

CME Group Tour Championship

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Naples, Florida, USA

Tiburón Golf Club

Lydia Ko

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: All right, everyone, welcome inside the virtual media center here at CME Group Tour Championship. I'm pleased to be joined by Lydia.

Lydia, I just want to first start with it's been a quick turnaround from the Sunday playoff. What were your thoughts after everything that went down there Sunday at Pelican?

LYDIA KO: Yeah, I think just with the score that I finished on after 18 I thought I was out of reach, even though 18 is a pretty tough hole. So I was really to get things going and then drive down here to Naples.

But even though I didn't end up winning, still always great to have the opportunity to be in a playoff alongside three of the top players.

So, yeah, it was a quick turnaround, but at the same time, I think it's great that we have the couple weeks here in Florida. Makes travel a little bit easier, whereas in other cases we might have to move flights and everything. Yeah, logistically it's great for us.

Q. We kind of talked about it at length last week, but the win in Saudi and coming into Pelican, another strong performance there; four runner-up performances in 2021. What's it been like the last couple weeks riding this momentum?

LYDIA KO: Yeah, I think I've overall been playing really solid. I think it all started around Evian. I felt like I got on a good momentum of things.

Golf is -- I think if you get in the rhythm of things you're able to feed off those kind of momentums. It can go either way, but I'm just trying to have a lot of fun out there and not get too carried away about what score I shoot and try and play the best golf I can and see where that leaves me at the end of the week.

Q. Now you return to a place you've won before;



you're quite comfortable here. What's it like now that we're at the end of the 2021 season?

LYDIA KO: Yeah, I walked past my photo the other day and I was like, Dang, I've either aged a lot or -- yeah, in the eight years.

I feel like it's been more than eight years, but then at the same time I can't believe it's been eight years. Baby face the Lydia; maybe I should rock the glasses again.

The courses changed a little bit since I won there a few years ago. I think they did some of the greens and the surroundings, adding a little bunkers. So this is a great golf course. I think there is a few holes that you do definitely need to be -- need to drive it well.

Other than that, having a good short game around here is really important. I think the years that I played well my putting has been good, so I think that's probably going to be one of the biggest keys this week.

Q. When you come to a course where you feel so comfortable, is there a lot of practice that goes into it or is it just about feeling it all over again, just nine holes here and there?

LYDIA KO: I think it depends if you played the week before or not. I took Monday off so I actually played 18 holes yesterday. I think I would rather play and like do my stuff on the golf course than be doing a lot of grinding and practice in the practice facility.

It depends on how well you're playing. Sometimes you're hitting the ball great on the driving range but you can't take that to the golf course, or you're hitting it good on the golf course but why is it not working on the driving range, vice versa.

So I think it's very circumstantial. For me, especially in tournament week, I would rather do my practice on course than actually practicing, so I think that's what I try and lean more towards.

Q. How tired are you and does playing well for two consecutive weeks, being in contention, is that more exhausting or less exhausting than just having mediocre weeks?



LYDIA KO: I'm sure being in contention and everything it is a little bit more draining. I think last week was just tricky because there was a lot of grinding and I think I was a little bit more tentative on the putting green just because there is a lot of slope there.

You know, putts that normally is like an inside right putt could break a cup, two cups, three, cups. Yeah, I think because of the course and how it played I think it took a lot of all the players' attention and focus.

But I don't feel that tired. I think when you get into a stretch of events I feel like you're going on the adrenaline of just keep playing. This is the last event of the year, so I'm going to put my 100% focus on it and just hopefully finish the season off strong.

But physically I don't feel that tired, which is great. I think I was more tired in Saudi because the weather was hotter and just more humid.

But I think we've been lucky. Last week was pretty comfortable temperatures. Obviously the next few days looks a little wet, but everyone is going to be playing the same conditions, so it is what it is.

I'm just thinking, Okay, four more competitive rounds and we're done. The countdown has begun for sure.

Q. Traditionally after this week you've gone and got on a plane and headed to Korea? Has that schedule changed or are you doing that again?

LYDIA KO: No, I think I'm going to stay Stateside. I'm planning to start my season a little earlier than before. I don't think I played the Tournament of Champions in a few years.

Because it's literally in my backyard next year I thought it would be a miss to not play it when you could wake up an hour and a half and rock up to the golf course and still not be late.

So, yeah, I'm planning on playing the event in Nona so my season starts a little earlier. So it's going to be -- it made more sense for me to be in the U.S. than to go back.

Q. Can you take us back to what you felt winning in Hawaii and how it impacted the stretch of the rest of the year?

LYDIA KO: Hawaii feels like a long time ago as well. I think since the restart last year I think I put myself in a little bit more contention than I had over the past few years.

And then finishing ANA really well, you know, on the last day, and then I think I was just kind of on the high of that going into Hawaii week. Obviously that was a golf course where you knew that low scores needed to be made.

So winning in Hawaii was more proving to myself that, Hey, I can be back in the winner's circle, even if you come second like five times. That's great and you know that your game is there.

But to take it to the next step I feel like it's giving that reassurance to yourself. I think that was a huge thing for me in Hawaii.

Then obviously winning in Saudi as well. I think every win is meaningful in different ways. For me, I think Hawaii was just a little bit more of a confidence booster.

Q. And how would you compare your game now physically and mentally to 2015, 2016?

LYDIA KO: It's different. I think there was a point where I was very comparative to like myself when I was No. 1 in the world. I think at that point I was just comparing myself to the past, and that's kind of not the place I wanted to be at.

Stacy Lewis was actually somebody that advised me to say, Hey, you got to be the best version of yourself now and not try to be who you were in the past. It meant a lot for somebody like her to say that to me, and then I think it really hit me then.

So I'm different every tournament; every experience changes you. For the good or the bad, I don't know. That's why I said age is just a number, but experience is a whole new thing.

So I'm hitting it longer than before, than in 2015, '16, so that's probably one of the biggest things within my game.

But I feel like just my game itself is very different; how I approach things is different as well.

Q. When did she give you that advice?

LYDIA KO: She told me that at -- what's that racetrack course that we play?

Q. Indy?

LYDIA KO: Yeah, Indy, the year that I was in contention. I don't know what year that was. But she said -- obviously she has been the world No. 1 and everything. She said -- I

think she too said she wanted to like kind of like be the person that she was when she was playing at her best, and I feel like I was trying to reach that, towards the best player now.

It meant a lot for me for her to say that. I think it was a really eye-opening thing and for me to look at it in a different perspective.

Q. Great season obviously so far for you. Nice group at least to start this week's tournament. Can you comment a little bit on Jin Young Ko's and Nelly Korda's seasons as well?

LYDIA KO: Yeah, I told my mom, I was like, I'm going to be like third wheeling with the two. I might be third in the race to CME, but I feel like I'm 100 compared to them.

Normally in a year I think we have a player that wins multiple times, and Jin Young did it 2019 where she won four or five times that year. There is always one player that does it.

I think it's seldom that there are two that has a year like they did, both having four wins I think, Nelly winning the gold medal, the stretch that Jin Young has had over the last seven, eight events is pretty incredible and it's super impressive.

I played quite a bit with Nelly, especially at the start of the year. The week that I would be paired with Nelly, the week after I would be paired with Jess, so I was kind of in the Korda sandwich. I get that in the locker room, too. I find Jess' name and then I can find mine.

Yeah, it's super impressive. They're both accurate with long game and great short game as well. But especially with Nelly with how far and straight she hits it I think is a huge strength.

Jin Young as well. Their games I can't really fault, and I think that's why they're playing so consistently well week in and week out. I'm surprised when they don't play like amazing, rather than the other way around.

But, yeah, it's going to be fun. I'm excited to play alongside them. I feel like there is a little less pressure on me because like they have the Player of the Year and they're so close in everything that I was like, Okay, I'm going to be like spectating while playing tomorrow.

It's super cool, and I think it's great for women's golf in general. Great for our tour. They have two very different games. Even though their strengths might be similar their games are very different.

I think it just shows so much talent out here. Doesn't take one type of player to be so dominant. It can be very different.

Yeah, it's really cool to see, and I think they and multiple other players are going to inspire more and more girls to want to be the future Jin Young Ko or want to be the future Nelly Korda, so I think it's a great place for our tour to be.

Q. Do you remember where you were when you found out you were going to be in that group this week?

LYDIA KO: I signed my scorecard and then they were like, Oh, this happened on 17, and I was like, Oh, okay. Like I'm still behind. I'm still probably going to go. They were like, Oh, no, you should stay around. I was like, Okay.

So I was watching with the rest of the spectators behind the 18th green and I was ready to cheer for the last group. But, yeah, so I was around. I don't -- if I knew and had the assurance that I was going to be ready then I might have warmed up or putted or something, but I didn't feel like I was.

But, yeah, it was still a great opportunity. I think looking back, I missed like a 10-footer or 16 and two 15-footers down 17, 18. I was like, Oh, what if one of those had fallen?

At the same time, if they were meant to fall they probably were going to fall and they didn't. Just to be in the opportunity it be able to play in that playoff was great.

Q. You mentioned the level that Nelly and Jin Young are on the right now. How difficult is it to maintain that play over a sustained stretch?

LYDIA KO: Apparently not that difficult. They're playing so good. I think it is very, very difficult and what they're doing is very special and very extraordinary.

Just because someone does it and two people are doing it doesn't mean it's easy out here. I think it's extremely difficult to win out here, maybe more difficult than when I was No. 1.

I think just the amount of talent and the length and the accuracy and how good players are getting in their short game, everything, is increasing.

I think every player is trying to get better no matter what rank they are. I think that's why we're all motivating each other to do better.

Yeah, I think it's extremely difficult. Sometimes we see them play and everyone is like, Oh, you make it look easy. But it's never easy, and I'm sure it's the case for them.

I'm sure when you're playing well you're able to feed off that momentum and you have the confidence, but I don't think I would ever say it's easy.

Yeah.

THE MODERATOR: One more from me. This has been a historic season for yourself. Two worldwide wins, a number of top 10 finishes. On top of that, in contention and just about wrapped up that Vare Trophy by the end of this week. We know in years past we've seen you win multiple awards at the end of the season. What does 2021 season mean to you?

LYDIA KO: I think it's been a meaningful season for me on and off the golf course. It's been a season like within my game where it's -- I probably played some of the most consistent golf I have in my whole career.

Obviously that's a great state to be in, because the more times you put yourself in contention you feel like at one point it's going to fall towards your way.

Yeah, having won for the first time in three years and then I think in over five years on the LET Tour, definitely meaningful in that sense. Also a lot of great things off the course as well.

So, yeah, no, 2021 -- I was actually talking to my mental coach about it, but it's been I think some of most happiest moments in my short 24 years.

Yeah, no, it's been a year to remember. Hopefully I'll be able to finish the season off strong here and enjoy Thanksgiving and the Christmas holidays.

THE MODERATOR: Sometimes you make us forget that you're only 24 years old.

LYDIA KO: Someone is like, Wait, you're still 24? I was like, Yes.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you for joining us, and good luck this week.

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