probably ten years. Each one of us have a very special relationship with families and people of the community.

So it's a very special place for me in my heart having been the first Latin player in the program. You know, having seen so many girls come in now from different parts of the region of South America and Mexico has been amazing.

MALLORY KINAHAN: You mentioned the support and the community embracing the tournament. What does that mean for a player on Tour being away so many weeks on the Tour, having the community rally around you and not only the community, but sponsors like Walmart and P&G?

GABY LOPEZ: Yeah, for sure. Tour life can be very lonely at times. It can be hard. Finding a place that you can somehow settle on one of the stops on the Tour feels nice. It feels always familiar. It always feels very warm and welcoming.

So I feel that everyone is very excited and looking forward to seeing all the familiar faces. I don't know, I really have created amazing relationships over the years.

Couple of my host families have come even to my wedding in Mexico. So that means how engaging they are with the

LPGA, with the NW Arkansas Walmart Championship, and of course amazing sponsors like P&G and Walmart and plenty of others.

Being part of such a long period time on the LPGA Tour, having the commitment to the highest level I think is exactly what the LPGA is looking for. You can see that this tournament does an amazing job.

MALLORY KINAHAN: Yeah, awesome to hear about your host family coming to your wedding. How cool. What a great experience.

Kind of switching gears, you had some rest these past weeks. Where do you feel like your game is now and what are you looking to achieve this week here?

GABY LOPEZ: Yeah, it's nice to have a little break after a busy summer and the beginning of the year also being really packed.

So I feel that my game is in a good position. I'm really happy how I'm playing. Very happy with the people I have around me. I have added people that has -- they have incremented a lot of value into my game and they have helped me sharpen a lot of my tools, different shots I didn't have in the bag.

Yeah, feel more prepared than other years. Yeah, I think the result is -- I like them to speak for me.

MALLORY KINAHAN: And you mentioned support. Tons of Razorback support in the area this week. What does that mean to you? I know each year you're super excited to call the Hogs on 17, so what is that tradition like and just in general the support around this weekend?

GABY LOPEZ: Yeah, I'm looking forward to 17 every time, every year. It's very special to see the amount of kids that they come. I think P&G and Walmart have done an amazing job embracing family environment, and not only certain age of watching golf, but also a full family with different activities they have out there for the kids.

Calling the Hogs is for sure one the highlights of week.



MALLORY KINAHAN: Coach Shauna kind of reflected on how this week is a reunion for the University of Arkansas. Almost feels like family. You and other alumni come back and bring some greens friends to Blessings and just being around the team. So what does that speak volumes about the program at Arkansas?

GABY LOPEZ: Yeah, yesterday I had the opportunity to bring Carlota, my friend, to The Blessings to hit some golf balls. She was really amazed with the facilities we have. Mr. Tyson does an amazing job with the golf course and the facilities.

It's very special to come back. People love it here. I feel that kind of sharing this scenario, sharing this golf course, the community with my friends on Tour, they know why it's different out here.

Q. You mentioned about being the first Latina. How did that recruiting process start?

GABY LOPEZ: Yeah, well, I was in Mexico, and after 2010 winning the Callaway Junior Championship I got 33 offers to come to the States for a full ride, and I had no idea where to go. Shauna and Mike did an amazing job recruiting by coming down to Mexico City to meet my family, my coach.

They knew that I was a family-orientated girl, and that's what they offered straightaway, a family environment. Coming from another country, a different language, I didn't hesitate. I knew that was my heart, where it wanted to be.

And, yeah, I'm really happy after me -- well, Regina and I were in the first kind of wave, and then having Maria and Ma-Jo and a bunch of other girls, I'm super excited the program has grown so much. It's like a hub for a lot of South Americans and Mexicans to come and play.

Q. This is one of your best years in your career on the LPGA Tour. What has been the biggest difference in your game this year that helped you have such a successful year?

GABY LOPEZ: Yeah, I feel that the consistency of my misses are much better than they used to be. Probably used to have like wild misses off the tee that would just put me off position.

Right now I feel like everything is a little tighter. I started working with Joe Mayo, with my chipping coach, and he's helped me a lot with getting momentum into the round and kind of having those up and downs when you have to make them.

Yeah, kind of having a much clearer and better round with not many mistakes.

Yeah, I feel everything kind of clicks a little bit better with a lot of experience and a little more consistency.

Q. And the U.S. Open was a big moment for you with the birdie on the final hole to get within one shot of Nelly Korda. Just describe that round and how you were able to have a strong finish.

GABY LOPEZ: Yeah, it was an amazing round. Very nerve-wracking for sure since the beginning because LA has a big Latin and Mexican community as well. Even on the first tee I remember people were yelling, you're going to win, you're going to win. I'm like, no, I need to hit the first fairway. That's my job.

So that was hard. After nine holes of not making a birdie I remember on the 10th hole I said to myself, I need to change something. I switched my putting routine and started connecting better to the putts. That dropped and couple others came, so overall it was probably the most fun I've had out there.

Knowing that in the back nine of a major championship you have a chance, we all dream of this when you're a little kid. You're on the putting green and putting and it's like, this is to win the U.S. Open. For a split second that crossed my mind and having that dream relived and having that experience, having that putt in that moment to tie the lead, that was very cool.

But, yeah, Nelly got away with it on the last hole, and I'm really happy we also got to witness history. What she's done for the game has been incredibly unbelievably great. I have a lot of respect and I admire a lot her game. It's been really fun to kind of be playing with her more often.

Q. And you had a stellar career at Arkansas before turning pro. How important was that time in your career and how did playing for the Razorbacks help prepare you for the LPGA?

GABY LOPEZ: Yeah, I think Shauna has done an amazing job and still does with practices. She knows exactly what she's doing. Stacy was the one that probably helped her for when she went into pro and got to World No. 1. But she's always been really structured with practices we've done, with putting, chipping, with hitting different shots and kind of going with the whole team through each one of them.

A lot of structure. So that gave me a lot of -- an example of how I needed to do my practices after I left Arkansas. So



what I've learned in this program and what I keep learning from the girls and Shauna, it's great because I still have an amazing relationship with them.

Q. With this being your tenth year on the Tour how has your game changed since 2016?

GABY LOPEZ: Oh, gosh. I mean, too much. I would say that when I got on Tour I was not prepared with that many tools that I -- that you need, especially under pressure couple shots that you really have to know how to hit.

Yeah, back then I had no idea. I was just trying my best. When you don't know, honestly sometimes it's better. The more you're playing -- I would say the first year on Tour the easiest one and the second and third, they become harder because you know exactly what's going on. You're tagging different things and you know what golf courses you like and which ones you don't like.

So it's really it's important to kind of freshen up the mind and not having all the scar tissue with you, being able to clear the path and go forward with a clear mentality.

Q. Shauna was just in here a little bit ago. She said she's just a proud mama bear this week. You mentioned her a little bit. Off the golf course, how much has Shauna meant to you not only in your college career, but also in your professional career?

GABY LOPEZ: Yeah, I've always said it. She's like a second mom for me. She has been the one person I needed to when I was in trouble here in Arkansas. Off the golf course she's so good at keeping in touch with the girls, probably not only from a golfing standpoint, but also as a personal.

I feel that our relationship has gotten better over the years because it's more woman to woman and she understands exactly probably what I'm doing, how I'm feeling off the golf course. When I need an advice I would probably call her and say, hey, what would you do? I'm very certain and calm that she would give me the best advice from the bottom of her heart. That's someone that I can trust and I've been trusting for a long time.

Q. As you know, this is the 20th year of this tournament. From back in college and when you turned pro and coming back here every year, how important is it for you as a Razorback that this tournament and the sponsors are in 20 years? And, two, how much have you seen this tournament grow over the years?

GABY LOPEZ: Yeah, the commitment level of P&G and

Walmart and the rest of the sponsors is incredible. We don't have that many sponsors that they stick for a long time. It's really cool that it just keeps getting better and better.

I can see that from the first year I played to right now. I see bigger crowds. I see a bunch of girls and bunch of boys that they really want to be out here.

That's exactly how you inspire the next generation, is by being present and watching the professionals inside the ropes right here, dreaming one day that you want to be just like them.

That was for me when I was in Mexico. I followed Lorena in Mexico, in Morelia, and I remember being, I just want to be just like her.

Yeah, I think that's exactly where you can put a seed into everyone of those little kids and let it grow as much as it wants to.

Q. What has this tournament meant to you and your career?

GABY LOPEZ: This tournament has meant the beginning of my career, the beginning of dreaming big for sure. When I was Arkansas I'm playing alongside LPGA players that meant a lot. Until today it means so much because I can feel all the good energy and the great vibes from the community. It's not only about the golf, but it's about the people that make it happen and the community this supports it. I think that's exactly why this tournament has so much success.

MALLORY KINAHAN: Awesome. I'm going to wrap it up here with one final question: Looking to the future a little bit, you attended WTGL media day. How excited are you to get started on that next chapter?

GABY LOPEZ: Oh, yeah. WTGL is going to be so different from what you see on every day on the LPGA Tour. It's going to be full of emotions. Going to be full of reaction. Going to be full of trash talk. It's going to be exactly what you don't see our here and I think that's so fun.

Coming from Mexico it's really hard to participate in International Crown and of course I can't do it for the Solheim. So having this first team event, it's going to be very exciting. I think it's going to bring so many personalities that you're going to be surprised.

It's going to be full of surprises.



MALLORY KINAHAN: Thank you so much for your time.
Good luck this week, Gaby.

GABY LOPEZ: Thank you, guys.

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